

FINAL DRAFT

Memorandum

To: Melinda Mallia and Keith Helmers, CAPCOG
From: Neil Seldman, ILSR
Re: Workshop Summary
Date: 16 August 2005

This memorandum summarizes the presentations and discussions leading to consensus issues reached at the Alternatives to Landfills Workshop, sponsored by the Capital Area Council of Governments (CAPCOG) and facilitated by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR) on 5 August 2005.

The entire workshop was documented through video and audio recordings. CAPCOG staff also took detailed notes. All these materials are available from CAPCOG.

Preparation

ILSR, CAPCOG, and the Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) chair planned the event between May and July of 2005. ILSR submitted a draft agenda, which was approved by CAPCOG. See Workshop Agenda attached. ILSR staff reviewed solid waste management reports prepared by CAPCOG staff and consultants during the past several years. Based on this data, ILSR prepared a series of presentations analyzing the data and suggesting possible approaches to diverting high levels of materials from the 10 county region's landfills.

CAPCOG invited interested citizens, government officials, academics, and waste industry company officials to participate. ILSR made case study and planning documents available to the participants. A set of books was provided for the CAPCOG library. Power point presentations with model planning documents were also left with CAPCOG staff for use by all jurisdictions within the CAPCOG region.

Presentations

The workshop started with a one and one half hour presentation by ILSR, which analyzed current data and suggested policies and programs which helped other US jurisdictions reach higher than 50% levels of recycling and composting. Several of these jurisdictions have adopted a 75% recycling goal. Others have adopted a Zero Waste goal (defined as 90% or more diversion from landfill or incinerator disposal). See attached Resources List. ILSR also pointed out that the CAPCOG region had more landfill capacity than probably any other major city and region in the US. Thus, there is no planning emergency. The jurisdictions with CAPCOG's region have ample time for careful planning and implementation.

ILSR also presented excerpts from model planning documents; companies and technologies needed for a recycling and economic development infrastructure; market analysis and valuation strategy; model institutions and infrastructure arrangements which are applicable to the region: and, jobs to tons ratios comparing recycling and composting with disposal.

Discussion

All participants had opportunities to comment, ask questions, correct misimpressions appearing in the data and present general ideas.

Key issues raised were:

- How to undertake a waste characterization study for the region;
- How to finance planning, implementation and monitoring of management systems;
- What ecological industrial parks are useful models for the CAP GOG region;
- What combination of private/government/community cooperation is needed for implementation; and
- Does industry need a push from new policies and new rules which even the playing field.

The discussion was helpful in filling in ILSR staff on aspects of the region's solid waste management and recycling and composting operations in the public and private sectors, not readily identifiable from the data. ILSR observed, for example, that the City of Austin's 29% recycling rate is very respectable among other comparable cities as this figure represents just the materials recovered from the household sector. The figure does not include diversion through recycling and composting accomplished by the private sector. Documentation of this activity could show that Austin's recycling rate approaches 50% of the total municipal waste stream. It also shows a high participation rate by Austin households.

Another interesting discussion followed the presentation by local officials of information concerning the Texas Compost Rebate Program, which provides significant economic incentives for landfill operators that undertake composting. Surprisingly, information about the existence and operation of this program was not known by most of the participants. One private sector official provided background to the legislation leading to the new program. This program provided an example of creative approaches to diversion already underway in the state and the CAPCOG region.

The co-chair of the City of Austin Long Term Solid Waste Management Task Force presented a summary of activities undertaken and planned for the next four months. Several members of the Task Force were present and added to the discussion. The Task Force is preparing a 50-year plan for Austin, which is due for completion in December 2005. Recycling and economic development, based on high levels of recycling is a priority among the Task Force members.

Other major issues discussed are reviewed in the Consensus Issues section below.

Dispute resolution strategies and resources were also discussed. The local Better Business Bureau, American Bar Association, Solid Waste Management Association of North America, are resources in dispute resolution. ILSR staff pointed out the need for a consensus-planning document as the basis for future dispute resolution among stakeholders in the solid waste management sector. ILSR provided an example from its New Rules web page.

Consensus Issues

After a total of three hours of constructive discussions, the participants determined that there were four policy issues, which had consensus.

These are presented below in no order of priority, but rather as a set of mutually reinforcing pillars of an overall policy:

- Establish a goal of 75% diversion of materials flowing to the landfills in the region.

There was some discussion of a zero waste goal but the group opted for 75% in the medium term time frame (5 years).

- Get the organics (yard debris, food waste and soiled papers) out of the waste stream.

These were considered both an obvious target in getting to the 75% diversion level, and an element of the current waste stream that most contributes to ground and air pollution. By eliminating organics from the waste stream, the jurisdictions of the region will also be reducing their financial liabilities under current landfill laws and regulations.

- Integrate solid waste policy with regional economic development.

The discussion focused both on the type of ecological industrial park(s) to be introduced, as well as lists of specific companies that might be needed to fill any service or opportunity voids that currently exist. ILSR presented planning for methods for calculating the amount of materials in 12 selected categories, the economic value of segregated materials, and the enterprises needed to use these feedstocks for industrial production and/or re-used products.

- Identify a lead agency to oversee development and implementation of the new paradigm.

The consensus on this point was reached following a significant discussion of alternatives. One suggestion was for a new entity or authority to be created. Another was for an existing agency to be given the authority and responsibility and capacity for the work. Yet another was to consider a cooperative responsibility by selected agencies.

ILSR Conclusions and Recommendations

ILSR staff was most impressed by two aspects of the workshop. One was the questions and feedback from the participants. These greatly informed ILSR staff, Neil Seldman and Richard Anthony, during the course of the day. The other was the ease with which the group of stakeholders reached consensus on four major policy directions. ILSR concludes that taking the planning and implementation steps necessary to reach high levels of diversion and economic development are possible in the CAPCOG region.

ILSR recommends that CAPCOG undertake a parallel planning effort with the City of Austin Long Term Solid Waste Task Force. ILSR further recommends that the availability of the documents from the August 5 workshop be publicized and made available throughout the 10 county region to increase public awareness of the issues and of the potential for environmentally sound economic development and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Resource List

Workshop Agenda

Southwest Network for Zero Waste, web page

Solid Waste Management Authority, Del Norte County, CA, web page

City of Palo Alto, CA, web page

Bill Coon Manufacturing, Inc. web page

International Dialogue on Zero Waste, to be available December 2005