



County of Santa Cruz

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

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AGENDA: SEPTEMBER 10, 2002

August 28, 2002

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

701 Ocean Street
Santa Cruz, California 95060

SUBJECT: BUENA VISTA LANDFILL SOIL MANAGEMENT PROJECT STATUS
REPORT

Members of the Board:

Over the course of the last three years your Board has considered many possible options for providing local off-site storage of over one million cubic yards of soil from the Buena Vista Landfill. This project is necessary to allow full development of the remaining landfill capacity while retaining the excavated soil for future landfill operations and post-closure activities. Your Board has given lengthy consideration to the three potential project scenarios as outlined below.

1. Rocha Property: Move soil to adjacent farm property west of the Buena Vista Landfill via a 1,800 foot overhead conveyor system crossing Buena Vista Drive, as originally proposed and permitted. A development permit for this project was issued by your Board and is currently being held in abeyance by the California Coastal Commission (CCC) pending the outcome of County review of alternatives, as requested by the CCC.
2. Watsonville/Imazio Properties: Move soil to the Watsonville Landfill expansion site and adjacent farm property southwest of the Buena Vista Landfill, via a mile long conveyor belt system. This project alternative was rejected by your Board as unfeasible and too costly.
3. Miyashita/Love Properties: Move soil to the Miyashita and Love properties immediately north of the Buena Vista Landfill, as previously recommended by the Buena Vista Community Homeowners Association members. Your Board directed Public Works and Planning to fully evaluate this alternative including conducting an environmental impact study. The draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for this project has recently been released for public and agency review and comment.

Based upon the initial findings in the draft EIR for the Miyashita/Love project option, we feel it is important to provide your Board with an update on several key issues affecting this project. The first and most significant finding in the **EIR** is that the original Rocha property project is identified as the “Environmentally Superior Alternative.” This finding is due primarily to two significant and unavoidable impacts associated with the Miyashita/Love project.

1. Several residences adjacent to the project site would experience noise in excess of County standards.
2. The project would be incompatible with adjacent land uses.

The Miyashita/Love project site has also been found to contain wetland habitats. The wetland habitat issues on the Miyashita/Love project site are similar to those on the Rocha site. Habitats on both sites are supported primarily by agricultural run off, both are of poor to marginal quality, and both are impacted by on-site agricultural activities. The significant difference is that the Miyashita/Love project site does not have any suitable land outside the stockpile area that can be used to mitigate the wetland area removed as a result of the project. The net result may be the need to purchase additional land to support an off-site mitigation site for this project. The EIR proposes the use of a portion of the Rocha property for the mitigation project. The benefit of using the Rocha site for mitigation is that the design work is already completed and includes an area with an existing drainage and erosion problem requiring attention. The Conservation District has also shown interest in mitigating this site and may be willing to provide partial funding for this project.

The size of the proposed mitigation plan is more than adequate to replace impacted wetlands delineated according to the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) protocol, which has been the accepted standard until recently. However, to cover all agency concerns, wetland delineation methods utilized during the biotic assessment for the **EIR** included both ACOE and CCC protocols, which differ in scope. After several attempts to seek CCC staff input early on in the biotic assessment process, we were informed that CCC staff was questioning the results of the original biotic assessment and required additional field work to further verify wetland status on the site. These additional studies have added several weeks and a considerable amount of staff and consultant time to complete. In light of these delays, we elected to move the **EIR** forward while we work with the CCC to meet its expanded requirements for wetland delineation. It is staff's opinion that the added field studies will not likely provide any new information on the extent and quality of the CCC defined wetlands. Due to the delay in receiving clear direction from CCC staff regarding wetland delineation, the size of the mitigation site as proposed could be enlarged based on follow-up review by CCC. If substantial changes in the mitigation plan are required based on the results of further CCC reviews, the **EIR** review period may need to be extended or the draft EIR re-released. We will keep your Board apprised of any further changes in the EIR process.

The final issue pertains to the landfill development plans, which we now believe, as a result of these delays, will be impacted by the current EIR schedule. In order to achieve additional time to complete the second EIR process, we previously changed our landfill

operational sequence and began filling the upper landfill areas toward final permitted elevations of 180-200 feet. The net result of this change is that we have been filling an area previously reserved for short term on-site soil storage and have effectively eliminated almost all on-site soil storage capabilities. Operational staff is making every effort to maximize current active landfill life by utilizing tarps instead of soil for daily cover, filling some of the ancillary access roads on the landfill, applying compaction efforts to refuse for longer periods and expanding on-site recycling programs. Even with all these efforts to extend landfill life, we will reach the end of our current landfill module's effective capacity by the end of summer 2003, at which time a new landfill module must be ready. By this time next year, the remaining landfill capacity will be reduced to a very small area on top of a peak with little or no room to stage customer vehicles and safely process refuse.

Only under the best-case scenario could we expect the EIR and permitting processes to be completed by next summer. To do so would assume no delays, only singular public hearings before the Planning Commission and your Board, no appeals by neighbors or the CCC, and an expedited land acquisition process. Based on experience with the prior EIR and permitting process and current comments from CCC staff and impacted neighbors, we cannot reasonably assume **an** expedited process will occur. The loss of some landfill capacity is now unavoidable as construction of the next landfill module will require leaving some soil in-place within areas previously planned for the permitted landfill expansion. At this time, we are conservatively estimating an initial loss of six to 18 months of landfill capacity. We will be firming up the expected capacity loss during the preliminary design phase for our next landfill module.

Our current efforts are now focusing on options for minimizing the loss of landfill capacity. We are currently drafting a new scope of work with our solid waste consultant engineer, GeoSyntec, to evaluate other landfill development options and then design the next landfill module. Options being considered at this time include, constructing the next module in two smaller sections to minimize loss of capacity in the short term while a final decision on the soil site project is considered. However, this will add an estimated \$300,000 to \$500,000 to construction and design costs by turning the *two* planned landfill construction projects into three or more smaller projects. The other alternative would be to follow our existing construction sequence and build the last *two* landfill modules as planned which would maintain the economy of scale necessary to keep costs down, but would result in a much larger loss of landfill capacity. At this time, we would only recommend the second alternative if it is determined that the soil storage project cannot be permitted under any set of reasonable circumstances.

Should we be unable to permit a soil storage project on one of these sites, we will likely lose a cumulative of three to five years of landfill capacity during the remaining landfill construction projects. This would reduce our current remaining 18 years of landfill life to 13-15 years and require a much accelerated siting and permitting process for the next solid waste facility. In addition to the lost landfill capacity, we must also begin searching for alternative local sources of off-site soil to make up for the on-site soils that will have to be left in place. Soil from other County projects will hopefully be able to offset some of our future soil needs for daily operations and closure.

Public Works recommends completing the proposed study of landfill development options and following through with the initial public hearings and agency reviews for the Miyashita/Love soil site project alternative before making a final recommendation regarding site

selection. Overall, many of the environmental concerns on each of the project sites considered are similar and are subject to review by the CCC. We will continue to try to work with CCC staff to ascertain the level of support and approval they may give to each of the project alternatives.

It is therefore recommended that the Board of Supervisors accept and file this report on the Buena Vista Landfill Soil Management Project and direct Public Works return on or before December 10, 2002, with a status report and final recommendations regarding the Buena Vista Landfill Soil Management Project and landfill development planning.

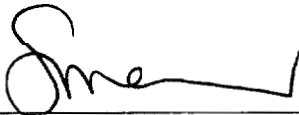
Yours truly,



THOMAS L. BOLICH
Director of Public Works

RPM:bbs

RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL:



County Administrative Officer

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