



# City of Santa Barbara California

IV.

## PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

**REPORT DATE:** July 17, 2014  
**AGENDA DATE:** July 24, 2014  
**PROJECT:** Resource Recovery Project  
**TO:** Planning Commission  
**FROM:** Environmental Services and Planning Divisions  
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### I. SUBJECT

The proposed Resource Recovery Project includes the construction and operation of a materials recovery facility and an anaerobic digester located at the Tajiguas Landfill. An alternative in the forthcoming Draft Environmental Impact Report contemplates siting the materials recovery facility component of the project on land located in the City of Santa Barbara.

### II. RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission receive a report from the Environmental Services Manager on the proposed Resource Recovery Project.

### III. BACKGROUND

For several years, staff from multiple jurisdictions, including the County of Santa Barbara and the cities of Santa Barbara, Goleta, Buellton and Solvang (Public Participants), have worked together to explore the development of a Resource Recovery Project (RRP) at the Tajiguas Landfill. The RRP would sort recyclable material from the trash and separate organic material to generate biogas, which would then be used to produce electricity.

It is anticipated that the County will release the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the RRP in August of 2014. While the project is located in the Unincorporated County, the DEIR will study as one of its alternatives locating of a portion of the project, the materials recovery facility, at a site located in the City of Santa Barbara. For this reason, staff believes it prudent, in advance of the release of the DEIR, to provide the Planning Commission with an overview of the project to be studied, including its history, technologies to be employed and an alternative located within the City. Consistent with City procedure, a hearing on the DEIR will be conducted by the Planning Commission during the public comment period.

#### **History of the Resource Recovery Project**

The Tajiguas Landfill, owned and operated by the County of Santa Barbara, is the primary disposal facility for all waste generated by the cities of Santa Barbara, Goleta, Buellton and

Solvang as well as portions of the unincorporated County located on the South Coast. In May of 2003, the County received approval from the State of California to expand the permitted capacity of the Tajiguas Landfill in order to maintain at least 15 years of disposal capacity pursuant to State law.

As part of a regional plan to extend the life of the Tajiguas Landfill, in October 2009 the County released a Request for Proposals (RFP) to formally solicit various projects that would divert a substantial portion of the waste stream from landfill disposal. After evaluating the proposals, the City Council authorized the City Administrator in January 2013 to sign, along with the other Public Participants, an "Exclusive Right to Negotiate" with Mustang Renewable Power Ventures (Mustang) for the construction and operation of a Materials Recovery Facility and an Anaerobic Digester to be sited at the Tajiguas Landfill.

### **Project Components**

The project to be studied in the DEIR consists of the following components, all proposed to be located at the Tajiguas Landfill:

1. *Materials Recovery Facility (MRF)* – the MRF would use mechanical sorters, magnets and air blowers to sort the municipal solid waste (MSW) that is currently received at Tajiguas Landfill into three streams:

- Recyclables – including paper, cardboard, glass, metals and plastics separated from the remaining trash or taken from "source-separated" (blue) containers. Recovered commodities would be baled and sent to market;
- Organics – that would be recovered for processing in the Anaerobic Digestion Facility; and,
- Residual – non-recoverable materials left over from the MRF and Anaerobic Digestion Facility, which would ultimately be landfilled.

2. *Anaerobic Digestion Facility (ADF)* – this facility would use bacteria to anaerobically (i.e., in the absence of oxygen) break down organic material (e.g., green waste, plant material, food and soiled paper) recovered from MSW into compostable material and biogas. This biological process is similar to that used at wastewater treatment plants to digest sewer sludge. The process generates methane that can be used to generate electricity. At the proposed scale, the ADF could generate approximately one megawatt of electricity; enough to power approximately 1,000 homes. The digested compostable material would be marketed as a soil amendment or used for reclamation projects.

Sewage treatment plants in the United States, including the El Estero Wastewater Treatment Plant, have long used anaerobic digestion to digest sewage sludge. Moreover, other countries such as Japan and others in Europe have used anaerobic digesters to digest portions of their waste stream such as green material and foodscraps. The State of California has officially adopted a strategic initiative to increase organics processing capacity statewide and recently developed and circulated an environmental impact report to assist jurisdictions to site new or expand existing composting facilities. However, it should be noted that large-scale anaerobic

digestion of municipal solid waste is in its infancy in the United States.<sup>1</sup> For example, the City of San Jose recently constructed a MRF and ADF facility similar to the Mustang proposal. However, comprehensive performance data is not yet available on this project.

### **City Alternative to be Studied**

According to the Notice of Preparation (NOP) released by the County in April of 2012, the following alternatives to the project will be evaluated in the DEIR:

- A. No Project/No Action Alternative;
- B. Siting of the RRP Facilities at alternative project locations (including locations within the urban areas of the County and/or City of Santa Barbara);
- C. Use of waste conversion technologies;
- D. Expansion of the Tajiguas Landfill; and,
- E. Disposal of MSW at other permitted in-or out-of county landfills

One of the alternatives to be studied would locate the MRF portion of the RRP at a site located in the City of Santa Barbara and owned by MarBorg Industries, Inc. (MarBorg). Under this scenario, recyclable material would be baled and shipped to market. Organic material extracted from the MRF would be transported to the ADF at Tajiguas. Residual waste generated by the MRF would also be transported to Tajiguas, but would be buried.

After the closing of the original request for proposals (RFP) issued by the County in October of 2009, and in response to the NOP for the forthcoming DEIR, MarBorg asked that its properties located within the City also be considered as potential locations for the MRF component of the RRP. At the request of the Public Participants and the Multi-Jurisdictional Solid Waste Task Group, MarBorg submitted to the County a proposal to construct and operate a MRF on its property. However, in December 2013, Mustang named MarBorg as its operator of any MRF located on County-owned land and, citing a desire to focus on this new role, MarBorg subsequently withdrew its financial proposal to construct and operate a MRF on its own properties within the City.

MarBorg's withdrawal of its financial proposal does not render the site infeasible within the context of the California Environmental Quality Act. For this reason, the MarBorg properties are still being studied to near project level in the forthcoming DEIR. In the event that an alternative is chosen that includes development within the City of Santa Barbara, it is likely to require design review from the Architectural Board of Review and possibly land use approvals from the City Planning Commission for a Development Plan and Coastal Development Permit.

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<sup>1</sup> Obtained from the world wide web at:

<http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/SWFacilities/Compostables/AnaerobicDig/PropFnIPEIR.pdf>