



Cedar Hills Landfill Expansion

by Peter Rimbos, GMVUAC Corresponding Secretary

On Monday, September 9 (one week later than our normal “*first Monday of the month*” due to the Labor Day holiday), the Area Council held its monthly meeting. The Area Council discussed: (1) Cedar Hills Landfill proposed expansion and (2) Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) *VISION 2050* Draft Plan. A standing-room-only crowd attended.

Membership

The Area Council swore in and welcomed two new members: Andy McDonald, representing the Hobart Community Area, and Bob Keller, representing the River Heights Community Area. Both Andy and Bob then took their Area Council seats.

Special Guest

District 5 State Representative Bill Ramos provided an update of legislative activities: changes to property tax reduction for seniors and disabled vets tied to County median income instead of a fixed amount and two SR-18 projects to ultimately provide 4 lanes from Issaquah-Hobart Rd to I-90 (~\$450 million).

Cedar Hills Landfill Proposed Expansion

The Area Council convened an Expert Panel to discuss aspects and concerns regarding the proposed expansion of the Cedar Hills Landfill. The panel was comprised of: (1) King County Solid Waste Division (SWD) Deputy Director, Glynda Steiner; (2) Department of Public Health—Seattle-King County (DPH) Health and Environmental Hazards Investigator, Darshan Dhillon; (3) Zero Landfill Initiative’s (ZLI’s) Philipp Schmidt-Pathmann (ZLI is an international non-profit organization dedicated to moving communities and enterprises away from landfilling and toward resource recovery and environmental protection); and (4) Sue Sander, an independent environmental consultant who has worked with numerous landfill operations—including the Cedar Hills Landfill—and closures, as well as in the preparation of environmental studies and impact statements.

Ms. Steiner provided some background on the landfill. The 920-ac landfill, located north of Maple Valley off of Cedar Grove Rd, is owned by King County and operated by SWD and annually, it receives ~1,000,000 tons of solid waste. Currently, its maximum permitted height is 800 ft. Most of the waste is mixed municipal residential and non-residential solid waste. A small amount (<10%) is waste requiring special management including asbestos-containing materials, industrial wastes, contaminated soil, treated biomedical wastes, and other miscellaneous materials.

The King County Council approved the [2019 Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan](#) on April 24, which authorized the SWD to consider *alternatives* to “*maximize the capacity to meet long-term disposal needs.*” Presuming some of the alternatives could present significant environmental issues, SWD issued a *Determination of Significance* (see: [DS & Scoping](#)) on July 25 calling for Public

Comments (which were due on August 24) on the scope of an upcoming *Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)*. SWD will prepare a Draft EIS to be released for Public review in mid 2020 with a 30-day Public comment period. A Final EIS, to be issued late next year, will identify a recommended preferred solution for maximizing capacity at the landfill.

The King County members of the panel, Ms. Steiner and Mr. Dhillon, were asked many questions from both the Area Council and members of the Public. Mr. Schmidt-Pathmann and Ms. Sander provided technical feedback and comments on alternatives to the landfill and mitigation paths. A summary of the discussion follows:

Evaluations: The Area Council questioned the methodology used in weighing alternatives which appeared to skew results towards landfill expansion rather than other alternatives, while giving insignificant weighting to many environmental, economic, and local issues. Ms. Steiner said she would get back to the Area Council with more information. Ms. Sander stated an economic assessment was not included and also, that key natural and built environmental impacts (e.g., aquifers, air quality, effluent, odor, dust, etc.) were not adequately addressed. Nor were the ~200 Bald Eagles—a protected species—that are allowed to feed on the landfill. The Area Council also stated regulations for DS require that the environmental impacts associated with a proposed action must be disclosed in the Scoping process. Ms. Steiner stated SWD presumed there were impacts that would require an EIS to be prepared, without being specific as to any one or more significant ones – thus the DS was issued.

Environmental monitoring: Ms Steiner stated environmental control systems are in place at the landfill to manage landfill gas, leachate, stormwater and groundwater. SWD monitors ~50 groundwater wells located in and around the landfill buffer. Reports are sent to DPH on a regular basis. Annual reports contain Appendices that detail the monitoring results. Ms. Sander stated such concerns demonstrate why the landfill should be closed and use Waste-to-Energy with integrated waste management system as ultimate solution. Mr. Schmidt-Pathmann indicated using compliance standards is an inadequate to protect public health and, rather, health assessments should be based on risk.

Inspections: Mr. Dhillon stated DPH inspects the landfill once a month and issues notices of violation. Also, DPH would have to issue permits to allow the opening up of any new areas on the site to accept waste.

Legal Commitments: King County has committed to *interlocal* agreements with 37 cities predicated on taking a certain amount of waste. This was a concern to the Area Council, as it legally binds the County to take that waste far into the future regardless of expansion plans or other alternatives being evaluated. The cities of Duval, Issaquah, and Newcastle chose not to take action on the 2019 Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan and have not signed interlocal agreements. Currently, only two County cities, Seattle and Milton, do not send wastes to the landfill.

Long-Term Planning: Questions were posed on what assumptions have been made as part of the County's long-term planning for the handling waste. Ms. Steiner stated they took a worst-case scenario over the next 30 years--no additional recycling, no changes in restrictions on what wastes are accepted, etc. Concerns were expressed by both Mr. Schmidt-Pathmann and Ms. Sander that this locks the County out of possible innovative solutions that would work as they have in Europe and elsewhere. Ms. Sander emphasized there has been inadequate analysis of alternatives and held out hope for true alternatives to the landfill. She also stated mitigation measures have not been addressed in numerous meetings/discussions since the landfill was opened in 1963. As a result residents/commercial/public sector employees, structure, and animals—dogs/cats/horses, cows, etc. are experiencing health issues which have never been addressed and no solutions have been offered. Such serious problems should be resolved to minimize legal issues and any/all health issues and property/structure problems based on existing Federal/State/Local Agency regulations. Mr. Schmidt-Pathmann stated landfill operations, in general, should be ended and alternative solutions put in place. He cited Germany as an example of what can and should be done to handle garbage and recyclables. He stated landfilling poses danger to human health; releases gases; and destroys re-

sources. He stated it is time to totally phase out landfills and increase recycling and strive for zero waste to become more sustainable.

Waste-to Energy (WTE): The Area Council asked several questions about a WTE alternative. Ms. Steiner indicated going to a WTE facility would be preferable, but unlikely in a short time frame and they would need to keep landfill operational in the meantime. Ms. Sander stated mitigation of impacts can now be implemented and it only took ~3 years for Spokane to permit/design/implement its WTE facility. Also asked: How long it would take to actually construct a WTE facility? Ms. Steiner stated it could take ~20 years. Ms. Sander and Mr. Schmidt-Pathmann disagreed and stated it would take ~2.5 years to actually design/construct and maybe 5 - 8 years start to finish. The Area Council said with such a time frame (up to 8 yrs), it wouldn't be necessary to expand the landfill. Ms. Steiner stated that is not the case, plus the County must renegotiate contracts for disposal with the 37 cities. She stated the County's backup plan is to rail wastes out of the county if landfill cannot be expanded as proposed. Ms. Sander and Mr. Schmidt-Pathmann stated the cost to rail haul is expensive, produces significant environmental impacts, due to rail line over capacity, air impacts due to train emissions, and pollution due to effluent from the waste in the rail cars—to name just a few of the environmental issues. In fact, much Solid Waste already is exported by cities and counties using the available rail corridor.

Costs: Members of the Public asked about costs to be incurred. What is the cost for the Alternatives 2 and 3? Shouldn't this cost be added to the \$241 million for Area 9 that SWD sold the public and cities on as being the cost for expansion? Since the \$73 million to relocate the facilities isn't in the \$241 million, shouldn't that have been included also to reflect a more accurate cost of expansion? Further, how financially responsible is it to pay \$73 million to relocate facilities, assuming the landfill closes by 2040, will no longer be used? How financially responsible is it to invest \$314 million plus the cost for either alternative 2 or 3 (if approved) and have nothing to show for it by 2040? Given that to get to 2040, SWD will have to choose Alternative 3, what is the true cost for expansion? Isn't export less expensive than expansion? Ms. Steiner noted these questions and stated she will provide answers to the Area Council. Mr. Schmidt-Pathmann indicated the County is not looking at the *true costs*, because it isn't taking everything into account. Ms. Sander has many concerns that operation/maintenance costs of the existing facility and any expanded facility have not been properly evaluated and no key actions have been taken to resolve any of the issues articulated to King County for decades. Potential alternatives to landfills (e.g. Waste-to-Energy/Integrated Waste Management Systems) will be less costly than to expand and maintain/operate the landfill. Also, there are benefits regarding recycling, energy production, etc.

Leachate Ponds: Members of the Public asked about both odors and hazardous vapors from the leachate ponds. Ms. Steiner stated leachate is treated with aeration (e.g., spraying), not chemically treated. Mr. Dhillon stated DPH reviews the effectiveness of leachate control systems.

Ongoing Issues: Members of the Public asked about specific issues they have experienced. Why hasn't King County ever fixed any of the problems the Public has identified for decades, such as, odors; contamination of air, water, and ground; noise and vibrations; birds; and buffer protection? Ms. Steiner indicated SWD has discussed many of these issues with the Public and has initiated several *pilot test programs* to see what could alleviate some of these issues. Mr. Dhillon stated improved leachate collection and treatment systems should help reduce odors and that DPH does monitor air and odors in vicinity. However, it didn't appear there was any meeting of the minds, as those who asked these questions were not satisfied anything would be done to resolve these *existing* issues.

It appeared King County is conducting a series of *pilot test programs* to attempt to find solutions to *existing* issues (e.g., groundwater contamination, wastewater runoff, odor, etc.), while at the same time forging ahead to *expand* the landfill to operate for the next 20 years or so to meet its potential legally binding contract commitments to 37 cities to accept their waste streams.

The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC)—the regional planning organization for the four-county central Puget Sound region—released for Public comment its **VISION 2050 Draft Plan (Plan)** ([VISION 2050 Draft Plan](#)) on July 19 with a 60-day Public Comment period. The **Plan** addresses regional transportation, land use, and economic development planning for the next 30 years while accommodating ~1.8 million additional residents to the region.

An Area Council-led team of King County Rural Area UACs and Unincorporated Area Associations (UAAs) conducted a complete review of the ~150-pg **Plan** and prepared a set of detailed comments.

The team found the subject **Plan** represents an excellent description of what our region needs to achieve and how to do so by 2050. The *Policies and Actions* are sound and reasonable, as is the *Implementation Plan*. However, there is a concern PSRC lacks sufficient tools for followthrough.

We foresee the two largest issues our region faces will be: (1) Effectively managing growth, which will continue to be a major problem and only become more difficult, especially for those cities on the fringe of the Urban Growth Boundary, where growth is least needed and infrastructure is least able to service such growth and (2) Providing an efficient transportation system, which also will become more difficult without a true regional perspective. Addressing these and other concerns, along with achieving the the forward-thinking Goals of the **Plan**, will take strong cooperation among *all* urban and rural stakeholders, as well as the State providing PSRC with more authority.

A final set of comments were approved by the Area Council. The approval, combined with previous approvals from the rest of the joint team of Rural Area UACs and UAAs, allows a final Comments to be submitted to PSRC by its September 16 deadline. The joint King County Rural Area UAC/UAA Comments will be posted on the Area Council's web site: www.gmvuac.org.

Upcoming Area Council Monthly Meetings

All meetings are held on the first Monday of the month, from 7 - 9:30 PM, at the Maple Valley Fire Station located at the SE corner of SE 231st St & SR-169 intersection (directly across from the Police Precinct). All members of the Public are welcome. Each meeting begins with an open Public Comment period.

October 7—Guest Speaker: Tahoma School District Superintendent Tony Giurado.

November 4—Guest Speaker: Mike Birdsall, Independent Traffic Expert—Issaquah-Black Diamond Rd Traffic Count Study.

December 2—Guest Speaker: TBD.

Your Area Council serves as an all-volunteer, locally elected advisory body to King County on behalf of all rural unincorporated area residents living in the Tahoma School District. Please see the Area Council's web site: www.gmvuac.org.

The sixteen-seat Area Council currently has three open seats. If you have an interest in joining, either: (1) Indicate your interest through our Citizens' Survey (click the "Survey**" link on our web site's Home page: www.gmvuac.org); (2) Send us an e-mail at: info@gmvuac.org; or (3) Attend one of our monthly meetings and express such interest for consideration by the Area Council.**