PROPOSAL for The Fredericksburg Green Party

Proposal #: GM140817GA
Date: 08/17/14
Status: passed

Title: Zero Waste
Author: Gerald Anderson
Time Frame: Now
Relevant Body: City of Fredericksburg and Stafford County members

Purpose:
The purpose of this proposal is to push the City of Fredericksburg and Stafford County to adopt zero waste plans for their jurisdictions, whereby the amount of material being landfilled at the jointly owned Eskimo Hill landfill owned is reduced by up to 90% over the next ten years.

Background & Statement:
Many cities in the United States have adopted zero waste plans and are well on their way to diverting 80-90% of their waste from being landfilled. This significantly prolongs the life of their existing landfills, reduces greenhouse gas emissions from the landfill operations, and reduces the need to compete for limited land resources for landfilling. Furthermore, these zero waste plans can actually reduce the fees that citizens pay for waste disposal.

Although most of the waste haulers that serve our city and county provide single stream recycling services, filling these one-stream recycle bins is completely voluntary. The EPA estimates that roughly 70% of what people throw away is recyclable yet in our area, the single stream recycling program is resulting in less than 12% of our waste stream being recycled.

At the same time, our landfill has been losing money for the past several years and is in a desparate need of change. Although the agreement in place to operate the landfill under a board made up of officials from Stafford and Fredericksburg calls for the jurisdictions to make up any deficits, neither has adequately done so for many years. In addition the board has probably not operated the landfill in ithe landfills best interest but in the boards best interest, since the bulk of them are elected officials. Landfill tipping fees have been less than the actual cost of landfilling and waste haulers in many cases have been able to drop off overly full containers without additional cost. At a recent R-Board meeting is was stated that the average revenue per ton of waste going into the landfill is less than $30/ton while the cost is about $48/ton. A lot of this difference is due to the fact that residents can drop off waste at the landfill and not pay any tipping fee and the city and county are disposing of the waste they collect without any fee.

The landfill board's response to the operating deficit has been to put a Request for Proposal out on the street seeking a vendor who is willing to finance, design, build, and operate a waste diversion system of their choice to reduce the amount of waste being landfilled. This may include low tech solutions such as recycling but they are also open to the idea of using high tech solutions such as gasification, pyrolysis, anearobic digestion, etc. The landfill board tried this same approach a couple of years ago and received three proposals, one of which was later retracted by the vendor. Of the two remaining proposals, the board selected a vendor willing to put in an unproven pyrolysis system under the condition that it could bring in as many tires as it saw fit to supplement the waste from our jurisdictions. However, the city and county wised up and this proposal was later cancelled, but the landfill board has decided to look again.

The most environmentally friendly and at the same time cost effective first step for a zero waste plan is

to implement a "pay-as-you-throw" plan. Under this approach, people are incentivized to increase their recycling rate. They only pay for what they send to the landfill. They do this by packaging it in plastic bags that they purchase which already has the tipping fee in the bags purchase price. Under programs of this sort cities have increased recycling rates from the low teens to between 40 and 50%. If this occurred in our jurisdiction it is estimated that this would reduce the amount of waste being put into the landfill by 30,000 tons per year and reduce the shortfall in the operating budget for the landfill by about $1.59 million per year. The landfill currently gets about $15/ton for single stream recycling, therefore every ton taken from the landfill wastestream and put into the recycle stream saves the landfill $53.

Another recommended step in the march to zero waste is to institute a third bin in the pickup scheme for businesses and residences. This bin would be to collect compostables such as food contaminated paper products, food waste, and yard clippings and convert it into compost. This fraction can divert another 30-40% of the waste from the landfill and produce a product that is good for soil conditioning. It also aerobically decomposes the waste rather than like landfills where it is anaerobically digested. This avoids methane generation and its impact on global warming. The composting also reduces the volume of the waste by about 40-60%.

Finally, once the above are instituted the final recommendation would be to establish a low-cost, labor intensive material recovery facility on the single stream recycle stream. Separated recyclables can fetch about $115 per ton compared to the $15 per ton currently received at the landfill. Assuming with "pay-as-you-throw", we arrive at 40,000 tons per year of recyclables, this can produce a revenue stream of about $4.6 million per year at an estmated capital expenditure of only $2-3 million.

Timeframe/Resources Required:

One to six months. Resources required should be minimal (labor intensive).

Action Plan:

Based on previous efforts, the initial course of action suggested is to email the councilpersons in Fredericksburg and Supervisors in Stafford with our viewpoint. If this does not appear to work, we should consider preparing a petition and getting signatures fro the local citizens expressing their desire for the city and county to establish a Zero Waste Plan for the two jurisdictions.

In addition, the landfill board is meeting this Wednesday at 1:30 in Stafford. It is anticipated that at this meeting we will learn of the number of proposals the board received in response to its request for proposal for vendors to supply waste diversion technologies at the landfill and hopefully the types of responses (i.e., number of responses proposing the various alternatives such as recycle, composting, gasification, pyrolysis). If it appears that a high tech solution is being proposed that will likely result in excess local pollution, toxic wastes, we will need to take action to speak out against these solutions and promote higher recycling rates, composting, etc.

If our actions do not produce the results we wish, we may also need to attend public meetings that are to be conducted with regard to the landfill board favored solution and we may also need to make our concerns known to the VDEQ when they ask for public responses when they post any permit applications related to the landfill board favored approach.

Hopefully, we will be surprised with the landfill board receiving and favoring a "green" low tech approach to diverting waste from being landfilled.

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