



Fighting for Life

East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice – 2317 Atlantic Blvd. Commerce, CA. 90040

March 22, 2022

Mayor Robert Garcia and City Councilmembers of Long Beach
411 West Ocean Blvd
Long Beach, CA 90802

Sent Via Electronic Mail

Re: Agenda Item No. 20 (22-0329) “Recommendation to request City Manager to work with the Energy Resources Department to schedule a study session for the City Council to review the operation of the Southeast Resource Recovery Facility (SERRF). The scope of the study session should include reviews of SERRF’s incineration process, operational costs, energy production, recycling capabilities, greenhouse gas emissions, and possible alternatives.”

Dear Mayor Garcia, Vice Mayor Richardson and City Council of Long Beach,

On several occasions, the City of Long Beach and its staff has expressed interest in pursuing zero waste and creating a Zero Waste Plan. However, to date, the city’s actions have contradicted these efforts by its continued use of SERRF which is incongruous of a zero waste future. What follows are zero waste definitions from different entities:

According to the Zero Waste International Alliance, Zero Waste is the conservation of all resources by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery of products, packaging, and materials without burning and with no discharges to land, water, or air that threaten the environment or human health.

According to the C40 cities, Zero Waste is a philosophy that refers to waste management and planning approaches that emphasize waste reduction and prevention, as opposed to end-of-life waste management. This vision promotes the redesign of resource lifecycles so that most materials can be reused and waste generation is continuously minimized. Rather than being an absolute term, zero waste is one of continuous improvement with the ultimate goal of progressively reducing the maximum amount of waste sent to landfills and incinerators as possible.

According to the City of San Francisco, Zero waste means that we send zero discards to the landfill or high-temperature destruction. Instead, products are designed and used according to the principle of highest and best use and the waste reduction hierarchy:

- Prevent waste
- Reduce and reuse first
- Recycle and Compost

These definitions clearly define that burning trash is not zero waste, and that approaches to waste should be focused on waste prevention and reduction, reuse, followed by recycling and composting.

A simplified life cycle of many of our products include the extraction of fossil fuels and raw materials, distribution of materials, manufacturing of materials into products, distribution of products to retail stores, consumption of products, and disposal of products into waste facilities or the environment. At every stage, there are impacts to the environment and to our health, which is why the systems we currently rely on have to be reimaged to create less waste and harm.

Our city cannot continue to ignore that the continued operation of SERRF is an issue of environmental racism. Many of the communities surrounding the incinerator, including communities outside of our city, are predominantly low-income communities of color who are disproportionately burdened by several polluting industries from oil & gas to the goods movement. **Therefore, the goal of the study session should instead be focused on community-rooted, localized zero waste alternatives to plan a just transition away from SERRF and fossil fuels.** Furthermore, any alternatives that include technologies whose end-products will be burned or pose a threat to the air, land, and water should not be considered as this will only contribute to the region's poor air quality and climate change.

There are various studies and reports that detail the harms of incineration. I want to call the City Council's attention to the report [Vestiges of Environmental Racism: Closing California's Last Two Municipal Waste Incinerators](#) that examines the environmental, financial, and public health harms of incinerators and delves specifically into SERRF and Covanta Stanislaus and request the City Council and staff hear a presentation from Earthjustice who released the report in November 2021 in collaboration with Valley Improvement Projects and East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice.

According to the report, SERRF has repeatedly exceeded the emissions allowable by their permits, but have avoided accountability by claiming equipment startup, shutdown, malfunction exemptions. In addition to air pollution, SERRF has also mismanaged the resultant toxic ash to the point that a CalRecycle inspector noted difficulty breathing, and that still requires landfilling

where there are great risks of the contaminants in that ash leaching into the soil and groundwater.

We also ask that the city council and staff receive a presentation from East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice to report back on the feedback we heard from community groups and residents regarding the types of zero waste policies, programs, and infrastructure they would like to see in Long Beach - which includes, but is not limited to, phasing out single-use plastics and just transition away from fossil fuels, tool lending libraries, repair clinics, reuse swap shed, textile recycling center, community composting hubs for every neighborhood, and expansion of existing programs like bulky item and household hazardous waste collection.

For far too long our city has wasted financial resources on a facility that makes no financial sense. According to a presentation made to the Sustainable City Commission, SERRF would require an investment of \$66 million to continue operating past 2024. Instead of investing on an outdated, inefficient, polluting technology, the City of Long Beach needs to begin investing in a zero-emission, zero waste future now.

In summary, please direct staff to read the report released by Earthjustice to learn about the harms of incineration and SERRF, receive a presentation from Earthjustice and East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice to learn about the policies, programs, and infrastructure community members want to see in our city, and have a study session focused on community-rooted, localized zero waste alternatives to inform a Zero Waste Plan and transition away from SERRF. We ask the City Council to please read the report and support the recommendations which include 1) closing the incinerator at the end of its contract in 2024, 2) Creating & implementing a Zero Waste Goal & Plan that centers community voices by Earth Day and the end of this year, respectively, as a sign of commitment to our communities and cleaner air.

Thank you,

Whitney Amaya
Zero Waste Community Organizer
East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice