






City of Long Beach

Office of Robert Garcia
Councilmember, First District

R-14
Revised

Date: July 5, 2011

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Robert Garcia, First District 
Vice Mayor Suja Lowenthal, Second District 
Councilmember Gary DeLong, Third District 

Subject: Yellow Pages Opt-Out

Background: "Yellow Pages", the commercial telephone directories delivered directly to the home of anyone with a landline, have long been the main source of local community information, and an important advertising medium for local businesses. However, in the age of the Internet they are less essential, and many people no longer consult them at all.

There are more than 100 companies that produce phone books nationally, and various commercial and residential phone books are often delivered several times a year in different iterations to phone customers. In Long Beach, at least three companies deliver commercial telephone listings to landline customers.

For those who use them regularly, this service is welcome, and for local businesses, there is an economic benefit. However, for those who do not use them, these books may be unwanted, creating extra refuse, which is a waste of paper and increases demand on recycling and waste processing unnecessarily. Their production, distribution, and disposal impact renewable and nonrenewable resources, and carry a cost to taxpayers. In San Francisco, a study found the cost of disposing of these books to be approximately three-quarters of a million dollars annually to the City.

Cities including San Francisco and Seattle have created systems to reduce unwanted delivery of phonebooks. Seattle created a system by which customers can opt-out of commercial phone book delivery. Allowing customers to opt-out gives residents freedom of choice and will reduce waste, while preserving the ability of the phone book companies and their advertisers to continue providing their product to those who wish to receive it.

The national registry for opting out does not track requests and has no system for enforcement. Seattle tracks customer requests and complaints and can fine companies that do not comply. According to news reports and the City of Seattle, this has increased compliance and consumer satisfaction.

Recommendation:

Request the City Manager create a system for Long Beach residents to opt-out of receiving Yellow Pages, and the City Attorney draft any necessary additions to the Municipal Code, and report back to Council within 60 days.

Fiscal Impact: Minor costs for developing and maintaining this system could be offset by savings realized through waste reduction, and a possible fee levied on violators.