

Council Members,

After delving into this whole issue a little deeper it seems to me the handwriting is on the wall that a switch to a source separated single bin system may be necessary, and if done right can lead to similar outcomes as the current 3-bin system. As the current recycling trucks reach the end of their useful life it is a good time to consider such a switch, and it appears that sorting MRFs have employed new technologies that are helping reduce the amount of material lost. Doing it right is the key, and the devil is in those details. Unfortunately, as decision makers you have not really been provided with the details, and much of what you have been given is wrong, or confusing, or based on an incorrect process and hopeful thinking instead of data. Good luck making a good decision based on what you have been provided. Here are a few more things to add to my previous questions that you might want to consider while coming to a decision.

- **The current main reason given to change County Code 8.10 is not necessary**, and shows that the Health Department (and SWAC) really do not understand recycling and waste management very well. If you look at the staff memo in your packet it says the reason to make this change is ***“In order to support a consistent recycling system across Whatcom County, the code will need to be revised to remove the source separated requirement.”*** After my previous testimony the Health Department has now introduced a substitute ordinance that correctly leaves “Source Separation” in the language. This is a good change and should be supported. Source separation of recyclables is the foundation of any good recycling system, is called for in the County’s Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan (CSHWMP), and is required by state law (RCW [70A.205.045](#)), so the Health Department’s previous effort, supported by the SWAC, to remove the Source Separated language shows there is little understanding of the basic principles of good recycling.

- **Reporting Requirements** - Since the ordinance was to be opened for the above purpose there were also some changes to the reporting requirements included, which have also been included in the substitute version. Updating reporting requirements makes sense but the proposed language is still very unclear. For example, under B.1.c are the recycling tonnages to be reported what is dropped off at the MRF or what comes out the other end minus the contaminated materials that need to be disposed of? B.1 makes it sound like three different types of facilities have to report this info, but B.1.c. makes it sound like it is only MRFs that need to report. And finally, when it says “per material” what does that mean? Paper, versus aluminum cans, versus glass, or just tonnage of single stream mix? How can any legitimate recycling rates for materials be gleaned, so we know the efficacy of our system and if specific materials warrant recycling, if all we get is tonnage of the whole mix of materials? If single-bin recycling is really the way we need to move perhaps another reporting requirement needs to be added such as:

- Annually, any Solid Waste Collection Company that collects mixed residential recyclables shall undertake a recycling characterization study, approved by the County, to analyze and predict the actual tonnage of each separate material type collected, and the tonnage of contamination of each separate material type that will most likely not be suitable for recycling.

- **The correct process for making such a change** - If you read the staff memo it also states that the change to the ordinance is necessary because Bellingham has already approved single-bin collection of recyclables so the County needs to change its code ***“In order to support a consistent recycling system across Whatcom County.”*** Nooksack Valley Disposal has stated they have no plans to change from the three bin system to a single-bin collection system, so county-wide consistency was never in play here. This again seems to show that the Health Department (and SWAC) really do not understand our solid waste management system. State law gives the County the authority for Solid Waste Management for the entire county, so individual cities, such as Bellingham, can not make major changes to recycling collection without the approval of the County, as spelled

out in the policies set forth in the County's Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan (CSHWMP). That plan makes clear that: ***"Pursuant to interlocal agreements, the CSHWMP defines the solid waste management policy of the County and all incorporated cities in the County, including Bellingham, Blaine, Everson, Ferndale, Lynden, Nooksack, and Sumas."*** The interlocal agreement mentioned in the above sentence states that the City of Bellingham ***"shall include, where appropriate, provisions in its franchise agreements with waste haulers to implement curbside recycling or other waste reduction and recycling programs of the adopted plan."*** The CSHWMP, approved a year ago, makes no mention of a switch to single-bin recycling, and to the contrary says such a switch is not contemplated. So, the proper way to "support a consistent recycling system across the County" would be to notify Bellingham they are out of compliance with the Interlocal Agreement and then work with them in a public process to amend the CSHWMP to account for changes they desire. There are a couple of ways to do this depending on whether the WUTC has to get involved because the change (millions of dollars in new trucks and bins) may change their analysis of potential rates charged to people in Whatcom County. Neither amendment process should be very onerous, and neither may require SSC to halt their trials in Bellingham.

In the Health Department's response to my questions about how this was allowed to happen in direct conflict with the recently adopted CSHWMP the Health Department stated ***"The process for amending the plan would occur after any changes are made, as it would not make sense to amend the plan prior to county approval of proposed changes."*** This sentence is incorrect, and should give the Council great pause, since the point of all the planning the County does is to provide for an informed consideration of various major changes, not to announce them after they have been implemented.

- **Does anyone know what is going on?** I had assumed when I read that SSC was doing trials of a single-bin collection system that the main purpose of those trials would be to collect good comparable data on changes in usage, amounts of materials collected, and contamination rates along with truck and fuel usage. Unfortunately to date SSC has not provided any such data, and when questioned about such things both SSC and the Health Department quote different numbers, sometimes at the same meetings. Contamination has been stated as 10%, 15%, and 20-25% depending which meeting you attend, and increased recycling collection has been said to be negligible in the Bellingham trials, although there is hope stated that in rural areas the wheeled carts on "long driveways" will lead to a real increase in participation.

One additional example - I know the Health Department provided a link to SSC's presentation about this to the Bellingham City Council, and I was surprised to see that some of the Health Departments answers to my questions do not align with what SSC told the City Council. Here is the link that was provided to that City Council meeting - <https://meetings.cob.org/Meetings/ViewMeeting?id=2783&doctype=1> While the Health Department said in their response to my questions that tonnage of recyclables would increase with a single bin system, at about 6:20 during the above City Council meeting SSC said that their pilot collection in Bellingham found **"no measurable change"** in the amount of materials collected. The Health Department also said in their response to my questions that contamination rates for the single bin system in "Whatcom County would be much lower than the average 10-15%", yet at about 7:20 in SSCs presentation to the City **SSC states they found contamination rates around 20-25%** which is pretty standard for these single bin collection systems.

- **Better transparency and education** – One thing that has become clear is the need for better education about how to use a single-bin system and transparency that our efforts to recycle are actually leading to materials being recycled. What specific increased educational efforts are going to be undertaken? If the switch to a single-bin system saves SSC money are they going to cover the costs of increased education or will that fall on the County's staff and already inadequate Solid Waste Excise Tax? Will educational efforts be passive online

resources that most will never use, or will we actually include bin to bin efforts by educators (not truck drivers who are already quite busy just trying to pick up the materials) to communicate with specific people in a helpful way to increase recycling such as leaving educational materials on bins where people are trying to recycle inappropriate materials, and also on garbage totes that are full of recyclables with no recyclables set out (as in “hey you could probably save money by using the included recycling system so you could reduce the amount of garbage you are paying to have picked up, and also save valuable natural resources from going to waste.”) .

To my previous question about why so little information is available about what material is actually being recycled and at what costs and where, the Health Department answered: **“Material Recovery Facilities (MRF’s) are generally private. Unlike haulers, they are not subject the WUTC regulations and do not generally make their information public.”** This is a disingenuous answer since Health Departments permit MRFs, and if they wanted information about what was being recycled and where, they could write that reporting requirement into their permits. Over the past decade there have been way too many national news stories about how collected recycling material, particularly plastics, are not really being recycled but are going to one time use at waste to energy facilities or worse yet landfilled. To restore trust in our recycling system information about where local recyclables are going needs to be provided, and clear information about the actual market value of the different materials being collected needs to be shared. Not sharing such information reinforces the belief by some that such information is being kept secret because in fact recycling does not work, and has just become greenwashing propaganda for many industries that profit from wasteful single use packaging, and another large income source for big waste management companies.

Lastly, to expand understanding of our local solid waste system, lets consider the answer the Health Department gave regarding participation rates. They said – **“There is a significant number of county residents that do not have curbside service.”** I believe this is accurate and needs to be addressed, but again there is no real data to work with. One way to increase participation in recycling and in garbage service, and thus reduce illegal dumping and increase recycling would be to enforce County Code Chapter 8.11 that requires garbage service, or a written exemption, for all residents. That chapter of the code says that **“Solid waste and recycling collection shall become mandatory for owners of all developed property.”** If there are significant numbers of residents in the County that do not have curbside service it is because the County has not enforced the code to require such service for all the good reasons stated in the code. If we really want to improve recycling rates and reduce illegal dumping of garbage perhaps another reporting requirement should be added to the proposed ordinance to get a better handle on how many people are not participating. It could say something like:

- Annually, any Solid Waste Collection Company operating in the unincorporated parts of the county shall report to the Whatcom County Health Depart the addresses of all residential properties in their collection areas that have failed to sign up for garbage and recycling services.