To: Santa Barbara Board of Supervisors

From: Siattle Olvera

Date: March 17, 2018

Re: Residential Compost Ordinance City of Santa Barbara

*Executive Summary:*

Santa Barbara has taken to composting since 2009, through it’s Commercial Food Scraps Composting Program. Through California’s Mandatory Commercial Organics Recycling Program, the state now requires businesses that generates more than 4 cubic yards of food scraps per week, to have a food scraps bin. These measures were a response to California’s aggressive recycling and greenhouse gas (GHG) emission goals, however if the county of Santa Barbara hopes to achieve significant reductions of greenhouse gas emissions from landfills, more aggressive local legislation must be implemented.

Composting as a solution to reducing methane emissions produced from landfills has been recognized by the state of California, and many cities across the nation have taken initiatives to invest in city-wide curbside composting programs to more efficiently address this environmental concern. Cities such as Seattle, Tacoma, Portland, and San Francisco, have adopted curbside composting as a means of diverting food waste from landfills. These cities have been able to progress in these composting measures, through either establishing fines for those who do not compost, or through outlawing sending food scraps to the landfills altogether. As of now, Santa Barbara has the necessary resources and equipped infrastructure to divert all of the county’s food scraps to a composting facility, however Santa Barbara’s minimal composting efforts of mere compliance to state legislation, does not encompass countywide composting.

*Context or Scope of Problem:*

On average, organic material accounts for 40% of what ends up in the landfill, and through proper care, this waste could be diverted from the landfill through either recycling or composting. About 15% of what is sent to the landfill is food waste itself, and when those food scraps break down, they do so in anoxic environments, producing methane which is a recognized potent greenhouse gas. Methane traps 28x more heat than carbon dioxide and the presence of methane in our atmosphere has increased 150% since 1750[[1]](#footnote-1). About 20% of the methane produced in the United States can be attributed to these food scraps breaking down in landfills and when we are facing the realities of climate change, reducing our methane emissions becomes imperative.[[2]](#footnote-2) In the state of California, composting legislation only mitigates those numbers, rather than provide a holistic solution to diverting food away from landfills.

Industrial composting has found a market for turning organic material into fertilizers to be used for agriculture, landscaping, gardening, and biomass energy. This industry embraces the regenerative processes of turning waste into a market product to be sold back to the community. Santa Barbara’s composting system sends all food waste accumulated from the commercial sector to a composting facility in Oxnard, called Agromin. This composting facility uses the food waste that businesses in Santa Barbara generate and creates an organic fertilizer that can then benefit other local businesses. Investing in organic fertilizers as opposed to synthetic fertilizers in both the agricultural and landscaping sectors ultimately contributes the health of our environment through using more sustainable practices.

Under this preliminary infrastructure of composting, Santa Barbara county has the necessary resources to adopt curbside compost for more than just businesses that generate 4 cubic yards of food waste per week. Because Santa Barbara has already established a system for Marborg to pick up compost from local businesses and direct it to the Agromin facility, expanding this system to the residential sector is only a matter of legislation for the county. In addressing the greenhouse gas emission produced in our landfills, the county must not discount the contributions of the residential sector to this environmental problem. If we are to take Santa Barbara’s Climate Action Plan seriously, then more aggressive legislation regarding methane emissions needs to be established. Investing into a city-wide curbside composting system appears to be the most practical next step in moving to a more sustainable future for Santa Barbara.

*Policy Recommendations:*

The current approach to composting in Santa Barbara is not a solution to eliminating methane produced from food waste in the landfill, rather this approach merely aims to reduce those numbers. 400,000 people live in the Santa Barbara county and with the average individual throwing away 209 to 254 lbs of food waste per year, the food waste generated in the residential sector should not be discounted.

In order to adequately address the environmental issue of methane produced from our landfills, the Santa Barbara Board of Supervisors needs to do more than what the state requires and rather set a composting ordinance for the county of Santa Barbara to make it illegal for food waste to be sent to landfills. In San Francisco, the Mandatory Recycling and Composting Ordinance was a municipal ordinance requiring the whole of San Francisco to participate in recycling and composting programs. The San Francisco Board of Supervisors past this legislation in 2009, and was the first municipal ordinance in the United States to universally require source separation of organic material.[[3]](#footnote-3) This aggressive legislation has ultimately transformed both the trash system and trash culture throughout the city of San Francisco.

The manner in which the city of San Francisco took initiative to establish a city-wide composting ordinance, should serve as an example for the city of Santa Barbara in relation to its own composting program. Because the modern environmental movement sparked here in the city of Santa Barbara during the 1970s and following that movement, the University of California Santa Barbara established the first ever environmental studies major, it only follows that an environmentally-conscious Santa Barbara would take to a more aggressive solution to managing methane emissions. The county of Santa Barbara should invest in a curbside composting program as a means of cultivating a more sustainable future for the beautiful city of Santa Barbara and doing so through a countywide municipal ordinance requiring source separation of organic waste.

1. ["Technical summary"](http://www.grida.no/climate/ipcc_tar/wg1/017.htm). Climate Change 2001. United Nations Environment Programme. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Greenhouse gas emissions” United States Environmental Protection Agency. 14 Apr. 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Coté, John (10 June 2009). ["S.F. OKs Toughest Recycling Law in U.S."](http://articles.sfgate.com/2009-06-10/news/17207992_1_bins-fines-composting) San Francisco Chronicle. Retrieved 25 April 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)