



SUSTAINABLE FOOD POLICY BOARD



Paula McDermott, Chairperson
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P. O. Box 1088
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December 3, 2010

Mayor Lee Leffingwell,
Austin City Council Members
301 West Second Street
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem, and Council Members,

The Sustainable Food Policy Board (SFPB) recommends that the Austin City Council take action to ensure that our city expediently plan and implement a comprehensive city-wide composting program.

An effective city-wide composting program will make valuable food waste and organic materials available to enrich the region's soil, strengthening sustainable local food production and completing the food cycle, while simultaneously supporting Austin's zero-waste initiative. Moreover, research shows that other U.S. municipalities have created popular and revenue-generating composting programs.

Effective composting programs in cities such as Portland, San Francisco, and Seattle educate city-dwellers and facilitate the transformation of food waste and other organic materials into compost that can then be sold locally as a sustainable soil additive. Austin can incorporate similar strategies, including public and private partnerships, pilot programs to develop appropriate processes and infrastructure, and education campaigns in order to create and implement a comprehensive program.

Austin's approved Zero Waste Plan identifies composting as one of four priorities and the Integrated Solid Waste Management Master Plan (ISWMMP) process incorporates recommendations involving composting in the Needs Assessment technical document just released in November. That document's review of the composting incentive piloted this year concludes that limitations of the residential initiative reinforce the need for a comprehensive city-wide compost collection program in Austin.

The report also suggests creating an incentive program for commercial and multi-family customers and expanding the current yard waste collection program to include food waste. In addition, the document outlines current city and private composting facilities and their potential for contributing infrastructure for expanded processing of yard waste mixed with food waste. Finally, the assessment suggests that city facilities and departments divert organics from the landfill.



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Based on relevant benchmarks from cities with similar characteristics and in support of the City's commitment to strengthen a sustainable local food system, the SFPB recommends the Austin City Council take action to implement a clear, detailed and timely plan for a city-wide residential, commercial, and institutional composting program that builds on the research and planning underway for the ISWMMP. To that end, city staff can integrate feedback from sustainable food production stakeholders specifically on the elements of the master plan that relate to composting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paula J. McDermott".

Paula J. McDermott
Chairperson, Sustainable Food Policy Board

cc: Marc Ott, City Manager
Bert Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager
Robert Gedert, Director, Solid Waste Services
Vince Cobalis, Executive Liaison
Lucia Athens, Chief Sustainability Officer