



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION
Zero Waste Advisory Commission

Recommendation Number (20140611-003i): Opposition of Waste to Energy as STAR Ratings Metric

WHEREAS the City of Austin has adopted the Sustainability Tools for Assessing and Rating Communities (STAR Communities) Rating system to measure our sustainability as a city, and

WHEREAS according to the City of Austin Office of Sustainability the City provided feedback on early drafts of the rating system, participated in the STAR steering committee beginning in 2008, beta tested the system with support from the City Manager in 2010-11 and was an “early adopter” of the system, and

WHEREAS a former employee of the City of Austin Office of Sustainability is on the STAR Communities Rating System Board of Directors, and

WHEREAS this system gives favorable points to communities which practice waste to energy “conversion,” and

WHEREAS waste to energy is commonly used as a euphemism for waste incineration, including phased incineration technologies such as waste gasification, and

WHEREAS Professors Nicholas Muller (Middlebury College), Robert Mendelsohn (Yale University) and William Nordhaus (Yale University) determined in 2011 that when comparing the total external damages of polluting activities per their total value added for the economy municipal waste combustion and incineration was the most destructive industry in the US—more than 3 times worse than coal fired power generation, and

WHEREAS recycling saves 3-5 times the energy produced by even the most consistent waste to energy incinerators, and

WHEREAS incineration competes with recycling for materials, and

WHEREAS Ted Michaels, spokesperson for the Energy Recovery Council—a trade group for waste incineration—admitted in testimony to the Washington DC City Council in 2013 that waste to energy facilities were more expensive than landfills and dirtier than coal power plants, and

WHEREAS waste to energy facilities have been major factors in municipal bankruptcies in Harrisburg, PA and Detroit, MI.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Zero Waste Advisory Commission recommends that the Austin City Council direct the Office of Sustainability to advocate against the consideration of waste to energy conversion as a benefit to communities, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Zero Waste Advisory Commission recommends that the Austin City Council end all City of Austin participation in or adoption of STAR Community Ratings if they decline to remove waste to energy conversion from its metrics in a timely fashion and make a public statement to that effect.

Date of Approval: June 11, 2014

Record of the vote:

Attest: _____

(Staff signature)