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Published March 4th, 2009

Moraga and Orinda Council Members Talk Trash

By *Sophie Braccini*



Council members David Trotter, Karen Mendonca, Victoria Smith and Steven Glazer listen to Steven Moore, President & CEO Pacific Rim Recycling in Benicia Photo Andy Scheck

On March 1st, the solid waste residential rate increased by 7.7% in Orinda, from \$25.23 to \$27.35, by 4.2% in Moraga, from \$19.98 to \$20.82 and in Lafayette by 9.02% from \$19.83 to \$21.62. On February 26, the Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority's (CCCSWA) Executive Director Paul Morsen invited some local city council members who also sit on the CCSWA Board to tour some CCCSWA partners and facilities. The tour was followed by a discussion of strategic goals.

Moraga Council Member Karen Mendonca and Mayor Dave Trotter, and Orinda Council Members Victoria Smith and Steve Glazer are recyclers in their everyday lives and advocates in their cities, and they all chose the assignment of sitting on the CCCSWA Board because of their commitment to recycling.

"I am involved because I want to work to increase our recycling rate and to keep hazardous substances out of the waste stream," said Glazer.

Trotter explained, "I have an interest and some previous background in solid waste matters...for a number of years during the 1990's I represented garbage collection and recycling companies as an attorney."

The first stop of the day was at Pacific Rim, a CCCSWA contractor in Benicia that handles recyclables such as what we put in our brown containers as well as the curb side recycling they provide twice yearly.

"I am environmentally conscientious and a huge recycler," said Mendonca, "but not an expert, and during this visit I've learned a lot."

The group was shown the highly mechanized and sophisticated sorting process that allows the contractor to prepare bundles of paper for China, extract glass and

metal for reprocessing and send plastic bottles on their way to reuse. About 93% of what they receive gets recycled, the rest ends up in the landfill.

The second stop took the team to Martinez, to the Contra Costa Transfer and Recovery Station that's owned by Allied Waste, a company that holds franchise agreements with CCCSWA.

"I was most impressed with the care taken by Allied Waste to do two things; first, to very thoroughly sort the stuff coming in to them, that is the recyclables and the garbage, to make sure that both get to the appropriate place so as to maximize recycling, and second, to move materials in and out so quickly," said Smith.

The third stop at the Pittsburg landfill was most impressive by its size, efficiency and oddly surreal beauty. The visitors were greeted by the site engineers who presented their topology and technology. "I was most impressed by the landfill," said Mendonca, "it looked more like a park, and their complex process deals with efficiency and safety with such enormous amounts of waste."

The group took a car tour along the vast acreage of the site, seeing the almost-operative methane facility that will produce three megawatts of electricity starting in April, and the wetland that has been restored for local children. Nestled in the bare hills, the section of land where the garbage is dropped is signaled by flocks of hungry seagulls that tour it endlessly.

From the site, the view expands to the Bay, homes and a windmill farm. "I appreciated the fact that the landfill operators cover the garbage twice daily, so as to minimize the impact on the neighboring communities," commented Smith, "I really thought they were acting as good neighbors."

The site will be in service until 2053, after that date it will become a golf course, or return to its original state of pasture.

The afternoon was dedicated to a presentation of the 2009-2010 strategic goals of CCCSWA and discussion of possible ways to increase the amount of recyclable material in our waste stream.

Steve Glazer said, "Orinda's recycling rate has slipped below 50% of its trash flow and is failing to meet the state requirements. Our community is very environmentally sensitive and if they can be made aware of our poor standing and the easy ways to reuse and recycle our trash, we can do much better."

Smith added, "In order to increase our diversion rate-both because the state requires us to and because it's the right thing to do for our community- we have to concentrate on new areas. To me, that means increasing our food waste recycling by residents, and also including expanding the CCCSWA commercial food waste recycling program to Orinda restaurants, better control over the disposal of construction waste, and we need to seriously expand recycling by businesses."

The situation in Moraga is a bit more positive. "With respect to recycling, the specific goal for Moraga at present is to continue meeting our AB 939 solid waste diversion requirement (i.e., achieve at least a 50% diversion rate on recyclables and green waste so that these materials do not go to landfill)," said Trotter.

Mendonca concluded, "Managing our waste is a great responsibility," she said, "this is the right thing to do and another very important way to take care of the planet."

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