

February 19th, 2024

Dear Sebastopol City Council members:

I am writing about your waste management contract, which you will consider at your February 20th meeting. I am a retired SRJC instructor and the former Executive Director of North Bay Jobs with Justice.

Also, in 2003, I served as co-chair of the Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County when Sebastopol implemented the county's first Living Wage Ordinance. Subsequently, the cities of Sonoma, Petaluma, and the County of Sonoma implemented Living Wage laws for city and county workers and large contractors.

I urge the Council to extend the Recology contract for at least six months and continue negotiations with Recology. Healdsburg renegotiated a long-term contract with Recology in 2021 and agreed upon fair and reasonable rates. Sebastopol should be able to do so as well.

If you decide to issue an RFP for the garbage franchise agreement, I urge you to include the values and priorities for such a new agreement. For example:

- Does Sebastopol want to contract with a waste management firm that provides workers with livable wages and comprehensive benefits?
- Does Sebastopol want to contract with a company with the resources and equipment to continuously improve the City's recycling rates?
- Does Sebastopol want to contract with a firm that processes waste materials in the county and minimizes greenhouse gas emissions?

Why should the City explore all possible avenues to retain Recology?

In 2016, workers employed by the former waste hauler for Sebastopol and many other county jurisdictions, the Ratto Group, approached Teamsters 665 and informed the union about the low wages, inadequate benefits, and hazardous working conditions.

The Teamsters and these workers initiated an organizing campaign, and Jobs with Justice built a community support network. In May 2017, Ratto workers voted overwhelmingly to join the Teamsters. After Recology purchased Ratto in 2018, the union and the company agreed to a five-year contract.

As a result, between 2017 and 2023, wages for Recology drivers roughly doubled. The typical driver now earns more than \$35 an hour plus another \$11-12 an hour in comprehensive family health insurance and retirement benefits. Moreover, the company provides opportunities for ongoing worker training, education, and upward mobility within the firm. In addition, Recology is an employee-owned company; hence, workers can annually accrue company shares.

During a period of skyrocketing inequality, unionization has transformed bad jobs with poverty wages at Ratto into good jobs with family-supporting wages, comprehensive benefits, and much-improved health and safety conditions for Recology workers.

Because of their excellent compensation, 85 percent of the Recology workforce can live locally in Sonoma or Marin counties and participate in their children's school activities and community civic organizations.

The unionization of Recology workers is the 'good jobs' component of the multi-year countywide "good jobs and zero waste" campaign.

The company and the union have collaborated with the County agency, Zero Waste Sonoma, environmentalists, schools, and community-based organizations to substantially increase the recycling of glass, paper, cardboard, plastics, construction waste, and food waste across the county. Sebastopol approved a Zero Waste Resolution in 2018, committing residents and businesses to reduce their waste stream to zero by 2030. In 2019, the city council passed a Disposable Food Service Ware and Polystyrene Foam Ban as part of this campaign.

Sebastopol zero-waste advocates report that Recology has been an excellent partner in the zero-waste campaign. Recology's highly trained staff, community outreach and education, involvement with schools, and support for nonprofits are enormous assets for the City in this effort.

Undoubtedly, residential and commercial rates will increase to align with other jurisdictions in the county that Recology serves. However, elected and community leaders must educate the public about what they are paying for with Recology, including:

- Good green living wage jobs
- High-quality waste hauling and recycling services at Recology's renovated recycling facility in Santa Rosa
- A robust zero-waste partnership that has improved the City diversion rate to 51 percent since Recology took over the contract.

It is important to note that if you decide to issue an RFP, just a handful of companies will respond. Sebastopol's waste materials will be trucked from the city to disposal and recycling facilities in Ukiah, San Jose, or Richmond.

Sincerely,

Martin J. Bennett

