

From: [REDACTED]
To: [City Council](#)
Subject: Item # 8 Council agenda January 7th - good jobs and zero waste campaign
Date: Sunday, January 5, 2025 4:11:02 PM

Dear Sebastopol City Council members:

My name is Marty Bennett. I am a retired SRJC instructor and the former Executive Director of North Bay Jobs with Justice. I am also a consultant for UNITE HERE Local 2, representing hotel workers in the County.

I am writing about item #8 on the Council's agenda for this Tuesday.

I am stunned that the Council is considering not renewing the Sebastopol Recology contract, effectively abandoning a key component of the "good jobs and zero waste" campaign initiated by a coalition of labor and environmentalists nearly a decade ago.

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 2017-2023, wages for Recology drivers have roughly doubled. The typical driver now earns over \$33 an hour plus another \$11-12 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 accrue company shares annually.

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 "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.

Recology's residential and commercial rates are somewhat higher than Sonoma County Resource Recover (SCRR)—but Recology's rates are consistent across numerous jurisdictions it serves in the County. Cost should not be the bottom line. The Council and community leaders must educate the public about what they are paying for with Recology:

- Good green living wage jobs that enable workers to live in the community where they work;
- High-quality local waste hauling and recycling services that will not increase greenhouse gas emissions by

sending refuse out of the County;

- A robust zero-waste partnership with a company that has the staffing, resources, and infrastructure to increase waste recycling incrementally. Recology has an excellent track record of doing so in Sebastopol and jurisdictions elsewhere in the County and the North Bay.

I urge the Council not to execute the proposed waste hauling agreement with SCRR and to renegotiate a long-term agreement with Recology.

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