



LOS ANGELES CITY COUNCILMAN GREIG SMITH

Leading the Nation in Environmentally Responsible Trash Policy

By Councilman Greig Smith

As submitted to the Daily News and Los Angeles Times

You don't buy a car without kicking the tires. So it makes little sense to build a \$100 million facility that will extract energy and valuable resources from trash and make L.A. an environmental leader in the nation, without seeing the technology in operation first-hand.

That is what I will be doing when I travel to several countries to see and learn from the world's leading energy-from-waste facilities.

Four years ago, I introduced the RENEW LA plan, a groundbreaking package of 13 pieces of legislation, which has been adopted by the City Council as City policy, and has been endorsed by the Daily News.

RENEW LA will end our dependence on highly toxic landfills by reducing, reusing, or recycling municipal solid waste that would otherwise end up in landfills, where it threatens the environment and public health.

The most exciting piece of RENEW LA is the series of conversion technology plants - clean, nearly emissions-free plants which will draw from our trash valuable materials such as plastics that can be used in manufacturing, while producing clean, renewable energy. The plants will help us meet the City's goal of recovering 90 percent or more of our waste by 2025.

The plants will bring tremendous benefits for our environment, public health, economy, and traffic. They will save valuable resources, reduce our dependence on oil, reduce greenhouse gas emissions linked to global warming, generate cheap, clean, renewable energy, produce valuable materials that can be sold, yield significant revenues, and create high-value local jobs.

Last summer, we marked a major milestone in this effort by putting out the Request for Proposals to build the first waste conversion plant. We received several of their submissions, offering a few variations on the conversion technology that we are looking to implement here. Now, on my fact-finding trip, we will get to examine the bids of seven of them and see those technologies in operation in cities, close up.

There are strong reasons to do this. A \$50 million to \$100 million facility is not something that can be purchased from a catalog. We have to be able to “kick the tires.” These are technologies that are not even in use in the U.S.

We will get to meet the people who run these facilities and talk to their scientists about technical issues, such as what their emission levels are, and how much they cost to operate and maintain. We need to be sure that these technologies will meet our environmental regulations and are suited to our local needs.

We are also trying to avoid repeating the mistake that the City made in the 1990s when it tried to implement an experimental alternative energy plant at Hyperion wastewater facility. It was a great idea on paper, but it was untested, and once built, it never worked. It cost tens of millions of dollars, and today it sits rusting away, a waste of public money.

The trip is being paid for by tipping fees that trash haulers pay to be able to dump their trash at Sunshine Canyon Landfill. These fees fund the Alternative Technology Fund, created years ago for the sole purpose of ending our dependence on landfills by finding new technology and alternative waste processing. These funds cannot be legally used for any other service, such as street maintenance, police, or fire service.

This trip will directly benefit our community by helping us implement the RENEW LA Plan and get the conversion technology plants up and running. It will help us invest in the long-term protection of our environment and public health, and bring lasting economic benefits. By reducing the number of trips made by trash trucks hauling waste to Sunshine Canyon Landfill, RENEW LA will directly reduce air pollution and traffic on our freeways.

Examining these facilities first-hand will help us avoid costly pitfalls, mistakes and change orders, so that we can find the best, most efficient, cleanest technology possible for our own systems. Any well-run business would do the same. It’s what we need to do to end the 2,000 year-old practice of digging a hole and dumping our trash in it.

For more information about RENEW LA, please visit www.CD12.org and click RENEW LA.

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