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2301 Russell Street
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Berkeley City Council
2180 Milvia Street
Berkeley, CA 94704
Via e-mail

SUBJECT: Berkeley Landfill

Dear Mayor and Council members:

I write in response to an April 18, 2024, off-calendar letter regarding Berkeley Landfill. I have followed this matter with interest as a former regulator of that landfill and as an advocate for Cesar Chavez Park, our largest and most bedraggled park. I obtained a copy of the 2018 report by SCS on the landfill; I urge you all to obtain a copy and read it.

In almost all human endeavors, people make mistakes. Things are more complicated than anticipated, resources are limited and so forth. To make progress, we need to examine our mistakes and look for the root causes. The off-calendar letter is not an accurate summary of the SCS report and does not contribute to a learning organization.

According to the off-calendar letter, the problems with moisture in the landfill were a result of heavy rain in 2019. "In 2019, a significant buildup of liquid in the GCCS impeded the flow of gases to the flare. The consensus between the City and SCS was that the liquid buildup was a result of particularly wet weather during the winter of 2019-2020." That is not true. When landfills are closed, they are covered with a low-permeability cap and then they are recontoured so that surface runoff is drained with only minimal penetration of the landfill. Even a low-permeability cap can allow water into the underlying sanitary landfill if surface water is not directed away. As the Air District noted, a well-maintained landfill is not subject to substantial water intrusion.

In the case of Berkeley landfill, the problems of water penetrating the landfill cover were present before 2019. This quote from the 2018 SCS report makes that clear: "We attribute the shutdowns to liquid blockages in the GCCS collection header and lateral piping,". The report goes on to identify four low spots that are probably accounting for these problems. The report makes it clear that the water problems need to be addressed, noting: "...trouble free operation and compliance with new permit conditions will be problematic without ...collection system modifications."

I disagree with the suggestion of the city manager in the off-calendar letter that:

In 2018, SCS provided the City with an evaluation of various potential upgrades to the GCCS that included a complete replacement estimated to cost \$2M. SCS advised that a

replacement would not be cost effective: naturally declining amounts of gas meant that a new gas collection and control system would have a relatively short lifespan.

It was not an all or nothing question, and the city's consultants informed the city in the 2018 report that they would not be able to obtain a waiver from collecting methane and should expect to continue to collect it for another 10 years. They provided the city with multiple options to address the water problems and identified the four areas where the most serious problems seemed to be.

Attributing the city's lack of action to the conclusion of SCS that replacing the *entire* collection system was not cost-effective is disingenuous. The 2018 SCS report makes clear the urgency of the problem:

Public safety and the City's ability to achieve regulatory compliance would be significantly compromised if the City takes no further action

A recommendation from your consultant that public safety would be compromised, and the continued discharge of a very powerful global warming gas were apparently not enough to stir the city to action. It is not clear that the city implemented any of the options in the SCS report and has taken 6 years and multiple notices of violations for this matter to come to public attention.

Without accountability and realistic post-mortems when mistakes are made, there will be no improvement.

Very truly yours,

Jim McGrath

Copies: Kelly Hammergren, Iris Kwok