

April 14, 2014
Mayor Annise Parker
901 Bagby St.
Houston, TX 77002

Dear Mayor Parker:

Our letter addresses the release of the City's Request for Proposals (RFP) and recent statements you have made regarding the "One Bin for All" proposal. The statement to which we are referring was first broadcast on KUHF 88.7 FM radio program "Houston Matters" Monday, March 31, and has since been repeated. We represent a broad constituency who questions assumptions inherent in the proposal, the technology under consideration, its associated risks and costs, and the very process by which the City's future waste program is currently being evaluated.

During the program, you stated that the benefit of the "One Bin For All" would be, "the chance to go from a 10% recycling rate to a 70% recycling rate by going to one bin, even if your materials aren't worth as much, the volume of the recycling goes up so astronomically that the economies of scale are tremendous."

Both the RFP and previously released Request for Qualification (RFQ) call for waste to fuel technologies, including gasification, catalytic conversion and anaerobic digestion, that are clearly distinct from "recycling." There has never been a mixed waste processing "one bin" facility anywhere in the world that has reached a 70% recycling rate, and "One Bin for All" would heavily rely on waste to fuel as a means to reach the desired "diversion" rate of 75%. Expensive and polluting, waste to fuel methods are completely unnecessary to divert 75% of waste from landfills and will create new emissions and economic threats for our City. Alternatively, we believe diverting 75% of the City's waste through source separated recycling and compost could create tens of thousands more jobs in the Houston area, conserve resources, reduce emissions and stop pollutants from entering our environment while creating maximum revenue for the City.

During the program, you said, "For some reason that escapes me, there is one environmental organization that attacks [the theory that we could do one bin recycling] and says that it reduces the value of recyclable materials, and I would agree with that." We have some point-by-point responses:

1) Many local groups have vocally challenged the mixing of trash and recycling; these include Texas Campaign for the Environment, Sierra Club Houston Regional Group, NAACP Houston Branch, T.E.J.A.S., Texans Together, and the San Jacinto River Coalition. At least 19,000 letters have been sent to the Office of the Mayor and City Council from concerned Houstonians.

Globally renowned environmentalists have also denounced the proposal. During the SXSW Eco 2013 conference, national Sierra Club CEO, Michael Brune, said: “‘One Bin for All’ calls for getting rid of all separate recycling collection in Houston, which means people there will get a lot less value from their recyclable materials. Facilities like the one they want to build have a history of financial, management, operational and other failures, and the incineration projects they want to pursue pollute the environment. This is a bad idea. Houston needs to join other cities in Texas and across the world in adopting a long-term Zero Waste plan which will truly maximize stewardship of their resources.”

Annie Leonard, director of the Story of Stuff Project, said “I’ve been hearing about magic machines for separating trash and recycling for 20 years, and none of them have worked. Even if they were real, I’d still oppose these ‘One Bin’ waste schemes because throwing everything in the same bin perpetuates our current mindless relationship with stuff. Houston and every other community needs to change the game and pursue a Zero Waste strategy which provides jobs, reduces pollution and offers real solutions to the unsustainable culture of consumption and disposal which has failed us for so long.”

Clearly, more than “one environmental group” have come forward to raise legitimate issues, point out inconsistencies, and especially, promote the Zero Waste option.

2) Aside from the obvious problem of contaminating recyclables which you recognize, groups proposing Zero Waste alternatives to the “One Bin” program have specifically flagged gasification, catalytic conversion and anaerobic digestion as problematic. We regard the first two as forms of incineration that have high potential to degrade air quality in the neighborhoods where they are to be sited and where there are already polluting facilities threatening public health.

Incineration is a risky form of energy production and simultaneously one of the least efficient means of waste disposal. Gasification of solid waste has never been successfully implemented in the U.S. and has a poor track record overseas, producing cancer causing emissions and toxic ash which must be disposed of in landfills. Gasification or catalytic conversion is expected to cost over \$100 per ton and would require a long-term contract, causing us to

miss out on opportunities for future innovations in recycling and waste reduction. Incineration also competes with recycling, reuse and waste reduction, drives further extraction of raw materials and creates toxic byproducts such as bottom ash and slag, laced with dioxins and other toxic materials. Thousands of people work in the recycling industry in this City, including public employees. The proposed incineration methods would eliminate many of those jobs if subsidized by the City, as the “One Bin for All” RFP proposes. In addition, anaerobic digestion, while not nearly as polluting as incineration, is simply unproven compared to source-separated compost collection, which other cities are doing, as you said.

We believe that evaluation of the “One Bin for All” proposal has not included adequate public participation. The Advisory Committee that has been announced has been constituted entirely too late in the process and should have been invited to examine the proposals during the RFQ process if not earlier. No representatives from local groups who have voiced concerns about the “One Bin for All” have been chosen to serve on the Advisory Committee. To our knowledge there are no environmental justice representatives on the Advisory Committee to provide valuable feedback and guidance on equitable solutions to our waste. Instead of coming together to look at the “One Bin for All” proposal in isolation, a more effective Advisory Committee would look at all alternatives to the commingling and incineration of waste, including the Zero Waste option of using separate recycling and composting containers, improving education and incentives, and committing to reduce waste.

We applaud the City's expansion of the big, green recycling bins to all houses. Now let's set goals for landfill diversion even higher than 75% and get a plan in place to reach it in the next few decades through recycling, compost, reuse and waste reduction. And let's include apartments, condos, businesses, etc. We urge the City to set up a genuinely representative Solid Waste and Recycling Board to look at realistic options for Houston to implement in the long term, including the Zero Waste alternative, and to include real public participation in this process.

Sincerely,

[NAACP Houston Branch] [signed rep &/or reps: R Lillie, Dr. Smith]	San Jacinto River Coalition Jacquelyn Young, Director Chris Schillaci, Organizer
---	---

<p>Sierra Club Houston Regional Group Art Browning, Chair Evelyn Merz, Environmental Chair Frank Blake, Recycling Chair</p>	<p>Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services (T.E.J.A.S.) Bryan Parras</p>
<p>Houston Peace and Justice Center Bill Crosier, President</p>	<p>Public Citizen TX Tom “Smitty” Smith</p>
<p>[Houston Climate Protection Alliance] [signed rep or reps: Louis Smith]</p>	<p>Texas Campaign for the Environment Robin Schneider, Executive Director Melanie Scruggs, Houston Program Director</p>
<p>[Houston Environmental Justice Climate Action Network] [signed rep or reps: Dr. Bullard, Dr. King, Nekya Young]</p>	<p>Carlos Doroteo, Former City Staff</p>
<p>[Green Chamber of Commerce] [signed rep or reps: Vikki Rosencrantz]</p>	<p>[SEED Coalition] [signed rep or reps: Karen Hadden]</p>
<p>[Strategic Materials, Inc.] [signed rep or reps: Richard Abramowitz]</p>	<p>[Houston Organization of Public Employees] [signed rep or reps: Melvin Hughes, Roy Sanchez]</p>
<p>[We CAN Recycle] [signed rep or reps: Mark Austin]</p>	<p>[Center for Houston’s Future] [signed rep or reps: Catherine Mosbacher]</p>
<p>[Texas League of Conservation Voters] [signed rep or reps: David Weinberg]</p>	<p>[IM Green Recycling Inc.] [signed rep or reps: Pat Baranski]</p>
<p>[Urban Harvest] [signed rep or reps: Sandra Wicoff, Libby Kennedy]</p>	<p>[Clean Disposal Solutions] [signed rep or reps: Hans Von Meier]</p>

<p>[Living Planet Foundation] [signed rep or reps: Kusum Vyas]</p>	<p>[Citizens Empowered] [signed rep or reps: Carlos Doroteo]</p>
<p>[Environment Texas] [signed rep or reps: Luke Metzger]</p>	<p>[Pleasantville Environmental Coalition]</p>
<p>[American Lung Association - Plains-Gulf Region] [signed rep or reps: Kristen O. Stubbs, Jaime Roll, Alex Wagner]</p>	<p>[Living Paradigm CDC] [signed rep or reps:]</p>
<p>[Transition Houston] [signed rep or reps: Mark Juedeman]</p>	