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The public is being told that our region is facing a “gargantuan garbage crisis,” but this is not true. Metro Vancouver’s own data show that we have plenty of disposal capacity in our region to meet our needs.

The Cache Creek landfill is one of three facilities managing the 1.1 million tonnes of municipal waste we produce in our region each year. When it closes we will indeed need to find something else to do with the 368,000 tonnes of municipal waste that we currently send there. But Metro Vancouver’s staff has already developed a plan for reducing our waste by 542,000 tonnes per year, including both municipal waste and waste from the construction industry.

On January 25, the same day it approved the decision to cancel the Ashcroft landfill project, the Metro Vancouver Board received a staff report outlining a strategy that will increase our overall recycling rate from 52% to 70% and divert over 400,000 tonnes of waste from municipal disposal facilities.

The most important part of the strategy is the phased introduction of composting for food waste and other putrescible wastes. This will reduce our waste by a minimum of 125,000 tonnes per year.

Second, enforcing the new disposal bans that were announced at the beginning of this year, preventing yard waste, recyclable paper products and electronics from going in the garbage, will reduce our waste by another 152,000 tonnes.

Holding the construction industry responsible for recycling its wood waste will cut our waste by a staggering 320,000 tonnes, 120,000 tonnes of which is going unnecessarily to municipal disposal facilities each year.

Finally, aggressive recycling efforts for plastics and small appliances – using the proven Industry Product Stewardship approach that is already removing 122,400 tonnes of waste from our landfills – will cut our waste by an additional 40,000 tonnes. Total: 437,000 tonnes – almost 20% more than we send to the Cache Creek landfill.

The budget for all of these diversion efforts, \$40 million, has already been set aside.

For the wastes that are left over, there are proven, low cost alternatives that have yet to be presented to the public. Mechanical and biological treatment of waste (MBT) has been chosen by many European cities as well as the Halifax Regional Municipality to reduce the environmental impacts of landfilling waste. Two respected Canadian engineering firms recently reviewed these communities’

experience in a report to the Niagara Region in Ontario. They found that a well-designed MBT system reduces climate-changing landfill gas by 90 percent (landfills are a major emitter of the GHG methane, 23 times more potent than CO₂). MBT also reduces odour emissions, bird nuisances and concentrations of harmful substances in landfill leachate, potentially increasing the service life of costly leachate collection systems.

A Swiss report cited by Zero Waste Vancouver found that MBT adds only 8% to the cost of landfilling (currently \$27.12/tonne at the Vancouver landfill), compared to 54% higher costs for waste-to-energy processing.

It would be much better public policy to bring our landfill up to top performance at a modest cost, allowing us to manage our waste responsibly as we scale down the landfill operations over time, rather than investing in capital-intensive technology that locks us into delivering fixed amounts of waste far into the future.

Citizens will have an opportunity to learn more about our region's waste and the options available to us at a public meeting being organized by the Sierra Club's Lower Mainland Group and Zero Waste Vancouver for Saturday, March 15.

Helen Spiegelman
Coordinator, Zero Waste Vancouver