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S.J. AIMS TO TURN WASTE INTO POWER

BIOGAS PLANT WOULD BE FIRST IN THE NATION June 20, 2009

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Tracy Seipel, Mercury News

Caption: MAP: Mercury News

Biogas facility

San Jose this week moved closer to becoming the first U.S. city with a biogas plant that would turn organic waste into methane gas and high-quality fertilizer.

Not only would the project reduce the city's energy bill, officials say, it would also help San Jose reach its Green Vision goal of obtaining 100 percent of its electricity by 2022 from clean, renewable sources and diverting 100 percent of the city's waste from the landfill.

"We're pretty excited," said Nancy Klein, the city's director of corporate outreach. "San Jose will be the first in the nation to deploy this technology."

The idea of turning waste into fuel isn't new; San Jose and other cities around the country already use a process that turns wet waste such as sewage sludge into energy. It's the dry fermentation technology behind this project that makes it unique, said Michele Young, organics manager for San Jose's Environmental Services Department.

"We're going to decompose food and yard waste in the absence of oxygen," Young said. "That produces methane gas, which can be converted into electricity." That power would be used by the proposed sewage treatment plant, or would be sold back to the grid, she said. Young said the project could reduce the plant's power bill by up to 25 percent.

The new facility will be built and operated by Zero Waste Energy Development Company on 40 acres of land jointly owned by San Jose and the city of Santa Clara on the north side of Los Esteros Road. The location is between two solid waste recovery and recycling facilities owned and operated by the private Zanker Road Resource Management, one of two companies, including **GreenWaste** Recovery, that are part of Zero Waste Energy.

On Tuesday, the City Council gave the go-ahead for San Jose's Office of Economic Development to negotiate a long-term land lease with Zero Waste Energy.

The land where the plant would be built is currently being appraised, but Klein said a comparably-sized piece of land would lease for about \$300,000 to \$400,000 a year. She said the plant would cost from \$15 million to \$18 million to build. It could employ 30 to 40 people during development and construction and is expected to create and retain 50 to 60 direct and supporting jobs when fully operational by 2013. By that time, the facility could take in up to 150,000 tons of organic waste that otherwise would be destined for a landfill, and process it to produce energy.

Industry observers seemed impressed, but not surprised, by San Jose's proposal.

"They have a history of being one of the front-runners in recycling, not only with their staff but with their partners in the private sector companies," said Scott Smithline, director of legal and regulatory affairs of Californians Against Waste. The Sacramento-based nonprofit is dedicated to protecting the state's environment through the development of better waste reduction and recycling policies and programs.

"It looks like they've done a good job of identifying what their priorities are and selecting a technology that will work well within their existing infrastructure."

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