

County of Santa Clara

Department of Planning and Development
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NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT FOR THE Z-BEST COMPOSTING FACILITY MODIFICATIONS PROJECT

Date: October 15, 2018

Project Applicant: Zanker Road Resource Management LTD

File Number: 6498-17P

Assessor's Parcel Numbers: 841-37-028, 841-37-029, and 841-37-010

As the Lead Agency, the County of Santa Clara will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Z-Best Compost Facility Modifications Project (proposed project). The proposed project site is the existing Z-Best Composting Facility at 980 Highway 25, which currently operates under a County-issued Use Permit. The proposed project includes modification of Z-Best's existing composting process from the current windrow method to an aerated static pile process, as well as associated changes in operations and site design. The proposed new process, which is described on pages 2-3, would occur within the already developed area of the existing composting facility. The proposed new process would result in a throughput increase from the current maximum of 1,500 tons to 2,750 tons per day, which would require an additional 59 trucks per day. The project proponent has proposed that the increased truck trips be confined to the hours of 8 p.m. to 4 a.m.

The County is soliciting guidance from your agency on the scope and content of the environmental information to be included in the EIR that is relevant to your area of interest, or to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. The project description summary and probable environmental effects that will be analyzed in the EIR are attached.

A Public Scoping Session to solicit comments for the Notice of Preparation will be held at the Gilroy Library, 350 W. 6th Street, Gilroy on Tuesday, October 30 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), comments on the Notice of Preparation (NOP) must be received within 30 days of receipt of this notice. Written and/or email comments on the NOP should be provided to the County at the earliest possible date, but must be received by 5 p.m. on November 16, 2018. Agencies that will need to consider the final EIR when deciding whether to issue permits or other approvals for the project should provide the name of a contact person. Please address comments to:

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is to inform decision-makers and the general public of the environmental effects of a proposed project that an agency may implement or approve. The EIR process is intended to provide information sufficient to (a) evaluate a proposed project and the potential for significant impacts on the environment, (b) to examine methods of reducing adverse impacts, and (c) to consider alternatives to the project. In accordance with the requirements of CEQA, the EIR for the Z-Best Composting Process Conversion Project will include the following:

A project description;

A description of existing environmental setting, potential project-level and cumulative environmental impacts, and mitigation measures;

Alternatives to the proposed project; and

CEQA-required environmental findings, including (a) significant environmental effects that cannot be avoided if the project is implemented; (b) significant irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources; (c) growth-inducing impacts; and (d) effects found not to be significant.

PROJECT LOCATION

The project site is located at 980 Highway 25, southeast of the city of Gilroy and northwest of the city of Hollister, in unincorporated Santa Clara County. Figure 1 shows the regional location. Figure 2 shows the project site boundaries and vicinity. The project site encompasses assessor's parcels 841-37-029 (approximately 137 acres) and 841-37-010 (approximately 99 acres). Both parcels are designated Agricultural Large Scale under the County of Santa Clara General Plan and zoned Exclusive Agriculture with a 40 acre combining district (A-40Ac).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project includes modifications to the existing composting facility Use Permit to convert the current composting process from a windrow composting system to a static aerated pile composting system using technology from Engineered Compost Systems. Composting is the transformation of raw organic materials (e.g., yard trimmings) into biologically-stable, humus-rich substances suitable for growing plants. The existing windrow composting system at Z-Best requires that the windrows (long piles of raw organic material in bags) be periodically turned to improve porosity and oxygen content. Aerated static pile composting, on the other hand, would biodegrade organic material without physical manipulation during primary composting as it would use a ventilation system to circulate air within compost piles.

Composting Process

The proposed aerated composting process would be installed within southwest quadrant of the developed area of the existing composting facility, west of Area 1, as shown on Figure 3 (Site Plan). The proposed new composting process would occur in two stages:

Primary Composting. In the first stage, pre-processed feedstocks (organic material) would be stacked in piles within rows of attached cement bunkers, approximately 10 feet in height. The bunkers would be grouped in zones, and each zone would have a ventilation system with an electrically powered fan and a series of ducts connected to each bunker. A front-end loader would build up the piles to a height of approximately nine feet. Each pile would be covered with a six-inch bio-layer (clean cover material) intended to provide insulation to ensure adequate pathogen control and temperatures, and to function as an in-situ biofilter layer to reduce odors from volatile organic chemical released from the top of the pile.

At the primary composting stage, the ventilation system would provide negative aeration, drawing air down through the compost piles, which would be purified in a temperature controlled biofilter before

release. An irrigation system mounted on the bunker walls would provide automatic top watering of the piles to add moisture before pile break-down or to increase the moisture in the bio-layer for additional absorption of emissions. The proposed process is designed to operate with a 17-day retention of material in the primary composting stage.

Secondary Composting. After completing the primary composting process, the material would be moved by a front-end loader to a secondary composting zone (labeled as “Extended Bed CASP” on Figure 3) and piled to a maximum height of 9.5 feet. Secondary composting would take place in an extended bed aerated static pile with positive aeration, where air would be blown up through each compost pile. According to the project proponent, positive aeration can be used at this stage because it is expected that the primary composting process would have substantially deodorized and stabilized the material. Also, according to the project proponent, the material would not be covered with an insulating bio-layer at this stage because it is expected that it will have already met all pathogen reduction requirements during the primary composting stage.

Operations

The proposed new process would result in an increase in throughput of finished compost from the current maximum of 1,500 tons allowed under the existing Use Permit, to 2,750 tons per day. This increase would require an additional 59 truck trips per day, which the project proponent has proposed be confined to the hours of 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. The proposal includes a request to modify the use permit to allow a maximum of 90 employees to be on site, which would be an increase of 32 employees above current conditions.

Grading and Drainage

Changes to the composting area would involve replacing approximately 180,000 square feet of existing impervious surfaces (sidewalks, equipment pads, etc.). The proposed project would not result in a net change to total impervious or pervious surfaces. Grading would be required to establish pads for the new composting system and to provide on-site drainage and stormwater detention. The project proponent anticipates that the current site can accommodate all required stormwater detention, with primary on-site detention occurring in the modified Detention Basin 1, with additional flood storage capacity provided on-site to the north of Area 1, as shown on Figure 3. However, in the event this proves infeasible, additional stormwater retention would be provided by a 98.8-acre North Flood Storage Basin (assessor's parcel number 841-37-010), which is shown on Figure 4. This parcel is located immediately north/northeast of the existing operations site and the highway.

Site Access

Access to the project site is provided via one existing entrance, which intersects with SR 25 on the south side approximately 700 feet west of the intersection of Bolsa Road and SR 25. The project proponent is not proposing to change this access but is proposing adjacent construction of deceleration / acceleration lanes on SR 25. The project site entrance is located within the area of a Caltrans-approved Hollister to Gilroy State Route 25 Route Adoption project, which would involve potential widening and realignment of SR 25 from San Felipe Road (in Hollister) to the end of SR 25 at US 101 in Santa Clara County. Truck traffic originating from and bound for the project site is currently restricted from using Bolsa Road. All new truck and vehicular traffic originating from and bound for the project site would continue to be restricted to the use of only SR 25 to SR 156 and US 101. However, if the Caltrans project is constructed, it is anticipated that Bolsa intersection with SR 25 would shift east, and project traffic bound for and originating from the Z-Best facility would utilize the new Bolsa Road intersection with the realigned SR 25.

Permitting

The proposed project would require a major use permit and architecture and site approval modification and grading approval from the County of Santa Clara. Additional permits or permit modifications may be required from the County Local Enforcement Agency / CalRecycle (revised Solid Waste Facility Permit), the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, and Caltrans (District 4).

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The EIR will include a discussion of the environmental setting/baseline for the proposed project, a summary of applicable regulations (federal, state, regional, and local), and an analysis of the potential impacts of the project. Mitigation will be recommended to reduce or eliminate project impacts, where feasible. The specific potential environmental impacts evaluated in detail in the EIR will be determined based on evaluation of the proposed project using an Initial Study environmental checklist (to be included in the Draft EIR) and on the comments received on this NOP. At this time, it is anticipated that the EIR will focus on the following topics.

Aesthetics. The EIR will evaluate the significance of changes to public views of the project site and changes to the character of the project site as seen from public roadways in the vicinity. Light and glare impacts will also be evaluated.

Agricultural Resources. The EIR will evaluate impacts to important farmland from development of the North Flood Storage Basin option, if pursued by the project proponent.

Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions. Construction-related emissions would be evaluated for installation of the new composting system and other site improvements. Emissions from operations, including from increased truck trips and employee vehicle trips would be quantified against Bay Area Air Quality Management District thresholds. The air quality analysis would also evaluate odor impacts from the proposed new composting operations.

Biological Resources. The portion of the proposed project south of State Route 25 would take place within the existing developed footprint. Therefore, the environmental analysis would analyze potential biological impacts from development and operation of the North Flood Storage Basin option, if pursued by the project proponent.

Tribal and Other Cultural Resources. Any tribal or other cultural resources that are known or have the potential to occur on the project site will be assessed, and the potential impacts that may occur to known and unanticipated resources as a result of project implementation will be evaluated.

Hydrology and Water Quality. The potential impacts of implementation of the proposed project with respect to modification of existing drainage patterns, decreased water quality, runoff, and flooding will be evaluated.

Noise. Existing noise and vibration conditions on the project site and the nearby vicinity will be described, including information on the location of existing sensitive receptors and major noise sources, ambient noise levels, and natural factors that relate to the attenuation thereof. Construction-related noise and ground vibration will be analyzed using published reference noise and vibration levels for typical construction equipment. The project's potential to generate operations-related noise increases from the modified composting process and additional truck trips traffic will also be evaluated to determine whether noise standards could be exceeded.

Transportation and Circulation. The EIR will evaluate site access and circulation with a focus on impacts to SR 25 from the additional truck trips. The traffic assessment would evaluate intersection levels of service for existing and projected peak-hour traffic volumes with the proposed facility expansion at the project driveway and at Bolsa Road intersection, with and without the SR realignment. An analysis of Vehicle Miles Traveled will be included for informational purposes.

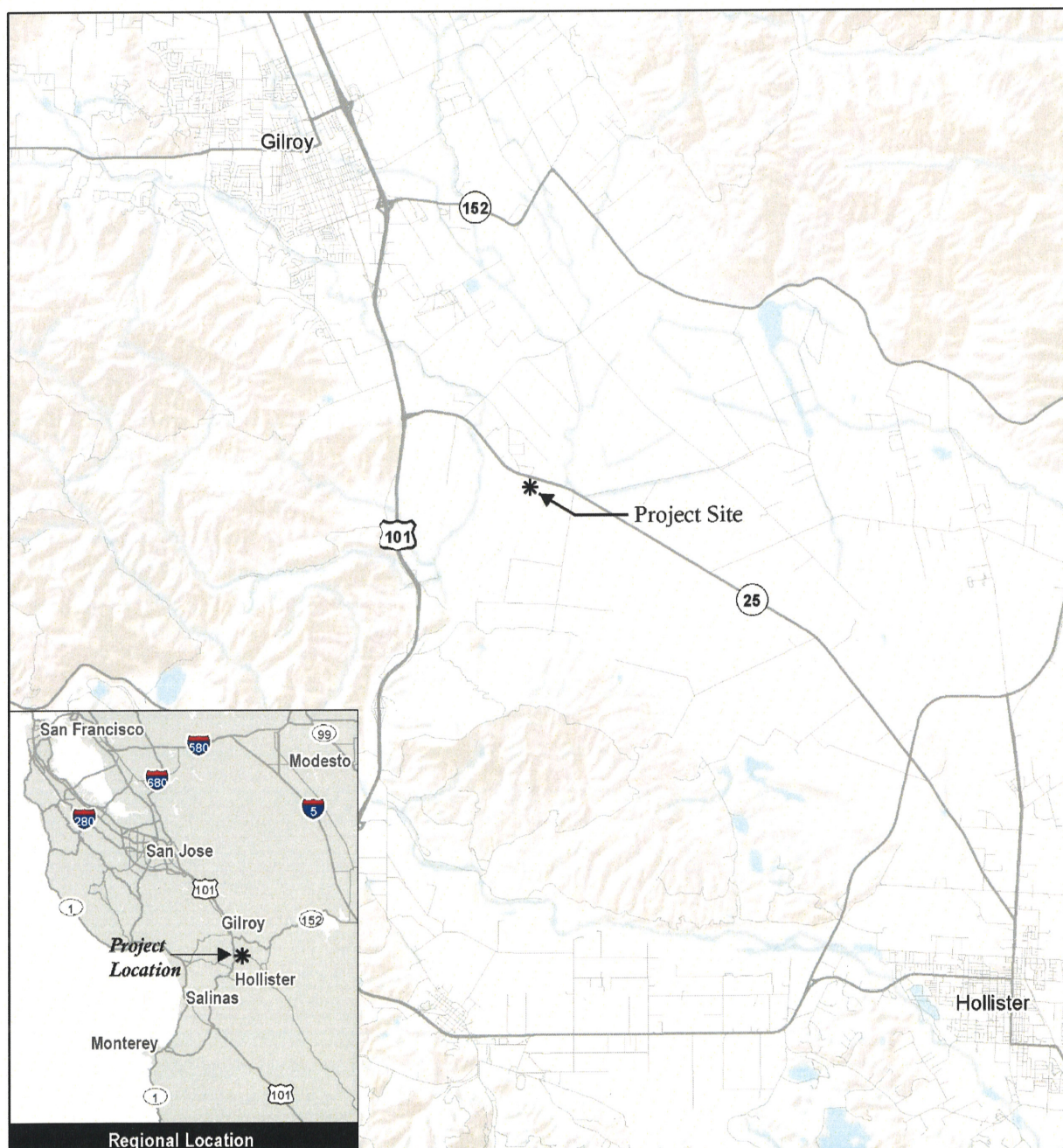
Utilities and Energy. Potential future demand from the proposed project will be compared to estimates of existing use on the site and regional planning documents to determine if the project would result in significant increases in demand for water, water treatment, natural gas, and electricity.

In addition to the evaluation of potential impacts, the following analyses will be included in the EIR.

Cumulative Impacts. This section of the EIR will discuss, issue by issue, the potential for the proposed project, when combined with other development identified in the cumulative setting, to either result in new, or contribute to existing, cumulatively considerable adverse effects on the environment.

Alternatives. CEQA requires that an EIR describe a range of reasonable alternatives to a project (or project location) that feasibly attain most of the objectives, but could avoid or reduce at least one environmental impact (see CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6).

Growth Inducement. This section will qualitatively evaluate the project's potential to induce growth and any subsequent environmental impacts that would occur (pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15126[d]).



Source: EMC Planning, ESRI 2018

Figure 1 - Project Site Location



Source: EMC Planning, ESRI 2018

Figure 2 - Project Site Vicinity

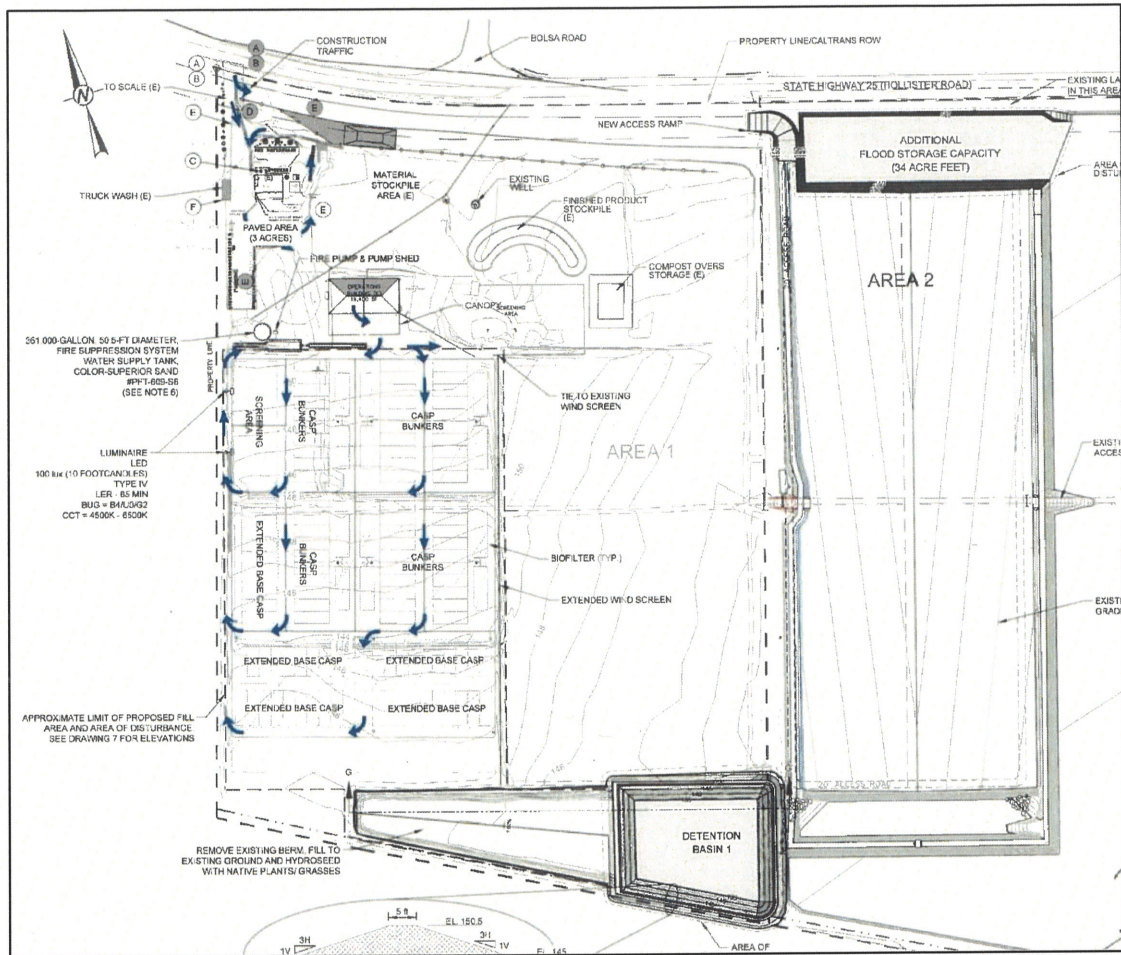


Figure 3 - Site Plan

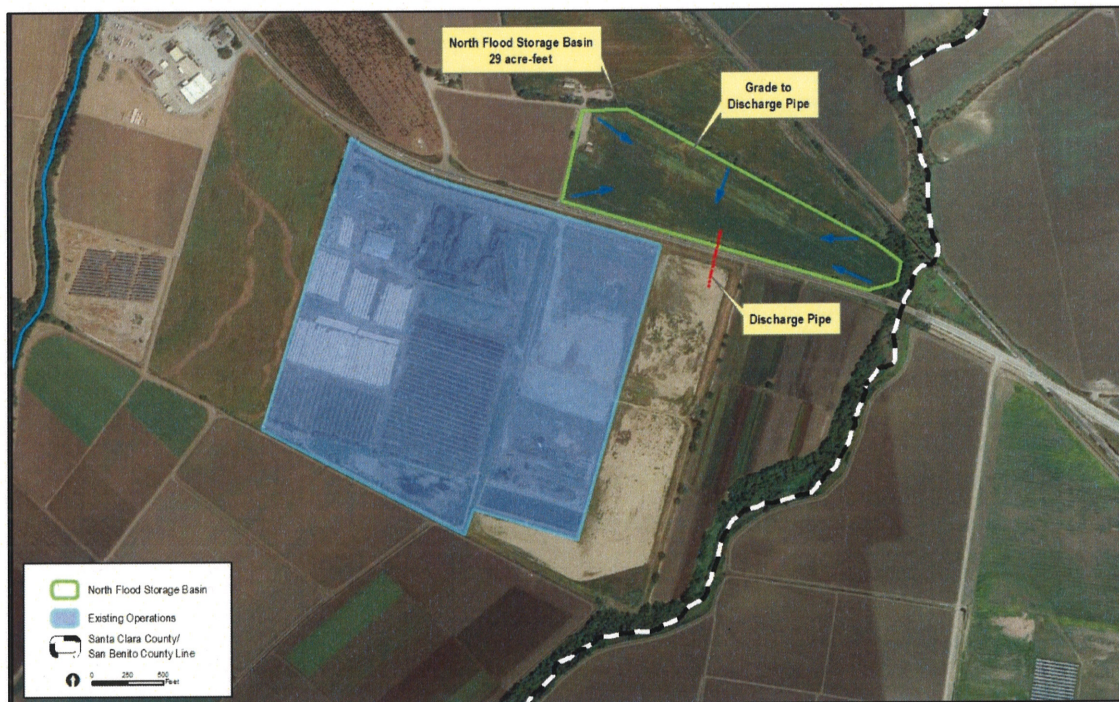


Figure 4 - North Storage Flood Basin Option