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Department of Public Works makes backdoor deal with Northeast Maryland Waste Disposal Authority to explore continued waste burning and privatization

DPW issued an RFP with the Northeast Maryland Waste Disposal Authority (NMWDA) to create a 30-year plan for solid waste in Baltimore City that goes against the City's Zero Waste Plans

Yesterday afternoon, Baltimore City Councilmember Mary Pat Clarke introduced a resolution titled "Improving Development of a Baltimore City Recycling and Solid Waste Management Master Plan," designed to highlight the Request for Proposals (RFP) and call for DPW to make the necessary changes to the request, aligning it with the previous zero waste trend set by the city. City Council passed the resolution was passed unanimously by the Baltimore City Council.

Thursday May 10 was the deadline for a closed set of consultants to bid on a \$450,000 contract to explore future directions for Baltimore City's waste management. The RFP is titled 'Less Waste, Better Lives: Developing Baltimore City's Recycling and Solid Waste Management Master Plan for 2040 (Master Plan) and beyond.' Only a small list of six consultants, pre-screened by the Northeast Maryland Waste Disposal Authority were allowed to respond to this RFP. This would have remained entirely hidden if not for an unnamed informant.

Just over a year ago, the city seemingly agreed to move in this green direction after passing a Zero Waste resolution last June. City Council also passed a Climate Change resolution that month, and passed a resolution to reduce the Wheelabrator Baltimore trash incinerator's (Wheelabrator) nitrogen oxides pollution limit in October. These also passed unanimously, and with the support of city agencies, including the Department of Public Works. Despite this, the 11-page request document included directives for the unknown consultants to study the continued use of the 33-year-old incinerator until 2040 and beyond, among other concerning directives:

- Studying just the positive benefits of incineration.
- Studying the use of new incineration technologies including gasification, and turning trash into pellets to be burned. (Similar to the Energy Answers proposal).
- Privatizing the city's landfill and intentionally filling it up as soon as possible.

Councilmember Clarke and local environmental advocates Energy Justice Network, Institute for Local Self Reliance and United Workers met with the Director of DPW, Rudolph Chow, and his staff to discuss this RFP and making amendments before the deadline had closed. "I will say the meeting got off to a rocky start," said Councilmember Clarke. Those in attendance reported that Mr. Chow was "belligerent" and "aggressive".

Disappointingly, the end result was that the RFP was issued without any changes and has accepted proposals from the pre-selected consultants with little experience in zero waste planning.

“It was shocking after all the buy-in on zero waste,” said Greg Sawtell, an organizer for United Workers, “and after fighting against Energy Answers for years, to see it brought back again is aggravating.”

This RFP, authored by Chris Skaggs, the Executive Director of the Northeast Maryland Waste Disposal Authority, is nearly identical with the RFP released by the NMWDA earlier this year in Montgomery County. Director Chow openly claims that he and his team wrote the RFP, but the similarities and the document authorship call into question whether DPW is being honest about who wrote this proposal, which they admit is being advanced with an urgent timeline.

Baltimore City has been paying over \$400,000 annually to the NMWDA in dues for their activities, which range from issuing waste-related RFPs to assisting in maintaining and repairing existing public waste facilities like Wheelabrator and Quarantine Road Landfill. The large cost of the RFP and annual dues could have been used to study and implement zero waste measures as Baltimore City requested over a year ago.

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