

December 15, 2023

Irene Fernando, Hennepin County Board of Commissioners, Chair
David J. Hough, Hennepin County Administrator

SENT VIA EMAIL board.clerk@hennepin.us



Chair Fernando & Administrator Hough —

This letter is in response to your November 3, 2023 request for input on Hennepin County Board of Commissioners Resolution 23-0384 and the proposed closing of the Hennepin Energy Recovery Center (HERC) between 2028 and 2040.

Greenwood strongly disagrees with the planned decommissioning of the HERC prior to 2040. Closing the HERC before having a solution is not solving a problem. It is reckless and pushes the pollution burden from County to Cities when Counties (not Cities) are in charge of creating plans for waste management. It appears this decision is being made because it “feels” good to close down a “dirty incinerator” instead of being based on facts and reality.

A more thoughtful approach would be for the County to work in a collaborative manner with Cities and take the lead on actions to reduce waste and increase recycling and composting with an initial focus on reducing the waste that is directed to landfills before it starts planning to phase out the HERC. As detailed in the Hennepin Energy Recovery Center staff report, the HERC is far more environmentally friendly than landfills. This fact also is confirmed by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency waste management hierarchy on page 5 of the staff report. The HERC keeps more metals out of our ground water than landfills. The “non-renewable” designation is unjust and oddly specific to this HERC facility only.

While aspirations are great, realistic plans are even better. The County 2022 Recycling Progress Report states recycling comprised only 357,101 tons of the County waste compared to 749,124 landfill and waste-to-energy tons with landfill's 386,110 tons being greater than the recycling tons. The report does not address the percentage of recycling tons that were too contaminated to be recycled or not recycled because of limited end-user demand. Despite mandated countywide recycling since the late 1980s and 30+ years of concerted effort with the presumed collection of the low-hanging recycling fruit, the County still needs to double recycling volumes to eliminate landfill waste. The County's Zero Waste Plan appears to be wishful thinking vs a true roadmap. It lists 62 Zero Waste Actions but never provides estimated costs for the actions or discusses who will pay the costs. Its Zero Waste Future still includes approximately 10% trash (pg 5 of the Plan). Thus, even if all of its stars align, the Zero Waste Plan will be a 10% Waste Plan. This misnamed Plan, appears to have the potential to be the driving force behind ill-conceived, unfunded mandates for Cities (residents and businesses) in the County. Even if the 10% Waste Goal is achieved, wouldn't it make sense to use waste-to-energy for the remaining 10% since it is environmentally preferable to landfills?

One of the key reasons presented for closing the HERC is its environmental impact and environmental justice concerns. We note if the HERC had been built as an economic development project, the County would be touting its success — the area surrounding the HERC has been virtually completely redeveloped since its construction with the luxury apartments, Be The Match, Target Field, Mary's Place / Sharing & Caring Hands, the Ford Building restoration, etc. The development success is even noted in Resolution 23-0384 R1 which states “population and density near the Hennepin Energy Recovery Center facility have grown dramatically since its opening 34 years ago in 1989.” Redevelopment is thriving around this facility long after it was built.

County Administrator David Hough's recommendations and concerns are not being addressed while County Commissioners put the burden on him to solve the problem that staff recommended against. According to the Sun-Sailor, Angel Conley said, “I have faith that our administrator has the tools and the brilliance to bring us a plan that will bring about a dignified closure of this facility.” Staff's recommendation was the closure should not happen before 2040.

The City of Greenwood requests that Hennepin County develop a more detailed and rigorous recycling and composting plan that includes expected costs and volumes for each option and take a leadership role in supporting the plan rather than mandating compliance. Until such time that a path is clearly visible to decommission the HERC without diverting waste to landfills, the City of Greenwood believes that planning for decommissioning of the HERC is premature.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debra J. Kind". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Debra J. Kind
Mayor, City of Greenwood
on behalf of the Greenwood City Council

CC: City Councils of Deephaven, Excelsior, Hopkins, Loretto, Maple Plain, Medina, Tonka Beach, Osseo, Robbinsdale
Richfield, St. Boniface, St. Louis Park, Tonka Bay, Wayzata