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Point of View

Transfer station's foes wrong

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The Pomona Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors supports the proposal to build a waste transfer station on Ninth Street because of the jobs and tax revenues it will bring to the city, the beneficial effect it will have on air quality in the region, and because it is being proposed by a strong corporate neighbor that has spent more than five decades supporting programs in Pomona and surrounding communities.

What hangs in the balance with this issue is no less than Pomona's vision of what it can be: a community that improves its fortunes by attracting and retaining responsible businesses, or one that trades water as other communities seize opportunities that once were ours.

The transfer station is a project of Valley Vista Services, which has been doing business in the San Gabriel Valley since the Eisenhower administration. The company is a good community partner, participating in and making substantial contributions toward a vast array of public and private groups. Valley Vista and its employees embody the sort of "good business neighbor" every community covets - no small feat, given that their business is picking up other people's trash.

How can we reconcile this record of service against claims that Valley Vista is trying to ruin a neighborhood? The short answer is that we can't, because it's not an apples-to-apples discussion. Those opposed to the transfer station don't have data on their side, and have resorted to asserting opinions as facts in

an effort to cast Valley Vista as an evil empire bent on ruining people's lives. This pandering to fear diminishes everyone associated with it, not least those who believe they are protecting their city but who are, in fact, killing an opportunity to create jobs, generate desperately needed tax revenue, and improve air quality.

The anti-station group claims, among other things, that the facility would create localized air pollution health and cancer impacts to area school children and residents. It also claims the proposed facility might someday take in more solid waste than currently proposed, creating greater risks.

No factual evidence supports these claims. The arguments, when not made up out of whole cloth, rely on deliberate misreadings of the Draft Environmental Impact Report for the project, and make no reference to either the Revised EIR or to detailed responses to the allegations by the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD).

The facts are these:

According to the state and regional regulators, the project would actually benefit overall air quality in the region by allowing waste materials to be transported more efficiently, since long

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truck trips to landfills are avoided.

The emissions do not present a disproportionate risk to the health of school children within one mile of the facility. The EIR states that "under all exposure scenarios, potential health risks to off-site workers and schools in the area will not exceed applicable SCAQMD threshold criteria."

The SCAQMD, while acknowledging that air quality standards could be compromised during construction, notes in the EIR that such violations must be confined to 60 meters (about 200 feet) or nearer to the construction site. The nearest school is half a mile away.

Again, while acknowledging that the SCAQMD cancer threshold will be exceeded for two (and only two) nonconforming residences near the project, the cancer risk with mitigation is only 45.10 in 1 million for one residence, and 11.59 in 1 million for the other. What's more, even that remarkably low risk is based on exposure to harmful emissions 24 hours a day, 365 days per year for 70 years.

Valley Vista will transition its truck fleet for the station completely over to CNG (compressed natural gas), thereby eliminating the alleged cancer impacts to the two nonconforming residences mentioned above. The anti-station group makes no mention of this, as it devastates the entire emissions argument.

The group's contention that the transfer station won't create 45 to 50 jobs, the jobs won't go to Pomonans, and even if they do "are not safe jobs," is simply made up. While no one can guarantee that the jobs will go to Pomona residents, most of them probably will, and operations will be subject to safety regulations under Cal/OSHA and CalRecycle.

The project as proposed will not handle more than 1,500 tons of waste per day. Valley Vista has only applied for a 1,500-tons-per-day permit, and both the city's conditional use permit

and state and regional permits will limit the facility to only 1,500 tons per day. Valley Vista has proposed a state-of-the-art, LEED Gold certified, enclosed transfer facility large enough to accommodate the permit capacity and ensure worker safety, and the anti-facility crowd points to construction costs as some sort of evidence that Valley Vista wants to do more with the facility. Not a shred of evidence supports this.

The waste transfer station has been on the drawing board for years, and Valley Vista staff met with the public and elected officials during virtually all of that time to consider its impact. It's a long way from fair to now start pointing fingers and accusing the company of trying to ruin a neighborhood. The least the company can expect from the community is a calm and fair consideration of the project based on facts, not baseless allegations, arguments, speculation and unsubstantiated opinion.

Frank Garcia is executive director of the Pomona Chamber of Commerce.

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