

FINAL FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

In accordance with the Council of Environmental Quality's (CEQ) regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (40 CFR parts 1500 – 1508) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) procedures for implementing NEPA (40 CFR part 6), EPA has completed an environmental review of the following proposed action:

Juneau Compost Facility

In the environmental assessment (EA), EPA evaluated the issuance of a grant award to the City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ), Alaska, for the construction of a municipal compost facility. The Juneau Compost Facility will be located at the site of the former Lemon Creek Gravel Pit at 2300 Anka Street. The site is a mined-out gravel pit that is currently being used for recycled asphalt pavement and snow storage. The site will eventually be converted for use as a Zero Waste Subdivision (ZWS) for the community of Juneau, which could include other aspects of Juneau's waste diversion and recovery, such as a recycling center, a transfer station, household hazardous waste center, a reuse center, and potentially a repair and training area. At this time, the ZWS project will span over several years to complete and will be contingent on available funding. The Congressionally directed spending will be used to initiate the planning phases for the ZWS concurrently with the compost facility. The former gravel pit consists of approximately 25 acres. Around two to five acres will be used for the compost facility. The other acreage will eventually be used for other solid waste management purposes within the next one to ten years as part of the ZWS project.

The Juneau Compost Facility will provide increased capacity and capability for solid waste management. With Juneau's only landfill having a life of 20 years left, the community has limited choices for landfill expansion or the placement of a new landfill. The former gravel pit is currently owned by the CBJ and is zoned for industrial use. By constructing a composting facility within the footprint of the former gravel pit, the community will have an option to divert a portion of its organic waste stream to the landfill and convert the organic waste material into a usable finished compost. By keeping food waste and other organics out of the landfill, CBJ can significantly extend the life of the landfill.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328) included \$2,500,000 earmarked for the CBJ for the municipal composting facility. EPA Region 10 will administer and manage this grant to the CBJ. The CBJ will be responsible for the contracts and all project components related to the municipal composting facility.

EPA made the EA and preliminary FONSI available for public review and comment for 30 calendar days. EPA is required to consider any substantive comments received before reaching a decision and to respond to substantive comments submitted during the public comment period. EPA considers comments to be substantive if comments directly or indirectly question, with a reasonable basis, determinations on the significance or severity of impacts or comments that identify impacts, alternatives, or mitigation measures that were not addressed in the EA. Substantive comments also include comments that question, with a reasonable basis, the accuracy or adequacy of the information or analysis in the EA, or causes changes in or revisions to the proposed action. This final FONSI responds to substantive comments received.

The consideration of public comments in the NEPA process is to ensure the adequacy and accuracy of the NEPA document. Comments of personal opinions or preferences are not considered in the decision-making process and are considered non-substantive. Many comments received either supported or opposed the proposed

project. Many of these comments expressed thoughts, opinions, and concerns. Other comments represented commentary on management or contract actions that are outside the scope of this NEPA analysis. For example, comments received were recommending for EPA to require CBJ to contract with or form a partnership with *Juneau Composts!*, a privately owned and operated compost facility in town. As discussed in the EA, CBJ intends to contract out the operation of the municipal compost facility. However, EPA has no authority over CBJ's contract process. In addition, some commenters did not provide specific information to assist EPA in making a change to the proposed action and did not take issue with the analysis used in the EA; these comments are not addressed further in this document. EPA read, analyzed, and considered all comments of a personal or philosophical nature and all opinions, feelings, and preferences for one element or one alternative over another. Because such comments were not substantive, EPA did not respond to them. It is also important to note that, while EPA reviewed and considered all comments, none were counted as votes. Commenting is not a form of voting and decisions made following the public comment period are not based on the number of negative comments received.

EPA is making a decision on the issuance of a Congressional directed spending grant award to CBJ for the construction of a municipal compost facility. CBJ plans on using these funds to design and construct the municipal commercial-scale composting facility that will serve the Juneau community. This will be the first facility in the future ZWS site. Plans for the ZWS site are discussed in the EA as this is a reasonably foreseeable future action not yet undertaken, but is sufficiently likely to occur that the Responsible Official would take such activities into account in reaching a decision. CBJ intends to plan for the ZWS concurrently with the compost facility. The initial planning phases for the ZWS will address the overall site plan (including the compost site) so that the parcel is developed with a "dig once" approach. For example, knowing where to place future roads through the site can assist with facility placement. Knowing the general placement of future uses will help determine where utilities will be needed and how utilities will be brought onto the parcel. The conceptual planning will also assist where the future ZWS stormwater system will be and will inform where the compost facility's stormwater controls need to be placed. In summary, the ZWS planning includes conceptual placement of utilities, roads, and stormwater control. The conceptual plan will also provide a general idea of where future facilities and uses could be placed in relation to the compost facility. The ZWS planning does not include the identification of future uses (e.g., feasibility studies) other than composting, or the design of future facilities other than the compost facility, or the building out of any future (non-composting) uses. The compost facility itself will include site preparation, utility installation, storm controls, and road construction for the proposed compost facility site.

One commenter expressed concerns about bear interactions increasing in the area from composting. There are many black and brown bears in and around Juneau, especially in the Lemon Creek area near the landfill. According to the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, bear interactions are rare at composting facilities in southeast Alaska. However, CBJ plans to build a perimeter chain-link fence to maintain site control as well as prevent unwanted interactions with bears in the area. Based on recommendations from the Alaska USDA Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service Wildlife Services office, CBJ plans on the following site perimeter controls:

- The fence will be 6 feet tall.
- There will be an anti-climb mechanism at the top, such as barbed wire, an electric pulse wire, or both.
- The fencing will have a 4-foot buried skirt to prevent bears and other animals from digging under the fence.

- Gates are weak spots as they do not have a buried skirt. CBJ will bury concrete below each gate to prevent digging.
- CBJ will place electric wires on the outside of the fence at intervals of 18 inches, 36 inches, and 48 inches, which will prevent bears from gaining access to the fence for climbing. Wires will be held away from the fence to prevent shorting the current.
- When animals are pushed, they run for the fence line. To provide an easy route for bears, deer, and other animals, a gate will be placed in one remote corner of the site to facilitate escape.

One commenter expressed concerns that people who live near the facility may perceive negative impacts from any increases in traffic. EPA does not anticipate that construction of the compost facility will result in impacts to traffic. The project will not involve rerouting or controlling traffic. Impacts from construction activities are typically temporary and short-term impacts. While construction at the site would temporarily increase the level of human activity in the area, it is not anticipated to result in any impacts or modifications to traffic patterns.

Another commenter expressed concerns of the project cost to taxpayers with an increase in user fees or rates paid. CBJ has reported that the project will not cause an increase in residents’ monthly service rates.

One commenter inquired where CBJ derived the 22 percent of compostable waste stream that can potentially be diverted from the landfill to the compost facility. This percentage came from EPA’s *2018 Advancing Sustainable Materials Management Fact Sheet published in 2020*,¹ which put food waste at 21.6%. This percentage is much higher when accounting for other organics, such as yard waste and wood waste. CBJ plans to perform a waste characterization study in May 2024 to get more concrete data for Juneau specifically.

No substantive comments received warranted a change to the EA. Based on the substantive comment received and the environmental impacts analysis in the EA, EPA determined that no significant environmental impacts are anticipated from the issuance of the grant and the proposed action does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, making the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) unnecessary. Therefore, I am issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) to document this determination.

 Timothy Hamlin, Director
 Land, Chemicals, and Redevelopment Division,
 EPA Region 10

 Date

¹ https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-01/documents/2018_ff_fact_sheet_dec_2020_fnl_508.pdf.