

September 6, 2019

Dear Ann Arbor City Council members,

Eco-Cycle would like to express our strong support for your continued partnership with Recycle Ann Arbor (RAA) as your local recycling hauler and processor. Eco-Cycle is a 43-year-old, non-profit social enterprise based in Boulder, CO, that innovates, implements, and advocates for local and global Zero Waste solutions; among other efforts, we are the contracted operator for the Boulder County Recycling Center, which processes almost 60,000 tons of recyclables per year from local municipalities across the region. Like RAA, Eco-Cycle is one of the original mission-based nonprofit recyclers still remaining in the U.S., and our work demonstrates the strong and direct economic, environmental and community benefits of working with a local recycling organization. In comparison, current recycling conditions are demonstrating the high costs and high risks to cities working with multi-national corporations on recycling, and the high environmental costs of materials being improperly handled in China and other developing countries. **As a non-profit social enterprise, RAA brings numerous unique values that make them the best qualified firm to operate a recycling center and haul materials in Ann Arbor.**

#### **Stronger, More Stable and Resilient MRF Operations with a Mission-Driven Partner**

Eco-Cycle has been the processor and marketer of Boulder County's recyclables since 1976 and the sole operator of the Boulder County Recycling Center (BCRC) since it opened in 2001. As the BCRC operator, we strive to divert as much material from the landfill as possible and to process materials in an environmentally and socially-responsible manner. Four decades of experience have resulted in the production of some of the cleanest recyclables in the U.S. and long-standing partnerships with markets who trust Eco-Cycle to provide valuable, well-sorted materials. As a result, Boulder County receives some of the highest prices for materials sold, and the BCRC has never been "cut off" from markets when commodity prices drop. Our contamination rates range from 7-11%, far below the industry average of 16-18%, due in large part to our extensive outreach and education efforts. Despite extremely low market conditions, Eco-Cycle continues to move recyclables and is one of only a handful of programs successfully recycling even low-grade, #3-7 plastics through domestic markets. We are only able to do this because of our commitment to quality first, and this reflects the long-term benefits of nonprofit operations to survive in down markets.

In recent negotiations for our Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) operations contract, Eco-Cycle was able to include more than 25 letters of support from key partners for Eco-Cycle's continued operation of the BCRC, including national recycling markets, municipalities, environmental organizations, community non-profits, local businesses, and other recycling industry partners. The diversity of these supporters speaks volumes to the strength and scope of our work, and to the unique value of nonprofit operations.

#### **Efficient, Innovative and Clean Hauling Services**

That same dedication to quality recycling translates into the collections and hauling services as well. While Eco-Cycle does not provide residential collections like RAA, Eco-Cycle does provide collection services to more than 700 local businesses. We collect traditional recyclables such as paper and containers, as well as compostable materials and hard-to-recycle materials, including electronics, books, plastic stretch wrap and other materials. As a mission-driven hauler, we continually invest in training businesses on how to recycle and compost properly and how to train their staff to do so, and we know firsthand the challenges businesses face in reducing and diverting waste. Through business waste audits and trainings, Eco-Cycle's outreach efforts increase waste diversion and generate more tonnage and cleaner materials for the County recycling center. Simply put, our hauling services and education focus directly improves the quality and quantity of tons recycled.

### **Investing in the Community, not in Shareholder Profits**

A well-run, cost-effective facility is only half of what a nonprofit recycling partner brings to the table. As a social enterprise, Eco-Cycle cyclically reinvests revenues from our collections activities and MRF contract into Zero Waste outreach, programs and infrastructure, creating a return value to the recycling facility and significant social value to the Boulder County community. Specifically, our revenues support innovative programs in schools, businesses, residential neighborhoods, and they help to build additional infrastructure that creates more Zero Waste opportunities, such as our Center for Hard-to-Recycle Materials (CHaRM). By providing extensive educational resources and programs, we:

- Generate cleaner materials from the community, which equates to more valuable materials for market and less labor required to remove contaminants.
- Increase participation in recycling programs, so more recyclables come to the facility and more materials are diverted from the landfill.
- Help communities adopt ordinances and policies that increase recycling and reduce contamination.

Let us be blunt: Without the revenue earned from our hauling and MRF operations, Eco-Cycle will not be able to offer our extensive outreach, education, and advocacy services. Much like RAA, Eco-Cycle's business model as a social enterprise depends on the revenue earned from the sale of materials and hauling services. This means the community benefits are not possible without the underlying operational contracts--you simply cannot have one without the other.

### **Proven Solutions Needed Now More Than Ever**

National recycling markets are in shambles right now in part because of sloppy, questionable practices by some of the nation's largest trash and recycling companies. Eco-Cycle and other nonprofit operators such as RAA have always prioritized strong community education programs that lead to clean incoming recycling streams, domestic markets that create U.S. jobs and provide greater accountability, fair working conditions, and not accepting materials that have no markets.

Our programs show that recycling does work, but only when it is done under the right conditions. Increasingly, cities and haulers around the country are coming back to the tried and true practices of RAA, Eco-Cycle and other mission-driven organizations. **Your strong community partnership with RAA is the envy of community programs across the country. We urge you to reflect deeply on the immeasurable value RAA has provided for over 40 years. It is hard to imagine success without them, both past and present. Please do not underestimate the challenges of recycling without a mission-driven partner and do not sacrifice community and environmental benefits simply for the lowest bidder.**

Eco-Cycle is available any time to share more on our value to the community and the value of nonprofit recyclers as a role for the national industry. Please reach out any time.

Sincerely,



Suzanne Jones  
Executive Director, Eco-Cycle