



Los Angeles County  
Department of Regional Planning

*Planning for the Challenges Ahead*



Richard J. Bruckner  
Director

October 19, 2010

TO: Supervisor Gloria Molina, Chair  
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas  
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky  
Supervisor Don Knabe  
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM: *FOR*  
Richard J. Bruckner  
Director

**SUBJECT: REVIEW OF CONDITIONAL USE PERMITTING PROCESS FOR SCRAP YARDS (RESPONSE TO ITEM NO. 8, JULY 27, 2010 AGENDA)**

On July 27, 2010, your Board directed the Department of Regional Planning (DRP), in coordination with the Department of Public Works (DPW) and County Counsel to complete a comprehensive review of the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) requirements for scrap yards and report back within 90 days with the Departments' findings and recommendations. The report was to include: 1) An evaluation of existing standards and best practices currently utilized by other urban local jurisdictions; and 2) The efficacy of establishing updated development guidelines, an inter-agency governmental coordinating committee, a Community Standards District (CSD), a Business Improvement District (BID) or other zoning mechanisms along the Alameda Corridor to promote regulation of these facilities. The subject report responds to this motion.

**I. Background/Existing Issues**

DRP is charged with enforcing the County's Zoning Code, which includes reviewing CUP applications for regulating, and monitoring recycling related uses; such as junk and salvage yards, scrap metal yards, auto dismantling yards, and recycling collection centers. Currently all such uses, except for recycling collection centers located next to supermarkets, are required to have CUPs.

Based on an informal land use survey of Alameda Street in Florence Firestone and Willowbrook conducted by Zoning Enforcement during the summer of 2009, staff found 300 businesses classified into 18 land uses as defined by the code. Of the 300 businesses, 35 were "recycling related" uses that fell under the code categories of "junk and salvage yards", "scrap metal yards", "auto dismantling yards", or were considered a "recycling collection center" that collects mainly plastic bottles and aluminum cans. For the purpose of this discussion, junk and salvage and auto dismantling yards will be grouped in with the "scrap metal" yard discussion as their operation is similar to scrap metal yards.

## II. Existing Standards and “Best Practices”

Under the Los Angeles County Title 22 (Zoning Code) junk and salvage, scrap metal and auto dismantling yards are only permitted in the M-2 (Heavy Manufacturing Zone) subject to approval of a CUP. In addition, the code regulates how materials should be stored, height of stored outside materials, fencing and wall height, fencing and wall materials, signage, paving, parking, and landscaping. In general, there are no buffering requirements between zones that may have conflicting uses, and sometimes, as in the case of the Alameda Corridor, an M-2 zone is located adjacent to a residential or commercial zone or use. In the Florence-Firestone portion of Alameda, there is a small buffering requirement of 5 feet adjacent to sensitive uses such as residential zone, school, park, etc.

Based on a survey of 21 municipalities, five (5) cities in Los Angeles County, ten (10) municipalities statewide, and six (6) municipalities across the nation, the County’s current zoning standards are relatively similar to other jurisdictions regulating these land uses. Attached to this report is a chart of the survey conducted (Attachment 1 – Scrap Yards Regulation Comparison Chart). These jurisdictions do have additional, more restrictive requirements than Los Angeles County as follows:

- Lot Size: The City of Anaheim requires a finding that the size of the lot is adequate for the use. The City of Atascadero and Pima County, AZ both have a one acre lot minimum size requirement for the use. Pima County has a 2 acre maximum lot size requirement for the use and up to 4 acres allowed for the use with a CUP.
- Hours: Three (3) cities (Anaheim, Irwindale, and Escondido) restrict hours of operation, especially within proximity of residential uses.
- Access: Atascadero requires that only a maximum of one driveway is allowed for every 300 feet of lot frontage. Driveways are limited to a maximum width of 20 feet.
- Residential Zone/Use Setback: Five (5) cities had separation requirements adjacent to residential zones or uses. Requirements ranged from not allowing such uses adjacent to a residential zone or up to 500 feet separation from a residential zone or use. Atascadero included separation requirements from churches, hospitals, public buildings, and commercial zones.
- Noise: None of the cities had additional noise standards for scrap metal yards.

DRP also contacted the American Planning Association, an independent, not-for-profit educational organization that advocates for excellence in community planning. In their research of jurisdictions across the country, salvage yards often require a special permit or special license similar to the County’s CUP requirement. Most development standards are brief and similar to the County’s screening and landscaping requirements. One difference from the Los Angeles County zoning code is the setback and distancing requirements from residences or other sensitive uses (hospitals, schools, daycares, churches). Often there are general requirements addressing nuisance and safety issues; yards must be kept free of vermin, standing water, weeds, loose litter, and dust, and yard material stack height is sometimes restricted, often to 10 feet.

Some ordinances (but by no means the majority) address the environmental aspects of this use, placing restrictions on burning debris, draining fluids, and disposing of these and other hazardous substances. These issues are typically addressed by other State and County codes.

On September 9, 2010, a group of DRP and DPW staff met with representatives of the scrap metal industry. Aside from explaining the scrap metal industry and their business operations and requirements, they provided written information and recommendations for additional standards that the County should consider:

1. Lot size requirement: At least one acre.
2. Parking requirements: At minimum, parking for the maximum number of employees per shift.
3. Fencing requirement: Require masonry block walls for safety and aesthetic reasons.
4. Experience of operator.
5. Background check of operator.
6. Clearer definitions of materials processed.
7. Operating hours.
8. Circulation safety.
9. Radiation detection.

Standards as suggested by the scrap metal industry that would fall into the realm of land use and zoning include lot size requirements, better parking and fencing requirements, and operating hours requirements. Circulation issues would still have to be determined by DPW.

Requiring background checks or operator experience is an inappropriate use of the land use regulation process. Currently, the Sheriff's Department's Metal Theft Detail investigates illegal junk vending at scrap metal yards once a week to enforce the State's Business and Professions Code that requires sellers to provide government issued ID before selling materials to scrap metal yards.

Requiring installation of radiation scanners to detect potential hazardous radiation is not required as an industry standard since materials are normally scanned at the port or at subsequent processing facilities. Radiation scanning equipment is expensive. No other jurisdiction that was surveyed required such equipment.

### **III. Efficacy of Various Approaches**

The Board motion of July 27, 2010 requested that DRP, in coordination with DPW and County Counsel, also explore the possibility of updating development guidelines, an inter-agency coordinating committee, Community Standards Districts, Business Improvement Districts, or other zoning mechanisms along the Alameda Corridor to promote effective regulation of these facilities. This section evaluates the efficacies of these ideas.

**Updating Development Guidelines:** Although development standards could improve aspects of junk and salvage uses, they would establish uniform standards for uses that vary greatly in terms of volume and types of materials processed. Uniform standards for these uses would in effect allow only larger businesses with more resources to operate such uses. For example, minimum lot size requirements may be appropriate for junk and salvage and scrap metal yards that need loading and unloading areas, turning radii for vehicles, and space for machinery used to process materials but not needed for centers merely collecting aluminum cans and plastic

bottles and not processing any materials on site. However, adequate lot size for these uses could be added to findings for CUPs.

Some of the other standards currently required by other jurisdictions such as hours of operation, dust, keeping businesses free of vermin, etc. could be included in conditions of approval under the existing CUP process.

Updating development standards in the zoning code would need further study to consider how changes would affect existing legal businesses. They may be made non-conforming as a result of revisions to code requirements. If the Board finds that development standards in the Zoning Code should be revised, additional resources will be required to conduct the necessary study and public hearings for the ordinance revision.

**Community Standards District (CSD):** Establishing a CSD creates a separate set of zoning requirements specific to a particular geographic area of the County. Even though scrap yards may be concentrated in certain unincorporated area communities, the issues relating to health, environmental and safety impacts are present wherever scrap yards operate. While a CSD approach concentrating on one or a few areas may address issues in those localities, it would not apply to scrap yards operating outside the CSD areas. A use-based approach is therefore preferred to the CSDs' geographically-based approach to ensure that scrap yard operations are not detrimental to the public health, safety, and welfare wherever they may operate.

**Coordinating Committee:** Currently there is coordination among County agencies, mainly DRP, DPW, and Fire, in reviewing the scrap metal businesses prior to their establishment through the CUP process. These three County Departments review the land use/zoning application for scrap metal uses to consider their compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods, traffic and drainage impacts, fire flow, and possible soil contamination. The Treasurer and Tax Collector (TTC - Business License Division) also requires these businesses to have a County business license. State requirements are often met through County's recommended conditions of approval (See Attachment 2 – Coordinating Agencies).

Once a CUP application has been approved by the County, DRP has been the main monitor of these uses to make sure the businesses operate in compliance with the CUP conditions of approval. Although the conditions of approval are based on recommendations from DRP, DPW, and Fire, based on discussions with DPW, Fire and the Sheriffs, the other departments essentially have little or no staff or funding to perform post permit approval monitoring inspections. In one case where an auto dismantling yard received a CUP but failed to meet the conditions, it required the District Attorney's involvement to pull together the County departments and enforce in a team approach.

One potential solution would be to create a task force among responsible County agencies similar to the existing County Nuisance Abatement Teams and have them conduct joint inspections for the first 2-3 years of the CUP approval at a 6 month interval. This would ensure that the scrap metal businesses receive all proper County and State licenses and approval and are operating in accordance with the approved CUP conditions of approval. This solution would require funding for staff resources to the participating County departments for post-approval monitoring.

**Business Improvement District (BID):** A BID is an area within which businesses and/or property owners pay an additional tax or fee in order to fund improvements, ongoing maintenance, and services such as cleaning, security, and marketing. To form a BID, the local government must adopt a resolution of intention, provide public notice with information on what improvements or activities the BID will do, hold a public meeting, and conduct an election. If a majority of those to be assessed do not oppose it, the BID is established and an advisory board is appointed. The BID can only work on the improvements or activities outlined in the public notice<sup>1</sup>. While a BID is an effective tool for revitalization in specific areas, it does not have the authority to regulate businesses within its area. BIDs can improve streetscapes, facades, and sidewalk areas but they do not set standards for how uses operate. As such, a BID is too limited a tool to regulate the complex health, environmental, and safety hazards associated with junk and salvage uses. Nevertheless, a BID may be an effective tool to improve aesthetic impacts of such uses.

**Other Zoning Mechanisms:** Currently, scrap metal yards in the unincorporated area operate through CUP approvals, which allow the land use for a specified period of time subject to certain conditions. Conditions are developed for each use based on the type of use being applied for, the site conditions, the neighboring uses, and other circumstances specific to each case. This approach allows flexibility to condition uses to operate in a safe, environmentally sound manner. Although this flexibility is needed to appropriately regulate diverse types of junk and salvage operations, it does not provide for uniform minimum standards as conditions are developed on a case-by-case basis. Standard conditions have been developed for other uses that require CUPs, for example wireless telecommunication facilities and alcohol sales facilities, however none currently exist for junk and salvage and scrap metal uses. While CUP conditions are an effective means to regulate new operations or those that are applying for new permits, they do not apply to previously existing operations.

#### **IV. Recommended Approach**

Based on an evaluation of potential approaches above, staff recommends the development of standard CUP conditions as the most appropriate tool in regulating scrap yard uses. Development of standard conditions would ensure that all projects meet minimum performance requirements. Continuing to require a CUP would also allow projects to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, with public review and input, so that individual conditions could be developed to address specific impacts related to various types of junk and salvage uses. Standard conditions could be developed that apply to all junk and salvage uses and a menu of condition options could be developed to apply to more specific types of uses. This approach will ensure that all operators meet minimum requirements, provide certainty to applicants regarding minimum conditions to be met, maintain public review and input, and allow flexibility to require additional conditions when needed.

To ensure that existing operations that are not applying for new or renewed permits comply with applicable regulations, staff recommends that the standard CUP conditions be complimented by one or all of the following additional approaches:

---

<sup>1</sup> *What is a Business Improvement District?*, California Tax Data (Irvine, 2010).

- Public Outreach - Over 80% of junk and salvage facilities along the Alameda Corridor currently do not have valid permits.<sup>2</sup> Based on this information and other public comments on these uses, it appears that many property owners and scrap yard operators may not be informed of existing regulations and requirements regarding such land uses. A reference guide can be prepared to inform operators of applicable rules and regulations that their facilities must follow. This information can be disseminated via an informational brochure distributed to the business/industry community as well as to any applicants seeking to establish these uses in the unincorporated County.
- Enforcement Task Force - As discussed, an inter-governmental task force made up of various County agencies could be an effective means to bring existing operations into compliance with all applicable regulations and to inform scrap yard operators of the County and State requirements they must meet. The task force would primarily be responsible for monitoring such uses after approval of the CUP but could also be used to address scrap yards operating without appropriate County approvals. Additional resources will be required to properly staff the task force.
- Processing Changes – When processing new CUP applications, DRP will request more detailed information as to the type of materials that will be processed on site, the type of processing proposed to take place on site, and the scope of the operations. This will help to determine how the applications will be routed to appropriate County agencies, including the enforcement arms of the agencies, earlier on in the process. It will also help vet out any problems prior to the application going to public hearing.

The supplemental actions listed above, in combination with the development of standard CUP conditions, will provide an effective regulatory and programmatic approach to address potential safety concerns, operational hazards, and parking and traffic impacts associated with junk and salvage operations. This recommended approach will address existing operations, establish standard conditions for new or renewed CUPs and establish a mechanism for ongoing enforcement and coordination.

If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact Ms. Maria Masis at (213) 974-6435. Our offices are closed on Fridays.

RJB:PH

Attachments: Scrap Yards Regulation Comparison Chart  
Coordinating Agencies

c: Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors  
Larry Hafetz, County Counsel  
Dennis Hunter, Department of Public Works  
Chief Executive Officer

---

<sup>2</sup> Motion by Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Agenda Item No. 8 (Los Angeles, 7/27/10).

Attachment 2. Coordinating Agencies (for Scrap Yards)

<b>Pre - Establishment of Business</b>	<b>Purview</b>	<b>Applicable County Code</b>	<b>Applicable State Code</b>
<u>Reviewing Agency</u>			
DRP	Land use/Zoning	LACC Title 22	
DPW	Traffic/Stormwater/tank storage/structures	LACC Title 12/Title 26-31	
LACoFD	Fire flow/Access/HazMat/Soil Contamination License required	LACC Title 12 /Title 32 LACC Title 7	
Business License			
<b>Post - Establishment of Business</b>			
<u>County Agencies</u>	<u>Governing document</u>		
DRP	CUP	LACC Title 22	
DPW	CUP, SUSMP, SWPPP, Building Permits	LACC Title 12/Title 26-29	
LACoFD	Emergency Response Plan, Hazardous Materials Business Plan	LACC Title 12/ Title 32	California Business and Professions Code section 21600 – 21610 and 21650 and 21653.
Sheriff	(metal theft detail)	Title 2	
Agricultural Commissioner	(scale certification)	Title 7	
Business License	(license required)	All LACC	
District Attorney	Criminal Complaint		
<u>State Agencies</u>	<u>Purview</u>		
Dept. of Toxic Substance Control	(Via local CUPA agency (LACoFD) reqs.)*		California Code of Regulations Title 22 California Code of Regulations Title 23 and Title 27
Regional Water Quality Control Board	(Via DPW reqs.)*		California Code of Regulations Title 14 and Title 27 California Vehicle Code Sections 29, 220, 221, 320 (b), and 11500 et seq./California Code of Regulations. Title 13, Chapter 1./California Government Code. Section 6157 (a) –
Dept. of Conservation	Recycling Center license		
Dept. of Motor Vehicles	Dismantling license		



