



Real Estate Services  
Owen Poole

June 6, 2016  
Mr. John Kopchik  
Director, Contra Costa County  
Department of Conservation & Development  
30 Muir Road, Martinez, CA 94553

RE: APN 159-200-032 and APN 159-300-001, Site addresses Martinez CA 54553

Dear Mr. Kopchik:

On behalf of the owners of the properties referenced above, I am formally requesting that your office consider changing the existing General Plan Designation of Multi Family to Agricultural and that the zoning be changed from R7 Residential to Planned Unit Development.

Heather A. and Tolbert G. Hamilton own the first property referenced above and wish to acquire the second property (the "Boylan" property) referenced above. Currently Hamilton operates Hamilton Tree and Eco Mulch on their property and wish to expand the operation unto the Boylan property. The existing business is subject to and adheres to strict air quality and clean water requirements.

Hamilton Tree and Eco Mulch began their business by leasing a portion of their property in 1996. During the time of the lease the portion of the property not leased from was littered with old, fully depreciated vehicles, construction material and recreation equipment ("Material"). In 2010 Hamilton considered buying the entire parcel and subsequently began removing the Material from the property. In April 2012 Hamilton acquired the property and has since removed all the remaining Material from the property.

Hamilton works closely with its neighbor Contra Costa Water District ("CCWD"). CCWD considers Hamilton's land use operation as compatible with its canal and is supportive of this request.

Hamilton works closely with Contra Costa County's Department of Health Services who frequently use the Hamilton property as a model operation for others who are considering starting or improving an existing green recycling business. Contra Costa County is a client of Eco Mulch which recycles some of the county's green material and its operation thereby contributes to the County's State mandated recycling requirements under Assembly Bill 939.

151 Spyrock Court, Walnut Creek, CA 94595  
(925) 933-4928; Fax: (925) 891-4334  
Email: owen@realestatesvs.com



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Owen Poole**

The property (Hamilton and Boylan) is long and rectangular and is bounded to the east by Interstate 680, to the west by a CCWD canal. The property to north is leased to several cell tower owners and its northern property line terminates at CCWD's canal. The property to the south is used for RV and Boat Storage.

All surrounding neighbors consider Hamilton's use as compatible with their uses.

Since Hamilton wishes to expand and since its operation is a successful asset to the County; Hamilton desires that the General Plan and Zoning be in compliance with its business.

Enclosed with this application please find a check in the amount of \$750.00 payable to Contra Costa County's Department of Conservation and Development. We look forward to County Staff support of our request and we anticipate a favorable response from Contra Costa County's Board of Supervisors.

Sincerely,

Owen Poole, Real Estate Services.

CC: William R. Nelson, Principal Planner

Attachments: "A garden View" Contra Costa Times, Keeping it All in the Family"  
Business to Business, and Mike Thompson, Congressman, 5<sup>th</sup> District, California

# A Garden View: Sustaining sustainability

subtitlebyline

By Joan Morris  
Contra Costa Times

date

Posted: 03/02/2012 10:00:00 AM PST

secondary date

When I think of ways to green my life, I rarely think beyond the curb.

Like everyone else, I load up my recycling bins and park them on the street; I leave my chopped grass trimmings on the lawn to return nitrogen to the soil; and I sell our cans and bottles to the recyclers every now and then, assuming they get transformed into other products.

But recently, I received a lesson in what it takes to sustain sustainable operations, learning that it may take a village to raise a child, but it takes almost as many villages to keep the world green.

## **Ecomulch tour**

Last week I was invited to tour Ecomulch's operation. The company, perched on a tall hill in Martinez, produces thousands of pounds of mulch each year from trees grown in the area. That seems pretty straightforward, but it turns out there is much more to it than that. In fact, Ecomulch is just an essential piece of a recycling wheel.

So here's how it works. Hamilton Tree Service, a family-owned tree service in Contra Costa County for 55 years, was seeing much of the remains of its work -- cut limbs, hewed trees -- headed for the landfills. In 2006, Grant Hamilton and his wife, Heather, created Ecomulch to repurpose those wood materials.

1401 Civic Court, Concord

Ecomulch produces mulch made from local trees and nothing else. But not everything that comes to the company ends up going through the chipper.

Some trees, because they are diseased or are too acidic, just don't make good mulch, so they are shipped to a cogeneration plant, where the material is used as fuel to power part of Sacramento County.

Hamilton also finds itself with a number of logs that, while they'd be great in mulch, are of such quality that they could be used to make furniture. Those logs are now diverted to California Urban Lumber, conveniently located just below Ecomulch.

California Urban Lumber is itself a division of JFC Construction, which builds telecommunications towers, does public and private general construction, and works in renewable energy. Bill Ridings runs California Urban and does custom milling and carpentry. The company builds furniture to order, often from logs and trees that Hamilton has removed.

### **School projects**

Recently, John Swett High School in Crockett had to remove some redwoods that bordered the school's memorial grove. That's something no one wants to do, but disease and the construction of a music building required it. The school and district worked together with the construction team to remove the trees and find a good use for the lumber. RGM and Associates donated transportation and coordination costs of the logs, and California Urban Lumber milled the trees into lumber at no charge to the school district.

The lumber was delivered this week to the shop class at the school where students, part of the district and local industry's Careers Academy, will use the wood to build memorial benches and for other projects.

It's one big, highly functioning circle of sustainability, each company needing the others in order to work at their full potential.

I may not fully understand the route the soda bottle takes to its transformation into carpeting, but I don't think I'll ever look at mulch again without seeing how it got to that point.

**Reach Joan Morris at 925-977-8479 or [jmorris@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:jmorris@bayareanewsgroup.com).**

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# KEEPING IT ALL IN THE



How a father-son  
California tree care  
company feeds into  
a husband-wife  
mulch company,  
and vice versa

**BY GREGG HENNIGAN**  
SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR

**The synergy between Hamilton Tree Service and EcoMulch makes so much sense, one might wonder why this type of business model isn't more common.**

Grant Hamilton is co-owner of both Northern California companies — the tree care company with his father, Dex, and the mulch operation with his wife, Heather.

Hamilton Tree Service (HamiltonTree.com) provides wood waste generated from its jobs to EcoMulch, saving on land-fill tipping fees. And EcoMulch uses that material to manufacture mulch products and co-generation boiler fuel. As Grant Hamilton puts it, one company cuts the trees, and the other recycles the material.

While such a setup is logical, that doesn't mean getting started was easy.

"You just don't go and buy a grinder and think you're in the mulch business," Grant Hamilton says.

"The amount of preparedness, overtime and monetary investment is huge. You need a big yard, permits, loaders, trucks, grinder, trommel screen, color machine, a huge water supply, qualified employees, welder/mechanic truck, and most of all, enough capital to provide fuel and wear items such as grinding teeth."

That's a long list ... and he isn't quite done: "Oh, yeah, I almost forgot. You need buyers, and lots of them."

## Father-son business

Hamilton Tree Service was formed in the early 1990s, although Dex Hamilton owned several other tree businesses and a nursery going back a few decades. It is located in the town of Martinez, about 30 miles northeast of San Francisco.

The father-son business started without much more than a pickup truck and a chain saw.





They began buying larger equipment in the late 1990s when Heather became involved in the business and helped get loans and commercial accounts.

As they added clients, their fleet grew to include chippers, stump cutters, aerial lifts, cranes and chip trucks. For their chipping and stump cutting, they own a Vermeer BC1500 brush chipper, an SC60TX stump cutter and an SC252 stump cutter.

In its infancy, the company used smaller residential jobs to finance efforts to get larger projects.

Tree removals, with Grant Hamilton doing much of that work himself, were secondary to jobs that involved pruning and plant health care.

Then they reevaluated their business because of how competitive the market was. Hamilton Tree Service began specializing in tree removals, cutting out the

low-profit, high-labor pruning projects. The company reduced its staff, relying on using its equipment to the fullest extent.

The changes worked to the Hamiltons' advantage.

"We currently are able to perform jobs with a higher profit margin and less risk exposure, and we have expanded our clientele to include our competition," Grant Hamilton says.

By that last point he means Hamilton Tree Service often finds it financially advantageous to subcontract work from other tree and landscape companies.

Grant Hamilton spends about 95 percent of his time with Hamilton Tree Service, which has nine employees.

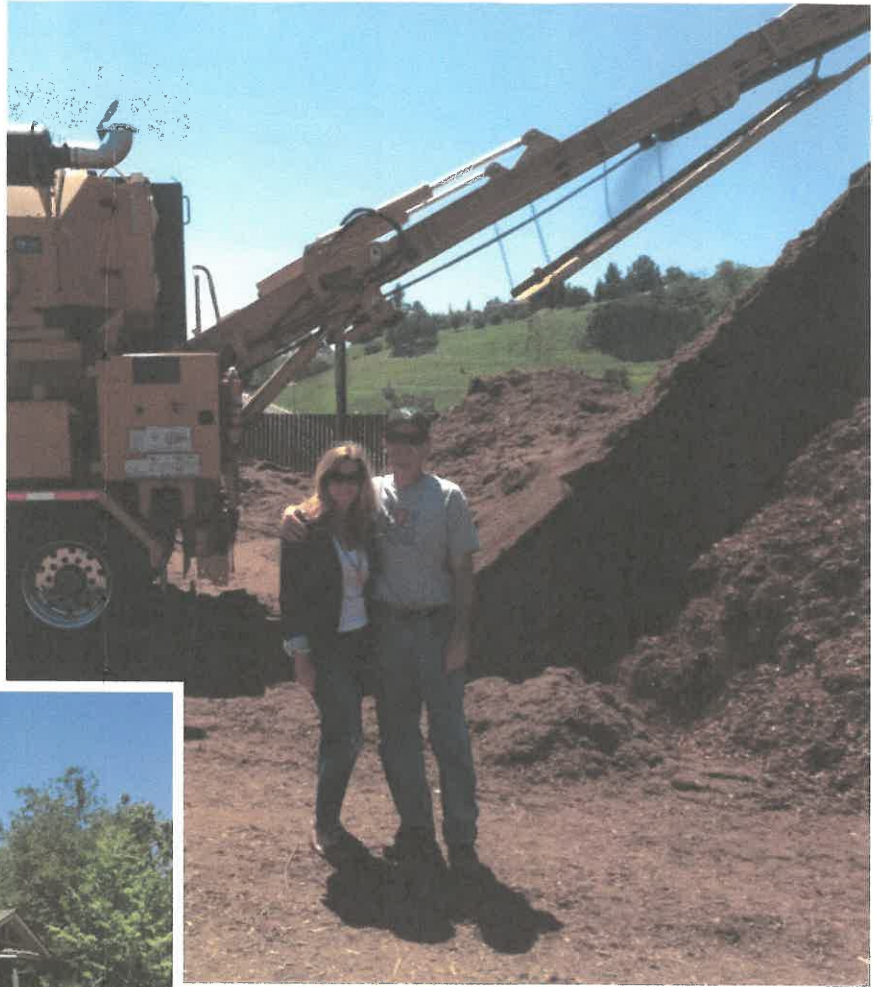
He is a certified arborist, certified crane operator, licensed commercial driver, welder/mechanic and project manager, and he does estimates and sales.

Continued on page 8

**Hamilton Tree Service provides wood waste generated from its jobs to EcoMulch, saving on landfill tipping fees. And EcoMulch uses that material to manufacture mulch products and co-generation boiler fuel. As Grant Hamilton puts it, one company cuts the trees, and the other recycles the material.**

Grant Hamilton (pictured at right) owns Hamilton Tree Service with his father, Dex Hamilton. He also owns EcoMulch with his wife, Heather Hamilton, (pictured at right, with Grant). Hamilton Tree Service is based out of Martinez, California. EcoMulch is also based out of Martinez.

PHOTOS: GRANT HAMILTON/HAMILTON TREE SERVICE



**“You just don’t go and buy a grinder and think you’re in the mulch business. The amount of preparedness, overtime and monetary investment is huge.**

— Grant Hamilton

Continued from page 7

### Mulch company sprouts

As the company grew, Grant and Heather Hamilton came to view the large volume of woody debris it was producing as a

liability that they had to pay to dispose of at a landfill. Grant also had begun dabbling in landscape installations.

“I couldn’t believe the cost per yard of colored mulch,” he says. “We figured, how hard can it be? Re grind that wood waste and add a little colorant.”

They found out it was much harder than that, but in 2006, the couple formed EcoMulch after leveraging their home and buying a grinder and a wheel loader.

Heather oversees the daily operations of the four-employee company.

EcoMulch processes junk logs, wood chips, woody brush, wood rounds and stumps.

About 5 percent of the material comes from Hamilton Tree Service and the rest from about 20 other companies, which pay EcoMulch a processing fee.

The end products are sold as mulch, soil

conditioner or co-generation boiler fuel. Customers include contractors and homeowners, and EcoMulch sells wholesale to other landscape supply companies. It has its own retail store in Martinez called EcoMulch Landscape Materials.

At one time EcoMulch even exported to China but stopped after a few years when the profit margin wasn’t worth the amount of work.

EcoMulch, which processes about 11,000 tons of material annually, uses a Vermeer HG4000 horizontal grinder and a TR626 trommel screen.

The grinder runs 20 hours per week and the trommel screen 12 hours.

About twice a month, the grinder is rented to Hamilton Tree Service and used another 20 hours a week. The trommel screen also is used in conjunction with other equipment to color mulch, although the trommel screen itself does not have a coloring system, which adds another six hours of operation per week during the





busy season from April through September.

EcoMulch saves Hamilton Tree Service more than \$100,000 per year in tipping fees.

But the efficiencies don't end there.

The mulch operation gets its material locally, significantly reducing transportation costs. It also gives Hamilton Tree Service leverage to go after jobs that require removing large amounts of material.

"Hamilton Tree gets the job, saves the client money and at the same time still turns a good profit by having the means to remove mass amounts of wood debris inexpensively," Grant Hamilton says.

"EcoMulch also gives Hamilton Tree a horizontal grinder and support equipment to use for tree jobs that wouldn't be affordable otherwise."

### People and equipment

Grant Hamilton has learned many lessons from his experience running two related but separate companies. One is to hire qualified employees and have zero tolerance for laziness. Another is to set goals and to mold the business to meet them.

He also says not to be scared of taking risks in business.

"Risk is part of growing a business," he says.

"No risk, no reward. If it feels right, then do it."

Several other lessons involve equipment. He stresses the importance of researching before buying and not purchasing "junk," because it will cost more in the long run even if the purchase price is cheaper. And he says to only buy equipment that has readily available parts and support.

He credits working with Vermeer (Vermeer.com) to help his company grow. EcoMulch has had four grinders and four trommel screens, all from different manufacturers, but the company eventually turned to Vermeer equipment. He also believes buying new equipment instead of used will result in savings on repairs and fuel consumption while being more productive and efficient.

Since EcoMulch purchased the new equipment, they've seen a production increase while using fewer operators.

"The increase in productivity is insane," he says. "We're now grinding up to 400 cubic yards per hour and screening 200 cubic yards per hour."

Environmental considerations also are a factor for Hamilton Tree Service and EcoMulch.

California has strict emissions

requirements, and the two companies have received certification under a state air quality standard for diesel equipment, according to Grant Hamilton. He says that will serve them well as enforcement becomes more stringent, and he proudly shares that the equipment his companies own run on Tier-4 interim engines.

"Others might not think it's going to happen, but they are fooling themselves," he says. "The green movement is here to stay."

Safety also is of the utmost importance, particularly with the tree service.

"I always refer to it as 'militaristic' — lives are at stake every day, and we all need to be on mark and clear," he says.

The Hamiltons' high expectations for their equipment can be seen as an outgrowth of what has made them so successful: A belief that integrity, honesty, humility, hard work and being respectful to others will serve them well.

"My dad taught me that if you are going to do something, then be the best," Grant Hamilton says.

Gregg Hennigan is a public relations executive at Two Rivers Marketing, a full-service business-to-business agency based in Des Moines, Iowa, that specializes in strategic planning, interactive and print design, public relations, media placement and training.





MIKE THOMPSON  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

FIFTH DISTRICT  
CALIFORNIA

January 19, 2015

Heather Hamilton, Owner, EcoMulch  
5010 Pacheco Blvd.  
Martinez, CA 94553

Dear Heather *Heather* Hamilton.

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and tour me around your company. I was impressed with your products and the thorough planning that went into creating your thriving business. I wish you and your company further success.

Again, thank you for sharing your time with me. Please let me know if I can ever be of assistance to you in any way. You can call me at my U.S. Capitol office (202) 225-3311 or Vallejo district office (707) 645-1888.

Sincerely,

MIKE THOMPSON  
Member of Congress

*I loved the tour and  
enjoyed meeting you.*

