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Austin charities want curbside clothing pickup contract canceled

By Kevin Schwaller Published



Rows of clothing at a thrift shop. (KXAN Photo/Kevin Schwaller)

AUSTIN (KXAN) — An Austin plan to keep clothes out of the landfill has local charities worried and calling on the city to take action.

Austin residents with curbside service can now get rid of clothes, kitchenware and toys with a curbside pickup service, which started this month. The for-profit Ohio company called Simple Recycling is behind the new service. The city approved a contract with the company to add the curbside pickups for free. Simple Recycling also has to pay the city \$20 for every ton of material collected. But some local charities worry the new program will cut into the clothing donations they depend on for their non-profit organizations.

“We’re all a little bit taken aback by it,” said Tod Marvin, president and CEO of Easter Seals of Central Texas, which helps people with disabilities.

Marvin believes the charity could lose \$60,000 to \$70,000 because of the new city contract. He also did not find out about the deal until after the contract was approved. Marvin says local non-profits likely could have provided a similar service to the city.

“The fact that no local non-profit organization submitted a bid shows how much this flew under the radar,” said Marvin.

Austin Resource Recovery spokesperson Melissa Goodman says the city followed its bidding process and a city council vote was not required. “We’re going to continue to work with [the non-profit community] in the coming months to address their concerns,” said Goodman. “It’s definitely not our intent to capture materials that are going to them.”

Goodman says the purpose of the new service is to keep the clothes out of the landfill. The Austin Resource Recovery website does encourage donors to give their clothes to local charities first. A letter from a group of non-profits called One Voice Central Texas is now calling on the city to cancel the contract with Simple Recycling.

Simple Recycling deferred all of KXAN’s questions to the city.