

AUSTIN MONITOR

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RESOURCES

ZWAC rejects Republic contract renewal again

In a bit of bureaucratic acrobatics during its Feb. 8 meeting, the Zero Waste Advisory Commission voted to rescind a November recommendation against the proposed renewal of the Republic Services solid waste collection services contract for city facilities, so that it could recommend against it again with updated rationale.

City Council will consider that updated rejection during its meeting today. It is not expected to make a decision on the contract, which could be extended as it is considered.

In its November statement, the commission cited a general lack of information, the inclusion of Austin Energy's Class 2 nonhazardous waste disposal and the absence of a clear diversion policy, among other reasons, as to why that proposed contract was unacceptable. Austin Resource Recovery Finance Division Manager Jessica Frazier explained at the meeting that staff, in order to address the commission's concerns, had divided the revised proposal into four sections so that commissioners could approve certain parts and discard parts they opposed.



The good intentions, however, did not stop the new format from raising concerns. "You're wanting to break this up into bits and pieces," Chair Gerry Acuna said. "It's very muddled here."

Acuna said that he wished that ZWAC had been involved since the beginning of the process. "I would love to start over," he said.

"Having you edit the (request for proposal) is not something we can do," Frazier responded.

"This commission in the past has been able to participate in the development of the RFP," Acuna said, "and the matrix that goes into scoring that."

Interim ARR Director Sam Angoori implied that it was too late to do so for this contract. The final extension for Republic's current contract expired last November, and the holdover will last until the end of March.

Commissioner Joshua Blaine agreed with Acuna that splitting the contract into four categories did not resolve some of its core problems, in particular the final destination of the waste. "If we were doing this at the beginning," he said, "it would be a number one priority – where's the waste going?"

Andrew Dobbs with the Texas Campaign for the Environment shared Blaine's concern and suggested that the commission specifically exclude the Austin Community Landfill from any future contract. "Austin Community Landfill is not just a problem facility, it's one that, at its current rate, is slated to run out of space," he said.

Representatives from other waste management companies spoke out against the proposed contract. Michael Mnoian with Central Waste & Recycling said that his business already services five city facilities and that this contract threatened that arrangement. "I don't understand why the vague language is going on," he said. "We were excluded from bidding on this contract, because we didn't meet certain requirements like 'own (a) Type 1 Landfill.'"

Commissioner Kaiba White asked if compiling the RFP in its current form could have excluded smaller businesses from bidding. Blaine agreed. "I'm all for making sure that we're not only creating economic opportunities for those who have massive resources, massive national corporations behind them," he said.

Blaine made a motion to rescind the previous recommendation after Michael Sullivan with ARR explained that it could not be amended, and Commissioner Amanda Masino seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Blaine then made a motion to reject the RFP and to deny permission to negotiate this contract, which Acuna seconded.

In its updated rationale, the commission included opposition to any waste going to the Austin Community Landfill or the San Antonio landfill, the need to honor existing contracts, lack of explicit plans for emergencies, the special events section having an unknown impact on small businesses, problems listed in the previous rejection remaining unaddressed and carbon footprint concerns.

After the discussion around the rationale, it appears that Blaine's earlier motion was forgotten, and he made a new motion to approve the updated version. White seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. Commissioners Jeff Jiampietro and Kendra Bones were absent.