

AUSTIN MONITOR

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Council seems ready to OK biosolids contract

The latest chapter in the city's quest to sign a new contract for handling biosolids at the Hornsby Bend Biosolids Management Plant appears to be nearing its end after two and half years of struggle. With Council Member Alison Alter leading the charge at Tuesday's work session, Council appeared ready to finally approve a new contract with Synagro of Texas-CDR Inc. when the matter comes up on Thursday.

Alter told her colleagues she wanted to find out if any of them would oppose the contract when it comes up at Thursday's meeting. Council members Jimmy Flannigan, Pio Renteria and Ora Houston all indicated that they were ready to move forward, and no one said otherwise.



Judy Musgrove, an engineer with Austin Water, said the utility has very little money left to deal with biosolids and cannot do composting because of lack of a contract. At this point, she said, the utility can just do land application of biosolids, which environmentalists oppose. However, "We'll do 100 percent composting with the new contract," she said.

At the moment, Musgrove said, "yard waste is just piling up" at the Hornsby Bend site because there is literally no place to put it and it cannot be processed without a contract.

Synagro has had a contract with the city, which has now expired, and even though Austin Water has money for biosolids treatment in its budget, the utility is unable to spend the money until it has a new contract, explained Musgrove.

The contract, which is for an initial term of five years with five additional one-year terms at the city's option, is worth \$19.3 million – and there has been considerable pushback from some of the companies not selected.

The city first solicited new proposals for handling biosolids in June 2016. Staff recommended Synagro, as did the Water and Wastewater Commission. The Zero Waste Advisory Commission

did not go along with the recommendation, and eventually a joint committee was formed to consider the contract as well as city policies regarding Dillo Dirt, the city's compost product.

In October 2016, the Water and Wastewater Commission again recommended Synagro and recommended that Allen Click receive a contract to process Dillo Dirt. In December 2016, on the verge of a new contract with Synagro, "alleged staff mistakes" resulted in a violation of the anti-lobbying ordinance, according to a timeline from the utility.

In April 2017, Council approved an ordinance waiving the anti-lobbying ordinance regarding solicitations for the collection, processing, sale or disposal of municipal solid waste, biosolids and recyclables. Although the Water and Wastewater Commission worked with the utility on the request for proposal, the ZWAC canceled its meeting and the city issued another RFP with no anti-lobbying provisions in October 2017.

In November 2017, Synagro again offered the highest-scoring proposal, but Texas Landfill Management, which is affiliated with Texas Disposal Systems, filed a protest. In May 2018, the city issued a "best and final offer" solicitation. In June, the bids were canceled because of a problem with documents inadvertently released as part of a public information request, according to the timeline. Another invitation to bid was issued on Aug. 13, and on Sept. 4 the city received three bids, with Synagro offering the lowest bid.

The Water and Wastewater Commission has again recommended the contract with Synagro and the Zero Waste Advisory Commission has taken no action.