

City goes with single collector

Round Rock awards exclusive contract for trash-hauling

Laura Morales

Special to Austin
American-Statesman
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Round Rock City Council has awarded a five-year exclusive contract to waste collection provider Central Texas Refuse.

Currently, four other waste collection companies service the city. Their contracts will expire in April. Central Texas Refuse is the larg-

est residential collector.

Utility director Michael Thane said awarding an exclusive contract will lower rates, reduce the amount of trucks driving and increase accountability of the collection service. The trash hauler also received a high rating on the city's independent consumer survey.

There were 13 people who spoke in opposition to the contract at Thursday's council meeting.

The Round Rock school district has been working with Texas Disposal Systems to start a new composting program across the district and to create an environmental education program in the school. Central Texas Refuse does not offer composting.

There have been allegations that Balcones Resources, the landfill that sorts Central Texas Refuse's waste and recycling, was dumping sort-

ed recycling into the landfill. The photos, which Texas Disposal Systems employees showed at the council meeting, were captured by TDS employees, one of the companies that will lose its contract with the city.

Most of the speakers were from Texas Disposal Systems. They voiced concerns about the lack of transparency and fairness in the process to draft the contract. Ray Bryant, Texas Disposal Systems' account supervisor, said his company offers more services than Central Texas Refuse, in-

cluding apps for service day reminders, free recycled materials for the city and composting.

"The city of Round Rock has none of these in their new contract," Bryant said. "It appears that you have the same services that you had 15 years ago. Do you have the same cellphone, the same internet connection? Do you have the same computer that you had 15 years ago? You have the same curbside waste and recycling services that you had 15 years ago."

Representatives from Texas Disposal Systems also said the drafted contract has no language that imposes any penalties for violations of its terms. However, the contract does allow for remedies after a period of required mediation if a contract dispute occurs. The city also has the right to terminate the contract at any time if the contract fails to meet the "reasonable standards of the trade."

The Round Rock school district has been working with Texas Disposal Systems to start a new composting program across the district and to create an environmental education program in the school. Central Texas Refuse does not offer composting. Andrea Kilpper, the school district's food production manager, said the City Council's vote will close off this initiative in the schools that are within Round Rock city limits.

"We are dedicated to reducing our environmental impact and our students are so excited to be taking part in this initiative," Kilpper said. "It would be a real shame to pull back and say, 'Sorry kids. No, we can't actually do this.'"

Representatives from the Texas Campaign for the Environment and the Lone Star Sierra Club nonprofits also spoke in opposition of the bill.

"Some of the photos show landfill waste right next to what appears to be sorted recycling," said Sierra Club representative Emma Pabst, "indicating that the city of Round Rock, the residents of Round Rock, paid money for someone to sort that cardboard into this giant box and then send it straight to the landfill, which is frankly ridiculous."

Central Texas Refuse President Micheal Lavengco said the photos are misleading and they would have to do a composition study to be sure it wasn't contaminated material. He also said the company does not do any of the sorting; the landfill does. Balcones Resources CEO Kary Getter responded that it sells between 30,000 and 35,000 tons of recycled material a month.

"We only get paid if we sell things," Getter said. "We don't get paid if we send things to the landfill. Why would I do that if I could sell cardboard for \$250 per ton? It makes no sense. It's almost laughable."

The council also approved a \$77,837 contract with the Smith Pump Water Company to repair a water pump Lake Georgetown. Michael Thane, the director of utilities, said the pump is vital to meet the demands of the city, especially during the summer.