

S.A. garbage headed for Austin

5-year contract calls for a third of trash to be trucked north

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One-third of the trash collected by San Antonio solid-waste crews is to be trucked to a southern Austin landfill under a \$13.5 million, five-year contract approved Wednesday by City Council.

The rest of the garbage, roughly 200,000 tons a year, is to be deposited in the Browning-Ferris Industries landfill on Tessman Road on the far East Side under the same contract and an existing agreement.

By a 9-2 vote, the council approved the contracts because the city no longer has a municipal landfill for trash.

Nelson Gardens, which the city had used for more than a decade, stopped accepting trash Tuesday.

As part of the contracts, the council increased residential garbage fees by \$1.61 a month to \$10.60, effective Oct. 1.

Officials said rates probably will go up again in the future.

The council's decision came amid strong lobbying by three firms vying for the contract.

Mayor Nelson Wolff said it was the "most intense lobbying I have ever seen," and one firm modified its proposal after the council discussion was under way.

"This is like a bidding war," Council woman Helen Ayala said.

Bidding for the contracts were BFI, Texas Disposal Systems of Austin and Waste Management Inc., whose Covel Gardens landfill is being prepared to open on the Southwest Side next to Nelson Gardens.

A fourth company with a landfill that accepts only construction material and yard waste entered the picture, but it was disqualified because of its limited scope.

Under the contract, roughly 100,000 tons of municipal solid waste is to be trucked to the Texas Disposal landfill in Austin and another 100,000 tons to the BFI facility.

BFI already is accepting a maximum of 100,000 tons of trash a year under a contract approved this summer.

The trash earmarked for the Austin landfill will first stop at the city's transfer station on Starcrest Road just north of International Airport.

That station also is the staging area for materials collected from North Side homes participating in the curbside recycling program and will require some modifications, Public Works Director John German said.

German said city crews are to drive the trash to the Austin landfill, which will provide jobs for five of the 40 Nelson Gardens employees to be displaced by that landfill's closure.

Texas Disposal President Bob Gregory said he is prepared to start accepting San Antonio trash immediately. The 341-acre landfill has been open for 2-1/2 years, he said.

Gregory said he planned to work with the city to develop a place at the transfer station where truckloads of household trash can be dropped off at no extra cost.

BFI sales manager Joe Irizarry said his company may need to increase its staff and to buy more equipment, but otherwise can accept trash immediately.

He said residents can dump trash for about \$10 per pickup at the Tessman Road facility. BFI also operates a landfill that accepts brush and construction materials at 440 Pinn Road.

The city still operates a free drop-off brush site on Bitters Road between International Airport and the Blossom Athletic Center.

Council members embraced the proposal to send garbage out of town in keeping with the phrase, "Not in my back yard."

"People don't want it (garbage) in their back yard," Ayala said. "The fact we are able to take it out of town to another location is good."

Wolff and Ayala voted for the BFI - Texas Disposal contract as did council members Henry Avila, Roger Perez, Lynda Billa Burke, Juan Solis, Bill Thornton, Howard Peak and Lyle Larson.

Voting no were Ruth Jones McClendon, who objected to increased amounts of garbage traveling through her district, and Bob Ross, who wanted contracts with all three firms to avoid concentrating waste disposal in a single area of the city.

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