

Hauler wants to solve recycling dilemma

Recycling currently trucked 214 miles away

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- Matt Flener

AUSTIN (KXAN) - An Austin waste hauler has stepped forward to solve a big recycling problem for the City of Austin. Texas Disposal Systems, or TDS, has offered to explore possibilities of partnering with the City of Austin for a single-stream recycling facility, according to Bob Gregory, president of the company. The facility would be located at its current 1750-acre landfill southeast of Austin.

"The cost comparison of hauling it to Dallas or San Antonio are significantly less," said Gregory, though he did not have specific cost estimates. The City of Austin is hauling recycling hundreds of miles away because Austin did not have a facility to handle the material Austinites throw into the new blue carts.

The City's Solid Waste Services Department scrapped plans earlier this year with consultant R.W. Beck to build a Materials Recovery Facility, or MRF, within city limits. Plans called for the facility to be located off FM 812 in Southeast Austin. The City paid R.W. Beck \$1 million for its services out of a \$3.5 million contract. City staff previously said those plans are on the shelf, until the city needs to use them again.

Last month, the City's Solid Waste Advisory Commission agreed to explore the possibility of a public/private partnership to build a materials recovery facility in Austin. "As a city we should be exploring all the different options," said Solid Waste Services Co-Chairman Rick Cofer.

"The question is will that \$1 million worth of work be useful in the future," said Cofer. "The community has a lack of confidence in Solid Waste Services ability to deliver, and that is why the community is urging private partnerships."

Solid waste spokeswoman Jill Mayfield said the department is waiting for new direction from the Advisory Commission on a public/private partnership. Single-stream recycling for customers across Austin began in October. It allows customers to throw all recycling into one cart, without separating the materials.

The City of Austin currently has a contract with Greenstar, formerly VistaFibers, to haul recycling outside city limits. Right now, Greenstar trucks the materials to 214 miles to Garland to be recycled because the city does not have its own facility. In January, Greenstar plans to truck the materials to San Antonio.

"I believe the contract that the city of Austin just did with Vista Fibers, is not a beneficial contract," said Gregory. "I truly believe that we can do more with the facility that we have here."

Gregory said TDS will build a Materials Recovery Center no matter if Austin decides to pursue one or not. TDS currently handles other recycling materials, including a nearly week-old contract with the City of San Marcos to handle Single Stream Recycling. Gregory said he had preliminary plans to build a MRF on TDS' landfill property by March 2009. "We can easily build the MRF on our facility to build even a broader range of recyclable material," he said.

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