

Home builders wary of new trash contract

BY: Monique Ching

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SAN ANGELO, Texas - Some local home builders are perplexed about what could happen beginning Aug. 1 — the day the city’s new solid waste contract with Republic Services kicks in.

“As of Aug. 1, roll-off containers are the only option (builders) have,” said Lynsey Flage, executive officer of the Home Builders Association of San Angelo, following a discussion at Tuesday’s City Council meeting.

Flage spoke during public comment regarding changes to the solid waste and landfill fee schedule.

Under the current trash contract, Flage said, many builders have used the 6- or 8-cubic yard frontload dumpsters for their construction debris. The new contract will eliminate that option, meaning builders only can use the 20- to 30-cubic yard roll-off dumpsters for construction debris.

“The service for construction debris in frontload, smaller containers is not going to be offered any longer,” said Shane Kelton, director of operations with the city. “That’s not an industry standard, I don’t know how that actually got started in San Angelo.”

Kelton said Republic and other trash companies agree that using frontload dumpsters for construction debris is not good practice because it causes damage to their vehicles and equipment.

“It was something that we negotiated out of this contract,” Kelton said.

Flage contended that the change would significantly drive up costs for local builders, adding that once a structure is built on a property there may not even be enough space for a roll-off container.

“That’s probably going to double the cost of the trash on (the construction of) the house,” said David Currie, owner of Cornerstone Builders and past president of the HBASA, who was not at the meeting but was contacted for comment Tuesday afternoon. “... If you’re losing that option, the cost is going to go up.”

Typically, Currie said, if he’s building several houses in a neighborhood, he will place smaller, frontload dumpsters on each of the construction properties and use just one roll-off container to compile the debris from all the separate properties. This has helped Currie reduce building costs, which reduces costs to the home buyers.

“We were not aware that this is not going to be a service offered. It was a current service offered,” Flage said at Tuesday’s meeting, “and one that the builders and contractors used, and used extensively on their construction sites. It is more affordable.”

Flage said home builders had been assured, by the city and Republic, throughout the request for proposals process that services would be improved in the new contract.

Kelton said, following Tuesday’s meeting, that while there are no plans to amend any aspects of the new contract, the city is willing to work with local home builders on the issue.

“If the home builders wanted to come to the city ... if (construction roll-off service) is not a viable option, the city will be glad to listen to them and work with them,” Kelton said.

Another sticking point at the meeting, between the city and the home builders, was Texas Health and Safety Code section 364.034, the code that refers to exclusive contracts for solid waste service to a municipality.

The HBASA submitted a letter to the council, stating that temporary solid waste disposal for construction projects can be exempt from the exclusive contract, meaning builders wouldn’t have to use Republic.

The city contends that the section gives the option for a municipality to exempt such construction project waste, but it also gives the city a right to enforce an exclusive contract.

“This is a legal matter,” said City Manager Daniel Valenzuela. “We believe our interpretation is correct.”

“And we believe ours is,” Flage said.

Currie said he felt putting the temporary construction project waste on the open market would be beneficial and allow for the competition he has had in recent months since Texas Disposal Systems, which competed for the city contract, began serving customers in the county.

“That’s kind of un-American to me not to have competition,” Currie said. “I think there ought to be competition. I just don’t understand exclusivity.”

The council adopted an ordinance regarding solid waste and landfill fees on a 4-2 vote, with council members Elizabeth Grindstaff and Don Vardeman voting nay. Councilman Rodney Fleming was absent from Tuesday's meeting.

Tuesday's item was not regarding approval of the contract between the city and Republic. The contract was approved at the July 1 meeting. Kelton said final contract documents have not yet been signed because of scheduling conflicts. He hopes to have them signed within the next week or two.



IN OTHER NEWS

The council postponed an item to consider increases on the excessive water usage fees because Fleming was not at the meeting and members wanted to wait until everyone was present.

The council authorized city staff to negotiate with property owners for construction and drainage easements in the Avenue P Drainage project. The project has been held up for about a year because property owners disagreed with the city's appraisal on the easement. The item passed 4-2 with Grindstaff and Vardeman opposed.

Council members voted 6-0 for city staff to prepare ordinance amending the Water Advisory Board's by-laws. Changes would include more frequent meetings, at least once per quarter, and would change the board from a seven-member to a nine-member board. The board will include a member who specializes in agricultural lending or water financing, a member of the Tom Green County Commissioners Court and a member from the Upper Colorado River Authority.

A new Lake Nasworthy boat ramp, at Spring Creek Park, was approved for the council and is expected to be complete by the 2015 Showdown in San Angelo boat races.

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