



## OUR OPINION: Waste collection explanation should have come sooner

Staff Reports

Sunday, May 11, 2014

SAN ANGELO, Texas —City administrators gave a helpful and informative presentation a week and a half ago about San Angelo’s pending waste management contract. They would have done themselves and the City Council a favor by doing that weeks earlier.

On April 1, the council unanimously approved the recommendation of a committee to grant, pending negotiations, the city’s waste collection contract to Republic Services for 10 years.

That vote came just days after the city had received two proposals, from Republic and Texas Disposal Services. Critics thought that didn’t give the council enough time to consider the voluminous proposals and argued that the council should have heard presentations from the companies.

They also noted that two of the three council members on the seven-person committee had proposed last year that Republic be granted a new contract without the city even seeking bids.

The presentation April 30 laid out some of the reasons Republic was the better choice, including that it was about one-third less expensive, that it was willing to assume liability for the city’s landfill, and that it would work with existing companies to implement recycling. There was, the administrators said, a “wide gap” between the two proposals.

Still lingering is the issue of extra environmental fees and fuel surcharges Republic has been assessing about 2,000 commercial customers. The city is investigating that issue, and it needs to be resolved before a contract is awarded.

Still, the reasons for selecting Republic seemed reasonable. But they weren’t known until City Manager Daniel Valenzuela and Shane Kelton, the city’s director of operations, laid them out to members of the media.

For weeks council members had said they couldn’t defend their decision because details of the proposals couldn’t be made public. Apparently a legal review determined that some of the aspects of the proposals could be disclosed.

It's unfortunate that decision took so long. It left San Angeloans wondering if the process had been fair and thorough.

If negotiations go well and the matter of extra fees is adequately addressed, it appears the council will have made a reasonable and well-considered choice.

But the city could have headed off some of the reservations about the decision if it had been more forthcoming sooner about the reasons for selecting Republic. If legalities made that difficult, allowing the companies to make public presentations at least would have allowed residents to have more information to form opinions.

The lesson needs to be learned again and again: Transparency is almost always better for everyone.



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