



OUR OPINION: Put brakes on waste collection contract

Staff Reports

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SAN ANGELO, Texas —The city of San Angelo received an award this month from the state comptroller's office for transparency in its financial reporting. To show it deserves the honor, the city needs to rethink its direction in granting a waste collection contract.

Three months ago the City Council tentatively selected Republic Services, the current provider, over Texas Disposal Services after the companies had submitted bids for a 10-year contract. Negotiations with Republic were to follow, and on Tuesday the council is expected to discuss the contract.

Any final decision should wait. The council should extend the current contract by 30 days because too many questions remain.

The biggest concerns extra environmental fees and fuel surcharges Republic has been assessing about 2,000 commercial customers, and on that matter the city isn't exhibiting the level of transparency for which it has been recognized.

The council ordered an audit of the surcharges, but so far there have been no assurances the findings will be made public. That would be unacceptable. The contract is too big and affects too many people for there to be anything but complete transparency.

Conducting the public's business in the open always is important, but it is especially so now because this selection process has invited concerns almost from the start. City officials said the law limits how much they could say about the bids, but then they offered an explanation for why Republic's proposal was better.

Even though Republic has announced it will examine its records and refund what it believes to be overcharges, the city should tell what its audit found about the extra fees Republic has been charging and answer questions. All that can't happen in a day or two. Put a contract decision on hold until the public can better understand all the details.



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