



## Council votes to retain Republic

### Packed house sounds off on trash contract

By Monique Ching

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SAN ANGELO, Texas —Republic Services, San Angelo's trash collector and landfill operator for years, is here to stay for at least another 10 years.

"I've never seen so many constituents get so involved emotionally in a trash contract," Councilwoman Elizabeth Grindstaff said at Tuesday's council meeting.

Almost every seat in the council chambers was taken Tuesday, and several attendees stood in the back of the room. Many business owners and residents weighed in on the controversial contract, which was authorized through a narrow vote Tuesday.

The split decision came after months of negotiations, allegations of unauthorized overcharges, questions of transparency and the filing of a lawsuit.

"We've been talking trash for the last six or 10 months or however long it's been, and it comes to a point where, my gosh, we've got to move forward," Councilman Johnny Silvas said. "I was with them from the very beginning because I just saw the system wasn't broken. And I think some people try to come up here and muddy the waters, and I don't think that's fair."

The new contract will provide once per week solid waste collection and once per week collection of recyclables, said Shane Kelton, director of operations for the city. Residents also will have quarterly curbside bulk waste collection beginning Oct. 1. After the initial term of the new contract, which begins Aug. 1, the city could choose to extend the contract for eight years, followed by another two years.

New residential rates, as of Aug. 1, will be \$13.97 per month, Kelton said, noting that figure is lower than sister cities such as Midland, which charges \$15.50, and Odessa, which charges \$18.28. San Angelo's base residential rate was \$9.81 previously.

Republic will continue to collect solid waste twice weekly until it delivers the 96-gallon recycling cart to a home, at which time it will begin collecting solid waste once per week and recyclables once per week.

Since the council voted to begin negotiations with Republic three months ago, sole competitor Texas Disposal Systems raised questions about Republic's operational practices in the current contract, which expires July 31.

Some of those concerns involved fuel surcharges and environmental recovery fees charged in excess of what is allowed by city ordinance, as well as a request for proposals process that was skewed in favor of Republic, TDS representatives said.

“Just say no to the staff-proposed contracts. Throw out the related RFP processes,” said Bob Gregory, president of TDS. “Do this prior to taking this vote, otherwise you won’t have any leverage at all.”

On Friday, Republic issued a statement committing to a comprehensive review of all past commercial customer billing statements, pledging to refund any incorrect fees it finds during the 90-day process.

Representatives from TDS, however, asked the council to hold off on the decision and extend the current contract for six months until all questions regarding the alleged overcharges were answered.

“I’ve not been an advocate for TDS, I’ve not been an advocate for Republic, I’ve been an advocate for transparency,” San Angelo resident Charles Young said.

Public comments also were split during the two-hour discussion on the solid waste issue.

Tony Villarreal, a local insurance agent, expressed satisfaction about how the issue had been handled and was confident that appropriate oversight measures were in place.

“Through this whole process, I’ve admired the way you (council members) have handled public perception,” Villarreal said. “When we disagree with y’all, that’s when y’all hear about it. Y’all have the interest of San Angelo at heart.”

Councilman Rodney Fleming, who had been on the RFP selection committee and had been outspoken about Republic being the clear front-runner in the proposals process, was on the fence at Tuesday’s meeting.

“My choice is Republic; they hands down beat them. It wasn’t even close,” Fleming said. “But people from my district are calling me up and saying, ‘I would like to do the six-month extension, and I would like to have these fines taken care of before we agree to a contract with them.’ ”

The vote, to execute an exclusive contract with Republic while amending the typographical errors that were raised in the meeting, was passed on a 4-3 vote. Mayor Dwain Morrison, council members Charlotte Farmer, Silvas and Marty Self voted for it. Grindstaff, Fleming and Councilman Don Vardeman opposed.

“We look forward to our continued partnership, and we look forward to keeping San Angelo clean,” said Kenny Ramzinski, general manager at Republic.

COUNCIL OKs TWICE WEEKLY WATERING

The council brought the city out of drought restrictions at Tuesday's meeting. Now, under standard conservation measures, residents are allowed to water twice per week.

"It's not necessary to water twice a week, but because the ordinance says that, I think we are obliged as a council to follow the laws," Morrison said.

The council felt that when it voted to remain in drought level 2 at a previous meeting, allowing for once per week watering, it overrode what was required by ordinance, and members wanted to rectify that.

The city has just over 30 months of water, said Ricky Dickson, director of water utilities for the city, excluding the Hickory Aquifer, which comes online this fall. The ordinance states if the city has more than 24 months of water supply, it will go into standard conservation. If the city supply falls below 24 months, that would trigger drought level 1.

"We are correcting an unintentional illegal action," Grindstaff said.

All members agreed the ordinance needs to be changed and the current month-supply trigger needs to be removed.

Fleming said he felt allowing more watering could encourage further abuse of water supplies.

"I am for the citizens of this city, though, to keep conserving water the way they've been doing," Fleming said. "We're doing really good. Just because we're going to say you can water twice a week — don't do it. I really hope the citizens really take heed here and don't just open the water gates."



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