

Windsor chooses new garbage company, rejecting its current hauler

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Windsor has chosen a new garbage hauler for the next 10 years, spurning its existing provider which recently sued the town and claimed the bidding process was unfair.

The Windsor Town Council late Wednesday night voted 4-1 to award the 10-year garbage contract to Sonoma County Resource Recovery, owned by Garden City Group, Marin Sanitary Service Group and its president, Kevin Walbridge.

The current company serving the town — Windsor Refuse and Recycling — was unsuccessful in its bid to retain the contract.

“There was sentiment by more than one (council member) they were uncomfortable with the fact Windsor Refuse was suing the town and expecting us to award them the contract,” City Manager Linda Kelly said Thursday.

Rates will be going up, but Windsor officials said it was inevitable with whatever company ended up being chosen.

The existing monthly residential rate for a 32-gallon container, the most popular size, will go from \$17.20 to \$24.

The 64-gallon containers will go from \$29.31 per month to \$38.

“These are significant rate increases,” Kelly said. “We knew our current hauler’s rates were artificially low for various reasons — investments not made in equipment and some violations.” Also, landfill fees are on the rise.

The council also cited Sonoma County Resource Recovery’s robust recycling and public outreach programs.

Windsor is required to put its garbage contract out to competitive bid every decade, as a result of a 1996 voter mandate, the first city in the county to adopt the procedure in an effort to obtain the best rates and service.

But the process has had some unusual twists and turns since the town a year ago put out requests for proposals from garbage companies interested in hauling its residential and commercial garbage, recycling and compost.

Five companies were in the running, including Windsor Refuse and Recycling, which is owned by the Ratto Group, the company that serves Santa Rosa and the majority of Sonoma County.

Another complicating factor was that Ratto is being sold to Recology, one of the largest garbage and recycling operations on the West Coast.

As an indication of what is at stake financially, the Windsor contract was worth at least \$52 million in revenues over 10 years, depending on which company was chosen.

The Town Council in May awarded the contract to Green Waste Recovery Inc., before reconsidering the vote due to issues with the company's proposed transfer station in Petaluma for recyclable materials.

After Petaluma officials objected and some citizens groups threatened to sue over environmental issues, the council again awarded the contract to Green Waste in early June after the company said it would find a location closer to Windsor, to transfer recyclables from garbage trucks onto bigger vehicles to take the materials to its San Jose facility for sorting.

But last week, Green Waste decided to pull out of consideration, saying it was having trouble securing a transfer station in time for the Oct. 1 deadline to begin serving Windsor.

Green Waste also cited political and legal pressures, including a lawsuit filed in late June by Windsor Refuse and Recycling. The lawsuit named both Green Waste and the Town, claiming the bidding process was unfair and the town engaged in secret meetings that Town officials said the lawsuit was baseless, but Green Waste said the litigation would affect its ability to provide service while significantly increasing costs.

On Thursday, Town Manager Kelly indicated the legal challenges may still lie ahead.

"It's been a long and winding road. Unfortunately we don't believe all the ancillary issues related to this are over. We could be facing one or more future lawsuits," she said.

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