

The Beach Reporter

City to switch to Athens for waste hauling

by **Alana Garrigues**

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After providing nearly 11 years of trash service to Hermosa Beach, Consolidated Disposal Service will bid residents and businesses adieu this December.

The company lost a competitive proposal to enter into a new seven-year agreement with the city at the July 24 council meeting. Instead, the city council voted 3-2 to enter into negotiations with Athens Services, with Crown Disposal as a secondary provider should Athens fall through.

CDS failed to impress the council on three important matters — price, diversion rates and customer service. Among the three trash service proposals considered, CDS showed the highest prices and lowest diversion rates, and a staff report indicated that while driver satisfaction was high, management and supervisors were perceived by city staff as not attending to incidents in quick fashion.

Council members Peter Tucker and Michael DiVirgilio supported Athens along with Mayor Pro Tem Kit Bobko, while Mayor Jeff Duclos and Councilman Howard Fishman voiced their preference for Crown.

"The one that I am going to mention has successfully completed a city change-over. Their diversion rates are higher than they promised them, and I feel that they will do a good job for us," Tucker said. "I would like to propose that we have Athens as our primary contractor."

Bobko seconded Tucker's request and added that he wants the city to take full advantage of scales of economy, leveraging the Athens street sweeping contract to save money for the city.

One potential change that Athens will implement is a porter system on Pier Plaza, in which porters would enter through the back door of businesses, pick up the trash and throw it directly into their pickup truck. It would eliminate the need for trash lots "A" and "B" and open up additional parking in the downtown corridor.

Athens representatives said they would use a truck painted with a beach scene, to match the plaza's ambiance and provide the porter service from shortly before the stores and restaurants opened until just after closing time.

They also pointed to a coordinated system of picking up the trash immediately followed by a deep power-wash of the streets.

Gary Clifford, COO of Athens Services, said that the company's goal was to work like a hotel lobby — clean, efficient and service-oriented.

Duclos preferred Crown, the company that promised the highest diversion, a calculation of the weight of recyclables, green and food waste divided by the total tonnage of a city's trash. He liked the commitment to green and the small size of the company.

"If I believe, and I do, that a small city like Hermosa Beach can be dynamic and nimble and innovative and be a leader, then I have to also believe that a small company that has similar commitments to that makes a very good fit for us," Duclos said.

Athens currently services 22 cities, CDS services 29, and Crown has contracts with two cities.

DiVirgilio said that for him, the competition was very tight and the decision between Crown and Athens was one of the most difficult he has made on the council.

The council also voted 4-1, noting Bobko's dissent, to implement a pay-as-you-throw system. Under the new plan, residents with a small amount trash will pay less than current rates, and residents with more trash will pay a premium. Athens will provide 35- to 95-gallon carts, along with unlimited recycling bins.

The plan will cost residents \$6.92 for the 35-gallon cart, \$10.92 for a 64-gallon cart and \$14.92 for a 95-gallon cart compared to the current rate of \$11.57 for unlimited trash pickup. There will not be an upper limit for residential customers, who can request more carts as needed at a discounted rate. Commercial rates will increase from \$91.59 to \$99.75 per week, although commercial recycling rates will decrease compared to the current plan. Recycling is currently at \$68.69 and will drop to \$49.88.

Athens anticipates \$17.4 million in revenue for the seven-year contract. There is a 24-month optional renewal built into the end of the contract.

Tucker, Bobko and DiVirgilio directed staff to negotiate based on the proposal guaranteeing a 35-percent minimum diversion rate. Athens also submitted a higher-cost, higher-diversion alternative proposal.

The Green Task Force committee recommended the pay-as-you-throw system, as did 9-year-old Max O'Reilly.

"Are we really considering going backwards to not separating our trash? Are we going to stop teaching the three R's (reduce, reuse, recycle) and go to only two R's since recycling will be someone else's problem?," O'Reilly said. "We kids can help teach better ways to reduce and reuse so we don't have as much trash in the first place, then we can finish off by making sure everyone truly knows how much can be recycled. We kids have learned how to take better care of the planet without making major changes in our lifestyle."

Bobko said that he did not believe the symbolism of recycling mattered when Athens could deliver a higher rate of diversion without asking the customer to separate trash from recyclables.

"The thing that I don't understand is why it's more important to do something symbolic when the people who actually do the work are telling us that it's more effective doing something else," Bobko said. "The haulers say they can be more effective at the end result if we put everything in one container. It makes me ask, are we really concerned about recycling, or are we more concerned about looking like we're recycling? I'm more concerned about recycling."

Other members of the city council disagreed with Bobko.

"As Bobko indicated, we kind of rely on the people who do this as a living to get their feedback, and two of the three haulers actually supported option A," Fishman said.

Tucker felt it was important to show the community's environmental commitment.

"I think that we as a community have embarked on being carbon-neutral and eco-friendly and want to be a leader. And to throw away the education our children are receiving in the schools and not having a two-cart system is a step in the wrong direction," Tucker said.

Athens did recommend the "single-stream" option B of commingled trash, but they will have to negotiate the pay-as-you-throw option A instead.

The decision to pursue further negotiations with Athens came after a July 11 trash workshop in which council members heard presentations from CDS, Crown and Athens and listened to input from residents and business owners.

Prior to the July 24 vote, council members allowed the presenters to restate their case briefly and answer questions about the contracts and diversion rates, followed by a public hearing that many people in the community attended.

Between the two meetings, Fishman and Duclos toured all three facilities together, and Bobko visited Crown and Athens. He had been on a previous tour at CDS.

City staff will now enter into contract negotiations with Athens, with a goal of a September agreement. New services will begin Jan. 1, 2013, and Athens has committed to opening a local office for residents to speak with customer service and pay bills.

The city council directed staff to work with Athens on several key factors, including shred days, the toy drive, senior citizen rate discounts, unlimited green waste, up to six free trash overflow days, food waste and economies of scale.

Once the vote was in, Duclos thanked CDS for their years of quality service and commitment to the community.

"You have done a commendable job for a long time, and I certainly appreciate the efforts you've made, particularly in the last couple of years in terms of community awareness and environmental issues," Duclos said.