



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Richard Mendoza, Public Works Director

DATE: March 13, 2019

SUBJECT: Transition of Highway Underpass Cleanups to City of Austin

Cleaning under highway overpasses has long been a function performed by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). Recently, the City of Austin was notified that TxDOT would not renew this service. To avoid an extended interruption of services, a proposed contract for monthly cleanups will be presented for Council's consideration on its March 28, 2019 meeting agenda.

In accordance with the 1986 municipal maintenance agreement (MMA) with the City, TxDOT routinely cleared and cleaned below highway bridges and overpasses using an annual contract with WorkQuest (formally Texas Industries for the Blind and Handicapped, Inc, or TIBH). The MMA states TxDOT will "assist" the City with mowing and cleaning of litter on non-controlled access highways located within the City's incorporated area.

Below is a timeline of events associated with these services and the proposed new contract:

- **December 17, 2018:** TxDOT notifies our department that its contract is up for renewal in 2019 and requests to meet to discuss options for transitioning this work to the City.
- **December 20, 2018:** TxDOT notifies our department that due to emergency district-wide expenses related to the Fall 2018 flood event, it was "eliminating services that are not identified in the MMA as our responsibility or where we assist when resources are available" to include the contract for highway underpasses, effective December 31, 2018. Staff examines the scope of the contract and options to avoid an interruption of services.
- **January 16, 2019:** During a meeting with the City's Public Works and Transportation departments, TxDOT agrees to extend the cleanups for an additional 60 days, through February 28, 2019, to allow the City to develop a transition plan.
- **January 23, 2019:** A cross-departmental team from Public Works, Transportation, Public Health, Watershed Protection, Resource Recovery, Police, Code, and Municipal

Court discuss the critical need and a plan to continue cleanups under a new City contract. Consensus was to pursue contract negotiation with existing vendor, WorkQuest, due to their experience and status as an approved State of Texas contractor. WorkQuest has been providing this service in Austin since October 2015, also supporting the [Works Wonders Program](#) that employs individuals with disabilities.

- **January 29, 2019:** Public Works meets with the TxDOT vendor to ascertain their interest in continuing the work under a City contract to which they indicated they were agreeable.
- **January 30, 2019 – Present:** Cross-departmental discussions regarding logistics and funding; Public Works conducted contract and fee negotiations with the proposed vendor.

Prior to these events, TxDOT gave no indication of plans to suspend the contract. Within this same timeframe, City Council Districts 1 and 5, and potentially others, received requests from the community to increase the frequency of cleanups, namely at the U.S. Highway 183 and Cameron Road, and Ben White and Pack Saddle Pass locations.

Highway bridges and overpasses provide refuge for people experiencing homelessness. A growing number of locations throughout Austin present unsanitary conditions and other public health and safety issues. This proposed contract would include once-per-month cleanups at approximately 61 highway underpass locations, including underneath Interstate 35, U.S. Highway 183, Loop 1, and U.S. 290. The frequency and level of service matches the previous TxDOT contract. Relief Enterprise is the WorkQuest sub-contractor providing the actual site cleaning and debris removal. Integral Care will provide sensitivity training on handling vulnerable populations. This contract would also provide for advance notification to our homeless community about upcoming cleanups, safeguarding of personal property, access to social service providers, and coordination with Austin Police, Municipal Court, and Austin Code departments. The FY 2019 cost is \$195,000 and is available in operating budgets for Public Works, Resource Recovery, and Transportation departments. The annualized cost is \$386,762 and may be adjusted for inflation in subsequent renewals.

This contract is separate from the Watershed Protection Department pilot to clean homeless encampments in and near drainage system and waterways. We will work in close coordination with Watershed Protection and the new City's Homelessness Officer (once hired) regarding effective practices, such as support services and notification procedures.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need more information on this matter.

cc:

Spencer Cronk, City Manager

Jim Smith, Interim Assistant City Manager

Rodney Gonzales, Assistant City Manager

Christopher Shorter, Assistant City Manager