

Gallup approves wastewater plant extension

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 22 July 2016 03:57



City most likely to contract with new firm in months

The Gallup City Council has unanimously agreed to a month-to-month extension of an agreement that allows the Pennsylvania-based Severn Trent Services to continue operating the west-side wastewater treatment plant. The action took place at the July 12 regular city meeting and did not receive opposition from council members or members of the general public.

The agreement permits Severn Trent, which originally entered into a contractual agreement with the city for managerial services in May 2010 at an annual rate of \$1.1 million, to operate and maintain the plant and its related facilities. The agreement expired June 30, 2016.

City Electric Director Richard Matzke told council members that the city went through a formal pre-qualification process at the end of the 2015 and selected three vendors to participate in a request-for-proposals process regarding a new design upgrade for the plant. Those vendors were Veolia Water North America, out of California, CH2M of Portland, Ore., and Severn Trent. CH2M eventually won out, Matzke said.

“We anticipate CH2M to take things a step forward,” Matzke — who was put in charge of wastewater and solid waste operations when former Plant Director Vince Tovar abruptly resigned in February — said. “There are still some preliminary matters that must be taken care of. This should move to a new level in about three or four months.”

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Matzke noted that CH2M has a strong presence in New Mexico when it comes to wastewater and solid waste maintenance. He said the city of Farmington contracts with the firm, noting that CH2M takes care of Farmington's distribution and collection, as well as that city's water and sewer system. On the contrary, Matzke commented, Severn Trent's sole New Mexico client is Gallup.

"This has to come back before council for final approval," Matzke said. "What we could end up seeing is something akin to a transition process – a handoff process from one firm to another."

The city electric director said the financial impact on Gallup, with respect to the extension, amounts to \$4,363.51, plus state gross-receipts taxes. Severn Trent requested a 5 percent monthly increase in base operations during the extension period, with no charge to the monthly maintenance and repair budget of \$12,500.

The city recently hired Dennis Romero as its new wastewater plant director. Romero is a New Mexico State University engineering graduate and former gas bureau chief for the state Public Regulation Commission in Santa Fe. Romero starts the \$90,000-a-year job on July 25, City Manager Maryann Ustick confirmed at the council meeting. The city has not released an official resume for Romero, nor has Romero been made available for formal interviews.

Oh, that previously stinky plant!

Over the years, because of the foul odor it periodically emanates, the plant has been the butt of jokes — particularly by folks who live near it on the west side. However, City Councilor Fran Palochak, whose district includes the plant, said she hasn't fielded public complaints or jokes about the plant in a long time.

"I think things are getting better," the councilor said. "I know there have been plant complaints in the past. But I haven't heard any complaints in a while."

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