

LOCAL

Councilman claims favoritism in city's contract negotiations

BY CELINA ALVARADO
Times staff writer

Issues of favoritism surrounding contract negotiations of a soon to be city issued multi-million dollar El Portal contract surfaced during a special called City Council meeting Friday afternoon.

Councilman Juan Ramirez raised the issue after city officials announced they would enter into contract negotiations with a Laredo based company, Leyendecker Construction despite the existence of a lower bidder from Houston (a difference of \$330,000).

"To spend more than what is being offered in this building (City Hall), I don't think that is right," Ramirez added.

Ramirez further stated he did not understand the city's reasoning and attributed their decision making to favoritism.

"You are selecting the best value in proposal not the best price," City Manager Larry Dovalina said in a heated rebuttal.

"I resent the fact that the councilman is indicating that he believes that somebody purposely did award scores to favor one contract over the other," he added of the contracts that were compared based on a point system.

I can assure you that is not the way the staff operates.

"For a councilperson to inject that about staff is uncalled for," he said.

Councilman Jose Valdez, Jr. agreed with Dovalina.

"You make it sound like we have something to hide," he said, stating he too was offended.

"We are open and we look at everybody and all the presentations," Valdez added, "we are not partial to anybody."

The two argued councilman Ramirez was "obviously misinformed."

Donato David Ramos, an attorney who represented



Times staff photo by Celina Alvarado

PRIVATE DISCUSSION: Donato David Ramos, representing attorney for Leyendecker Construction, approaches Mayor Betty Flores to discuss the results of Friday's Special Called City Council meeting. City Council, who held the meeting to decide who would enter into contract negotiations with the City of Laredo for the multi-million dollar El Portal Project contract, voted to award the contract to Leyendecker. One councilman opposed.

Leyendecker Construction Friday explained.

"After going through the selection process and the criteria evaluation, the evaluation committee said that Leyendecker will be the number one and the other contractor was number two.

"All that means is that it now authorizes the city of Laredo to enter into negotiations with Leyendecker construction," he said.

"Just because this occurred today doesn't necessarily mean Leyendecker will get the contract. At some point in the future once they agreed with the price, then they come back to city council to enter into a contract," he added.

The two companies were judged on a "fair" point system, the city argued.

"I have a lot of respect for all

the city council but – apparently - Councilman Ramirez was not aware of this procedure. I think the councilman was confused," Ramos said.

"One factor – apparently – Ramirez was not aware of is that price is only 45 points out of a possible 120 points," he added. "He was focusing on one of seven criteria. You have to look at the bigger picture (i.e. history, plumbing, subcontractors)."

But the process is not over – nothing is set in stone yet.

Leyendecker Construction has worked on projects such as City Hall, the Webb County Administrative building, and recently the Inner City Lamar Bruni Vergara city park and aquatic center, among others.

"It is not like they are novices they are experi-

enced in large projects and more importantly they are responsible and they look forward, hopefully, to work out their contract with the city," Ramos said.

The proposed Bridge of the Americas Modification Project is located in downtown Laredo along Water Street between Convent and Santa Maria Streets with parking lot improvements south of Water Street.

The project also includes building demolitions and several other improvements Councilman Ramirez argued would further raise costs for the city of Laredo in the future.

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County attorney deems youth village land purchase illegal

BY ROBERT LOPEZ
Times staff writer

Amid confusion over a recent land purchase, plans for building the Youth Village Detention Center may again be delayed.

Two weeks after the Webb County Commissioners Court voted to pay \$675,000 for a 15-acre site off Highway 359, County Attorney Homero Ramirez has deemed the purchase illegal.

It was "improper" because commissioners approved the acquisition of a tract of land that was not initially offered by developer Richard "Dickie" Haynes.

At the May 24 meeting, commissioners considered various tracts of land, including two Haynes' properties that sat side-by-side in Las Blancas colonia.

The two 15-acre parcels sat 900 feet away from the highway. However, Haynes agreed to sell the commissioners an adjacent 15-acre parcel that abutted the highway.

"But that 15-acre parcel was not part of his proposal," Ramirez said. "It was a probably a well meaning decision, but it was not consistent with the (bidding) procedure we set out."

Because of this technicality, the court can choose one of several options Monday.

Commissioners can either select a bid from the ones initially offered, or reject all bids and order an exemption from the competitive bidding process, allowing them to go ahead with the Haynes property purchase.

The \$11.3 million Youth Village will combine the Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program with a 72-bed detention center.

Monday, commissioners will also discuss the possibility of rewriting the county's food service contract with Ben E. Keith.

The issue became especially heated several weeks ago when Vince Lombraña, who heads the county's Meals on Wheels program, accused Commissioner David Cortez of assaulting him at a Community Action Agency picnic.

Lombraña states Cortez berated and poked him for using food from the South Texas Food Bank at the picnic, instead of the more expensive designated food vendor.

Commissioners may also take possible action on the lawsuit between the city and United Independent School District over riverside land, which the county had hoped to use for a fifth bridge.

The court decided to intervene in the lawsuit at their last meeting, but Ramirez said details need to be ironed out with the city before the county could proceed.

Other items on Monday's agenda include change orders for the following:

- \$38,020 to Zertuche Construction for installing a pavilion, roof, plumbing and electrical accessories at the Oilton Community Center Park;

- \$9,869 to Jimmy Closser and Sons Construction for additional permit fees to the city of Rio Bravo, which is threatening to halt the project unless \$29,869 in fees are paid; and

- \$13,348 to Caldwell Tanks Inc. for installing elevated water tank in El Cenizo. This contract amount will jump \$496,000 to \$509,348, subject to approval by the Texas Water Development Board.

LCC students invited to get connected

Many first-time college students often experience anxiety when crossing the threshold to higher education. Lisa Gonzalez, LCC Counselor and College Connection Coordinator, vividly recalls the confusion and frustration of her first college experience.

"Setting foot for the first time on a college campus can be overwhelming. You may not know where to go or who to speak with for help," Gonzalez explains.

Gonzalez, along with other college counselors and faculty, are joining forces in July to provide first-time collegians with valuable advice and tools for student success via the College Connection, a new student orientation program. Participation is free and open to first-time students entering LCC this

fall and to those with less than six college hours.

"The College Connection is an annual orientation program for new students to learn how college works," says Gonzalez. "Participants will be able to get connected to valuable student services available at LCC, qualify for scholarships, and be among the first to receive valuable academic and career advising to register early for the fall 2004 semester."

Three sessions of the College Connection are scheduled, including a session July 8 from 1 to 6 p.m. at LCC South (5500 South Zapata Highway), and two sessions July 13 from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2 to 7 p.m. at the LCC main campus near downtown.

Gonzalez says that the College

Connection will include a presentation by representatives of the leading online global careers network, Monster.com.

"This will be a valuable opportunity for students to explore career options and learn about time management, first-year college expectations, extracurricular involvement and other important aspects of college," notes Gonzalez.

After the presentation, participants will be able to participate in a mini-expo, where they will be able to meet with staff of various college departments, including financial aid, student activities, bookstore, continuing education, special populations, library/internet corral, employment assistance center, ROTC, learning center, distance education and counseling/assessment services.



Times courtesy photo

Aldo with Reagan

Aldo Tatangelo, left, then mayor of Laredo, cherishes an autographed picture of a 1988 meeting in the White House with former President Ronald Reagan. Tatangelo was part of a South Texas mayoral group meeting with Reagan and staff in the Wilson Room "to talk about the border." Tatangelo could not recall the name of the mayor sitting between him and the late U.S. president. "The president wanted to hear about things on the border," Tatangelo said. "Nobody talked except me. I talked for three quarters of an hour."