Cajundome contract disputed

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LAFAYETTE — The Cajundome will get a new floor-scrubbing machine, despite an argument that awarding the contract for the scrubber might be illegal.

The Lafayette City Council accepted a $6,830 high bid Tuesday from Tennant Co. for the scrubber.

"I think we circumvented the state bid law. The specs were so tight, this was the only manufacturer that could meet them," said Bob Bacon, who along with fellow council member Jan Heymann voted against giving the contract to Tennant.

Other bidders on the scrubber were: Coastal Clarklift, $6,137; National American Sales, $5,995; and Dreyfus Co., $5,393.

"The point of the state bid law is to allow equal bidders to have an equal chance," Bacon said.

The state bid law says the lowest bid that meets specifications should be accepted.

Bacon argued that it was "blatantly obvious" that bid specifications were written so that Tennant would be the only qualified bidder.

Of 19 items requested, Bacon said, Tennant was the only one that could meet all of them. The other bidders qualified only for three or four items, he said.

"Perhaps the need is there. But it isn't demonstrated here," Bacon said. "This was taking the manufacturer's requirements and making ours match his."

Cajundome Superintendent of Maintenance Chuck Dunand told the council that two of the other machines bid were too big to fit through Cajundome doors.

Dunand, who said he's used Tennant machines before, said he recommended the Tennant because it would do a better job, save man-hours and has power steering.

Before writing the specifications for the scrubber, Dunand said, he took measurements at the Cajundome and considered the types of carpet there.

Steve Brackin, Coastal Clarklift representative, argued that his company could provide a machine with attachments that could do the same job as Tennant's machine.

But, Dunand countered, that machine would require three men operating it while the Tennant machine only needs one operator.

Although more taxpayer dollars are needed to purchase the Tennant machine, Bacon agreed that its higher cost might be justifiable if it saves man-hours.

"If it works efficiently and brings people, it'll bring in taxpayer dollars, too," council President Al Simon said.

Councilman Wilfred Pierre added that high bids have been accepted for other Cajundome items, and asked why this particular item was causing such debate.

"Frankly, I think it's time for this council to stand up and ask why they're writing specifications for particular projects . . . " City Auditor George Lewis said. "I know he (Dunand) wrote specifications that no one can match except Tennant."

Assistant City Attorney H.D. Melton said he hadn't had an opportunity to look over the bid recommendations before Tuesday's action.

"Although I don't feel comfortable with it, if the proper procedure was followed, it is a legal action," Melton said after the meeting. "It is legal to write specifications for a particular piece of equipment, if the procedure is followed."

In a related matter, the council tabled until next week a resolution to award Tennant a contract for a gas-powered sweeper and scrubber attachment. The machine would be used to clean the Cajundome's parking lot.

Tennant submitted a bid of $20,661 while Coastal Clarklift offered a bid of $19,595.

The council also tabled final adoption of an ordinance to rezone some property south of Pont des Mouton Road, west of the Vermilion River, north of Interstate 10 and east of Rue Amitie.

The resolution would change the zoning from multi-family to general business.

The matter is being studied by attorneys, Simon said.

Also Tuesday, the council appointed four members and the mayor appointed one to the new Intergovernmental Recreation Commission. They were awarded staggering terms at random.

The commissioners appointed by the council and their terms are: Allen Comeaux, three years; Ron Robicheaux, three years; Lyle Mouton, one year; and Shirley Picard, two years.

Leon Moncla, the mayor's appointee, will serve a one-year term.

The Lafayette Parish Council is scheduled to appoint its three representatives on Oct. 24. The parish president also will appoint one member.

The move is the first official action toward consolidation of city and parish government.