

Bedford will still manage library

By Jessica DeLeón

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* Mayor Jim Story casts the deciding vote against a private company's bid.

BEDFORD — The city will continue to manage the library, the City Council decided Tuesday, ending a yearlong debate over whether operations should be outsourced to a private company.

The council was evenly divided on whether to approve an outsourcing proposal from Library Systems and Services of Germantown, Md., which manages 47 public libraries across the country.

Mayor Jim Story cast the deciding vote, with Lori Nail, Roy Savage and Roy Turner joining him. Councilmen Jeff Cason, Charles Orean and Bob Whistler voted in favor of LSSI's bid.

Audience members, some of whom had to stand in the packed chambers, applauded after the vote, which capped an hourlong council discussion.

Earlier in the meeting, Jon Westrom presented a petition signed by residents who did not want a private company running the library.

"Hear us," Westrom said. "Listen to all 1,686 of us."

During the meeting, Orean argued that LSSI could save the city half a million dollars over three years. He said the savings could be used to build up the library's collection.

Whistler agreed. "I don't see how we can ignore half a million dollars," he said.

Turner said residents have opposed outsourcing even though they know the cost difference.

"It's not a blind support," he said. "They know what they are saying."

Story cited an analysis of three new books bought by the library and LSSI. Bedford paid 86 cents less for the materials. Bedford bought 11,000 books last year, a \$9,500 difference, he said.

He also said that LSSI could be low-balling its figures on salaries and that the city would face a risk if it changes management when the library moves into a new building in the coming year.

Proposals

The city received two bids to operate the library.

The Bedford Public Library made a proposal for \$764,626 a year. Library Director Maria Redburn touted high customer service, knowledge of the community, programming, and ability to get grants and donations.

LSSI made a proposal with two cost estimates. A plan for \$622,740 a year would have included radio-frequency identification technology, which identifies materials without bar codes. Another for \$652,740 would not include the technology.

LSSI released its proposal Monday, after initially saying that some of the information was confidential.

In its proposal, LSSI said Bedford's current library staff is too devoted to office work,

such as book processing and ordering, instead of direct work with patrons.

The company said that by transferring processing and other functions to its offices in Germantown, Md., the library could be open 64 hours a week, instead of the current 59 hours, and some work space in the building could be freed up.

LSSI also proposed to eliminate the task of checking out books by having a self-check system based on RFID technology.

The biggest difference between the two budgets was salaries. Bedford has budgeted for 16.38 full-time equivalents. LSSI budgeted 14 full-time equivalents.

The library has experienced a tumultuous couple of years.

In 2005, the library closed for a month after a voter-approved property tax rollback forced the council to make drastic budget cuts.

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