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## As Landfill Nears Capacity, Battle Brews Over Future Contract

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**JACKSONVILLE, Fla.** -- A controversy is brewing over bids involving Jacksonville's city-owned landfill after a local company threatened to file suit if the city opens up bids for operations of Trail Ridge Landfill, which is nearing capacity.

The ethics commission is scheduled to meet Tuesday night at City Hall to discuss renewing a contract with Waste Management.

The mayor's office has renegotiated a deal with the company, lowering the rates and saving the city money, but the City Council must give the final OK, and not everyone is convinced that would be best for the city.

The city said it wants to clear new space before the garbage starts piling up, but to do that an ordinance must be passed, giving Waste Management the right to operate Trail Ridge Landfill and leaving other companies out of the bidding process.

"We don't want to put the city at a disadvantage where in five years, we don't have a landfill permitted or built," said Environmental and Compliance Director Ebenezer Gujjarlapudi.

The mayor has asked the City Council to extend the agreement with Waste Management, giving the contractor nearly a half billion dollars over the next 40 years.

Waste Management has already threatened to sue if other companies are allowed to bid because it believes the current contract doesn't expire until the landfill runs out of room.

The city said it wants to avoid a lawsuit at all costs.

"The worst thing that could happen to us is we could get hung up in a lawsuit and not have disposal capacity and ship the garbage out of the county. That would probably be in excess of a \$30 million annual impact to the city. That's what we're trying to avoid," said Solid Waste Department Division Chief L. Chris Pearson.

However, other commercial waste disposal companies argue taxpayers could save a lot of money by allowing other companies to make an offer.

Mary O'Brien with Advanced Disposal gave Channel 4 the following statement:

"We certainly will respect the final decision of the council and the administration. However, in the event the city does competitively bid the landfill contract, Advanced Disposal is prepared and qualified to submit a responsive and competitive bid to the city for this opportunity. For a contract of this magnitude, the competitive market is a fair and unbiased means of determining the true value of the landfill contract."

"Can we get a lower price? That's debatable," said Gujjarlapudi.

The ordinance would need the approval of two more committees after being reviewed by the ethics committed on

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Tuesday. It would then go before the full council in two weeks.

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