

Moermond, Marcia (CI-StPaul)

From: Mike and Benita <warns@pclink.com>
Sent: Thursday, December 12, 2013 11:57 PM
To: Moermond, Marcia (CI-StPaul)
Subject: Information on City Recycling

This is concerning the organized neighborhood cleanups. These events are paid for with taxes. The city pays the local district councils to organize the cleanups. The district councils are currently responsible for selecting vendors who come and collect various items brought by citizens to the cleanups. Many of the items collected – used furniture, lawnmowers/snowblowers, architectural salvage/building materials, bicycles, household goods, etc. – are not only reusable, but there are tax-paying businesses (primarily second-hand dealers) in St. Paul who sell these types of items, which generates tax revenue. However, there is no formal process for locally-owned businesses to gain access to these events. The district council staff generally use the same vendors year after year, because “we have always done it this way,” or because they are friends with a particular vendor.

Many of the vendors selected by district councils are non-profits, who don't pay taxes. Some of these non-profits operate retail outlets where they sell the goods that they get for free at cleanups, and are in direct competition with tax-paying businesses in the city. Why should tax-paying businesses be forced to subsidize their competition? Also, when district councils choose vendors according to who they know or like, and all interested businesses are not given an equal opportunity to participate, isn't this, in effect, discriminatory contracting?

I feel that the city needs to adopt a process that provides equal and open access to all businesses who wish to collect usable items at the cleanups. The process should give preference to businesses that pay taxes in the City of St. Paul prior to giving access to non-profits. The process can be as simple as a lottery to select vendors for the various events, or possibly a bid process where an event goes to the highest bidder. Any event that doesn't have any for-profit bidders for a particular commodity can then be awarded to any interested non-profits.

I operate a bicycle shop in St. Paul, and it is a business, not a non-profit. My business collects used bicycles, fixes them, and gives them away. To pay for this, I sell used bicycle parts and some used bicycles. I get no public money or grant income, I pay taxes, and I have chosen not to take a salary for my work. From 1998 to 2007, my business collected bicycles at the majority of the neighborhood cleanups in St. Paul. A local non-profit organization wanted to get the bicycles, so they proceeded to contact the district councils and told them that my business didn't actually give away bicycles, but that I sold them, and that it was just a story I told so I could get the bicycles. After a decade of satisfactory performance, my business suddenly stopped being invited to the cleanups. I didn't find out what happened until two years later, when someone who witnessed what had happened told me about it. That organization tried to ruin my reputation and good name, as well as take away my source of bicycles. My business has not been invited to any of the cleanups since 2007 except for one, which generated 7 bicycles.

Those bicycles are a valuable commodity. I don't believe that my business should get to do all the events if there are other bike shops who are interested in participating, but I do believe that I should have an equal opportunity to participate in these events. I also feel that non-profits should only be eligible if there is no interest from for-profit businesses. This should apply equally to all commodities generated at neighborhood cleanups. The vendor selection process should reside with the city, not the district councils.

Please share these thoughts with the members of the City Council as part of the policy discussion on recycling.

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