

City to move on delayed water-main bids

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Tuesday, August 4, 2009 7:04 AM MDT

The replacment of more than six miles of water-mains across Casper could begin before the end of the month if the city votes to accept the contested bid at tonight's meeting.

Construction should have started in the beginning of July. The city was forced to reject all the bids, though, because the low bidder, Hedquist Construction, didn't seek minority or women-owned subcontractors until a day before the bid was due. A state agency overseeing the federal money warned the city council that they couldn't use stimulus money if they accepted Hedquist's bid.

John Robinson, attorney for Hedquist Construction, sent a letter to the city in June warning that it could be exposed to "potential liability for Hedquist's lost profits on the project. Those lost profits could exceed \$1 million."

City council rejected all the bids despite Hedquist's objection, modified the scope of the project and tried again.

This time, High Plains Construction submitted the low bid, dropping their bid by more than \$1.1 million. Their new bid came in just under \$5.2 million but their bid last time was more than \$6.3 million.

Four days after the city revealed High Plains Construction as the low-bidder, Craig Hedquist wrote a letter to City Engineer Andrew Beamer accusing High Plains of doctoring their bid by pricing certain items at \$1 per unit.

According to the bid schedule submitted to the city by High Plains Construction, the company will install 6,500 linear feet of curb and gutter, and 3,500 feet of concrete sidewalk at \$1 per foot.

"If the first bid from High Plains was responsible and balanced, their second bid raises a number of questions," Hedquist wrote. "The city reserves the right to 'disregard all nonconforming, nonresponsive, unbalanced, or conditional bids.' Please be advised that High Plains' bid is neither responsible nor balanced."

Robinson said Hedquist was disappointed the city appears to be moving forward with the project and said Hedquist would "consider all its options." Robinson wouldn't say whether that meant Hedquist would sue the city.

Richard Moore, managing partner at High Plains Construction, said he wasn't concerned about Hedquist's contacts with city officials and was hopeful his company could begin work before the end of this month.

If Hedquist Construction were to sue the city, Mayor Kenyne Schlager said the city would likely move forward with construction and turn over the litigation to the Wyoming Association of Risk Management.

"I can't speak for council but I think we made a fiscally responsible decision and I don't know what [Hedquist]'s basis would be to sue us on," she said.

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