

PARK MAINTENANCE IN DALLAS— CONTRACT VERSUS FORCE ACCOUNT

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Philip Huey presented this paper at last January's Park and Recreation Maintenance-Management School held at Oglebay Park, Wheeling, WV. Both the National Recreation and Park Association and North Carolina State University sponsor the week-long program each January.

The spring and summer of 1978 marked the second year of a program utilizing contracts to accomplish certain phases of park maintenance.

The objective of this program was to provide contractual maintenance for park areas at less budget impact than as incurred by park forces. The group of contracts included neighborhood parks, library sites, and medians at 37 locations.

These sites were in all sections of the city and involved our three more intense classifications of maintenance. These are Class A, which is basically irrigated and with horticultural development mowed with a reel mower on a seven day schedule. Class B is irrigated without horticultural development, except for trees, mowed with a reel mower on a 7-10 day schedule. Class C is usually un-irrigated, mowed with rotary type mowers, and is mowed on a 12-18 day schedule depending on rain-fall intensity.

The contracted areas included 20.25 miles of medians, 1,468.39 acres of parksites and 6.75 acres of library sites. Our estimated contract cost was \$100,000 and the bids came in at \$99,223 with fourteen contractors being selected out of 25 who bid. Eleven of the fourteen were minority contractors.

Because we wanted to give bidding opportunity to the widest possible number of individuals, the contracts were broadly written and bonding, which is usually mandatory on all our contracts. Insurance requirements were also waived on park and library contracts, but remained on median contracts for reasons of high risk in traffic injuries.

Individual performance was made a special provision on all park and library site contracts. This meant the person signing the contract must be the person who actually performed the work. Contractors working under this special provision were not authorized to hire employees for assistance in the landscape maintenance. There was a limit of two properties per contractor, and equipment (1 mower and 1 edger) was provided for each contractor involved in park caretaker maintenance.

From the management standpoint, the amount of time required to put together the contracts was minimized since format was taken from the previous year's contracts, which had been developed by the City Attorney's Office.

Because we were trying to write the contract loosely to get the maximum number of bids, particularly from individuals and small contractors, the attorney had spent a lot of time working out special provisions so the City would be reasonably protected while still meeting the requirements of a small business contract.

Before proceeding with the actual experience in this project, let me enumerate our goals. They were to:

1. Provide private contract maintenance at park areas of equal quality but at less cost than the park department maintenance forces.

2. Improve maintenance at all contracted locations to include (a) better litter control, (b) better turf maintenance, and (c) more closely manicured ground cover, shrubbery, and flower beds.

3. Reduce maintenance costs at least by 10 percent to include supervisory and administrative costs in administering the contracts.

4. Make greater availability of remaining permanent park department personnel for more meticulous less easily contracted responsibilities.

5. Provide more efficient use of the dollars allocated because of reduced employee carrying costs in retirement, vacation, holidays, injury, worker's compensation, etc., and

6. Give more participation by small and minority contractors in the City of Dallas bidding process.

There is an Office of Minority Business Opportunity within our Purchasing Department whose sole responsibility is to seek out and encourage minority contractors to bid on City of Dallas contract, material, and construction requests. This division worked diligently to locate such contractors, and we feel they did all that is reasonably possible to find competent contractors.

In addition, we placed advertisements in 15 daily

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Good maintenance occurred with a family/team approach.

and weekly area newspapers, two of which were minority papers. We made announcements on the radio stations, one with a minority listening audience and the other a local country-western music station.

Our efforts were rewarded when minorities were successful with 79 percent of awarded contracts, representing 52 percent of total contract monies. All companies which were awarded median contracts were small businesses with five or less employees.

After close counseling with prospective bidders in a pre-bid maintenance meeting where we ac-



The fine points of a manicured maintenance program are missing in the maintenance of this crape myrtle bed. The bed is not weeded or edged and litter is not picked up.

ually told them the bid limits, the bids came in at a reasonable price and at a level where they could be accepted.

Work for most of the contractors began about April 10, 1978, which was an early date for contractors to start on the growing season. This was an advantage to both of us and a vast improvement over the previous year's late start.

We provided a separate type of maintenance contract and specifications along with the overall request for bid that went to each prospective bidder. These outline our expectations.

Following are some observations made during the course of the contract:

1. Contracts were properly executed by both the Park Department and the contractor. There were not any unnecessary delays in signing the forms and approving the median contractor's insurance.

2. Contractors were familiar with the specific locations of their job sites. This was due to close orientation received from each district supervisor in a pre-maintenance meeting held April 1, 1978.

3. Contractors presented their own schedule to follow and it was approved by the district supervisor. Most of the contractors adhered to the

approved schedule.

4. Landscape inspection was handled by the district supervisors who were familiar with the maintenance requirements of each park site. This method of inspection was not as time-consuming as the year before since the supervisors checked contracted sites along with their regular check route, thus eliminating any special trips.

5. All of the contractors had grounds maintenance experience. Our specifications did provide for rejection of their bid on the basis of "no previous experience."

6. Contact with each contractor was handled by the district supervisor concerned on an "as needed" basis and did not present a problem.

7. The contractors were adequately equipped. Median contractors had ample and efficient equipment and personnel. Other individual contractors who were provided with city-owned mowers and edgers for the most part took good care of the equipment. There was one case where equipment was not returned as specified and final payment was held by the city for reimbursement.

8. Payments were made to individual contractors on a weekly basis and to median contractors (companies) on a monthly basis. There was some problem with the time lapse between when the contractor submitted payment vouchers and when payment was actually received (approximately 1-1/2 weeks). However, the contractors were informed of the unavoidable payment delay before they entered into contract agreements.

9. City owned equipment which was loaned to individual contractors had a detrimental effect on park force maintenance. This was because the equipment was tied up for an entire season, even though it was only used every 7 days or less.

By midsummer 37 percent of the maintenance locations had been canceled and only nine contractors were still performing. At this time, before completion of our growing season and the contracts, I judged the whole project as not reaching the program goals. Even though this year's program had been by far more successful than that of the previous year, the contract results were still not meeting, let alone exceeding, those displayed by park forces.

The one bright spot in the contract picture at this time is still the individual contractor, responsible for all maintenance except large area mowing on a small neighborhood park. It is still recommended that this be approached more cautiously with only pre-qualified individuals and that the individuals be required to furnish their own equipment.

We believe this aspect of contract maintenance has greater possibilities because we are dealing with one person, in a confined area, on a full or almost fulltime basis where contact is reasonably early, work expectations easily outlined, and where daily contact by supervision is about the same as with a regular park employee.

We have a lot of polishing to do on this approach to maintenance, but if what has to be done to make the contracts work adds up to a higher cost than doing it with our own personnel then it is not worth it and we have spent money unnecessarily. **WTT**