

Fresno City Council chooses builder for southeast water treatment plant

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The Fresno City Council on Thursday took a major step forward on one of the biggest capital works projects in City Hall history, awarding a \$158.8 million contract to build a massive water treatment plant past the southeast fringes of the city.

W.M. Lyles Co. was the lowest among four bidders for the Southeast Surface Water Treatment Facility. It's a cornerstone project in "Recharge Fresno," the name for the \$429 million water system upgrade approved by the council this year in what officials say is the city's plan to secure water sustainability for Fresno. The vote was 7-0 to award the contract to the Fresno company.

The bid was below the engineer's estimate of \$160 million.

Public Utilities Director Thomas Esqueda told council members that voting on the contract was the biggest hurdle left in the project. City Manager Bruce Rudd said that barring a barrage of bad weather (a definite possibility with El Niño), construction should start early next year. Completion is slated for September 2018.

The surface water treatment plant southeast of Fresno – on a 58-acre parcel at the northwest corner of Armstrong and Olive avenues – will be able to handle 80,000 acre-feet of river water annually. The city already has a smaller treatment plant in the northeast part of town now that handles 30,000 acre-feet a year. An acre-foot is about 326,000 gallons. A typical Fresno family of four used to go through an acre-foot of water per year, though that has dropped as families have cut back usage under drought restrictions.

Fresno wants to use all 180,000 acre-feet of surface water (from the San Joaquin and Kings rivers) it has rights to in a decent rain year. But, for several reasons, the city can't. The biggest is lack of plants to treat the water before it gets to kitchen taps.

Together, the plants in northeast and southeast Fresno will eventually enable the city to treat 110,000 acre-feet a year. Fresno residents use 120,000 to 130,000 acre-feet a year.

The southeast water treatment facility is one of several projects to be completed in the next five years as part of the Recharge Fresno program. The plan is to take water from both the San Joaquin and Kings rivers, which will be treated and sent on to city residents. Officials say the projects will allow the city to significantly reduce the amount of water currently being pumped from the ground, and in the long run will enable the aquifer to be replenished.

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In other business

• **Downtown development:** The council approved a land deal at the corner of Stanislaus and L streets in downtown Fresno with Mark Astone, building as Upside Enterprises. Astone is proposing a mixed-use development that will have ground-floor commercial space and 70 residential units on upper floors. Years ago, a residential project had been proposed for the site, but it never came to pass. Land at the corner of Van Ness and Stanislaus where a vacant gas station sits is also part of the proposed project. Upside bought the land for \$147,000, but that money won't have to be paid for 30 years.

lowest of s	ix bids was \$1.	.03 million.			