

Night ball

Hills rebids lighting project

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer



The photo by RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Farmington Hills officials expect the installation of lights at Harrison High School's baseball fields to be completed before spring, despite a decision to seek a new set of construction bids.

The Farmington Hills City Council voted 5-2 Monday to reject three bids that city officials had received earlier in September and to rebid the project. The new bid proposals require the lights to be installed by March 1. Councilwomen Jodi Soronen and Joan Dudley opposed the measure.

The proposed installation of lights at the Harrison fields is the result of an agreement between the city and the Farmington Public Schools to provide more playing time and space for community teams. Under the agreement, the city will provide and pay for a lighting system for two baseball fields.

Lighting the fields will enable the city's parks and recreation teams to play on the school district-owned fields after dark. School district teams will continue to use the fields.

Two of the three bids that city officials received Sept. 11 exceeded the city's \$85,000 budget limit for the project by about \$16,000. The lowest of the two bids (tendered to do the project for \$104,300, while the other listed the project at \$111,285.

THE THIRD bid, for approximately \$88,000, was closer to the city's budget, but was received Sept. 17 — six days after the city's designated deadline.

"The one that was allowed to be turned in late was the lowest," City Manager William Costick said. "This does pose a dilemma."

Costick recommended that council accept the late bid because the city could pay less for the project than they would by accepting the lowest of the two more costly bids that were received within the deadline.

Wording on requests for bids sent to contractors says the city has the right "to accept or reject any or all bids, to award contracts to other than the low bidder, and to waive any informalities in the bidding procedure if it is found that the public interest will be better served."

The fact that the lowest bid from Draffen Electric in Farmington was late "could be termed an informality," Costick said. The lower bid also would serve public interest because it was closer to what the city had budgeted for the project, he added.

OFFERING HIS opinion on accepting the late bid, city attorney Paul Bibeau said, "I think in light of the bid wording, the city is within its right to accept the late bid."

But some council members expressed concern about the city losing its credibility by accepting a late bid.

"I think we lose credibility," Councilman Ben Marks said. "Even though it might cause a hardship (more costly bids) . . . the integrity of the city is far more important that we do things right and proper. That's a game you are playing. That's not legitimate business."

"I definitely agree with Ben (Marks) that accepting a late bid is twisting informality too far," Councilman Joe Alkateeb said, suggesting the city rebid the project.

Councilman Donna Wolf's concerns were similar. "I guess I have a real concern about accepting the late bid even though it is going to cost us \$16,000," he said.

But Dudley and Soronen disagreed. "I think the record of the city is such that we have established ourselves as very credible business people. I am so surprised that those who are so concerned about the taxpayers' dollars are willing to cast aside the opportunity to save money," Dudley said.

This May junior varsity game between Harrison and Farmington took place during daylight. Baseball after sunset is on target for next spring on Harrison's diamonds.

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Hills councilman

ACCEPTING ONE late bid doesn't mean the city will continue to do so, Dudley said. "I do think the citizens of this city, however, will not disagree if we take this opportunity to do this much needed, much deserved project for a good price," she said.

Soronen echoed Dudley's comments, adding, "I don't think our reputation will be sullied for accepting the bid."

Although Councilman Charles Williams supported rebidding the project, he raised concern about the lack of local contractors who offered bids. He suggested efforts be made to contact more contractors in the rebid.

The agreement between the city and school district comes at a time when residents have expressed concern over the Farmington area's lack of sports facilities.

Cooperation between the city and school district is easier and less costly than the city buying land specifically for the construction of new ball fields, city officials said.

The agreement also holds the city responsible for improving the fields when necessary, such as repairing or replacing fencing, improving the composition of infields and installing permanent restrooms. The city also is responsible for maintenance of the field and parking area.

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