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News Release

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AUB AWARDS TREE TRIMMING CONTRACT

ATHENS, Tenn. – At its monthly board meeting last night, directors of the Athens Utilities Board (AUB) awarded Asplundh Tree Expert Company, Inc. (Asplundh) a three-year contract to perform tree-trimming and -removal services that keep power lines and rights-of-way clear of trees and vegetation.

AUB solicited bids in September. All proposals were submitted to the utility on Oct. 31.

Utility spokesman Wayne Scarbrough said that seven companies originally acquired bid packages and four eventually submitted proposals including Asplundh; Seelbach Tree Expert Company; Trees, Inc.; and Wolf Tree Experts. Trees, Inc., withdrew their proposal with no stated reason during the evaluation process, leaving three proposals for full evaluation.

Along with pricing data, the proposals addressed qualification requirements that included safety, licensing, insurance, workforce credentials, adequate equipment and resources, experience at required levels of production, and training to perform to ANSI A-300 guidelines that dictate proper pruning methods adopted by the utility.

Asplundh has been the tree trimming contractor for AUB for many years. Scarbrough said that the company's length of service in Athens did not factor into AUB's contract award to the company.

"The playing field was level, period. All who qualified had the chance to compete for the business equally," Scarbrough said. "The award was made based on which company came in with the best cost picture while fully meeting all qualifying criteria," he said, "and that was Asplundh."

Eric Newberry, the utility's general manager, said that AUB hired the consulting firm Environmental Consultants, Inc., (ECI) to fully evaluate each proposal based on both a time-and-materials and a unit-rate basis.

"We chose to enlist ECI to ensure a thorough evaluation by a company whose focus is utility-line clearance practices and contracts," he said. "This approach will help us get the best package for the community.

"Furthermore, we wanted someone to evaluate each proposal in detail with complete neutrality, having no stake in who gets the award," Newberry said.

After a two-week scrubbing of all of the data, Asplundh was the clear winner under a time and materials approach, Newberry said.

AUB is structuring the contract to allow smaller, local contractors to compete for other right-of-way clearance work, such as using "bush hogs" and mowers to clear other rights of way.

“That will give the small contractor a shot at work on the system,” Newberry said.

“The continual circuit work on the primary lines requires a lot of equipment, a lot of human resources, stringent insurance requirements, and much more regulatory oversight,” he said. “But, we would like to break out clearing work on some rights-of-way for locals to bid on when we can.”

Scarborough said that AUB has changed the way it manages tree trimming in the past year to improve performance and reduce costs and in preparation for the recent re-bid to get the best service contract possible.

“We now have a person at the utility solely dedicated to planning the tree-trimming work in advance of the crews based on our primary lines and clearing needs and to communicate personally with customers whose trees will be pruned regarding exactly what is to be done and why,” he said.

As a result of this and a restructuring of the trimming crews, AUB’s cost per tree trimmed has been reduced significantly. Scarborough said that the key is AUB’s new approach to hands-on, in-the-field oversight of the contractor.

“This dedicated supervisor also is responsible to ensure that the crews stay on task when and where the planning dictates while simultaneously ensuring unplanned or emergency work is performed as needed,” he said.

“Regardless of who won the bid, contractor management is the key. Under our current system with a dedicated AUB supervisor, Asplundh delivers the production, quality, safety and community awareness that we require,” Scarborough said. “That’s what we would have required of any contractor and that’s what we’ll continue to require of Asplundh under the new contract.”