

Lone contractor bids to remove N.O. monuments

Firm wants \$600K to take down three Confederate statues

BY JEFF ADELSON

[jadelson@theadvocate.com](mailto:jadelson@theadvocate.com)

Only one bidder has submitted a proposal to take down three Confederate monuments in New Orleans, and that firm is asking more than three times the amount the city has budgeted for the project.

The scarce interest and the big price tag - perhaps not surprising in view of threats received by previous bidders - could ultimately delay taking the monuments down. The city may have to set aside more money for the job, which would require another vote of the City Council.

Cuzan Services Limited submitted a \$600,000 bid to remove the statues of Confederate Gens. Robert E. Lee and P.G.T. Beauregard and Confederate President Jefferson Davis from public view in New Orleans. The bid was opened Tuesday afternoon.

Mayor Mitch Landrieu's administration has said the removal will be paid for with funds from an anonymous private donor, but it will go through normal city budget processes. Several months ago, the city said it had secured about \$170,000 for the job.

"Given threats and violent acts toward previous contractors, we understand the increased costs can be due to increased risks," Landrieu spokesman Tyrone Walker said in an email Tuesday. "We remain committed to taking down the Confederate monuments and securing the funds necessary to do so."

The state's public bid laws do not prohibit a city from moving forward if there is only a single bidder or if the bid comes in above budget. However, state officials have previously advised municipalities to seek new bids when there is only one response and to budget the additional money before entering into a contract.

According to details from the bid read aloud during Tuesday's bid-opening meeting, Cuzan wants to charge \$300,000 to remove the statue of Lee from its pedestal on St. Charles Avenue and another \$150,000 each to remove the statues of Davis from Jefferson Davis Parkway and Beauregard from the main entrance to City Park.

The bid specifications called for three quotes, one for the removal of all three statues, one to remove only Lee and Davis and a third to remove only Lee.

The contract does not cover a fourth statue, the monument to the Battle of Liberty Place, a failed insurrection by a white supremacist militia against the state's biracial Reconstruction era government. That statue, now on Iberville Street, had been protected by a separate court order that was lifted after the city started requesting bids. It is not clear how the city will proceed with its removal.

Officials with Cruzan did not respond to a message left Tuesday afternoon.

The company is a licensed construction contractor in Louisiana that lists a variety of specialties, including heavy construction and demolition, in filings with the state. Those filings also list the firm as qualifying for the state's Disadvantaged Business Enterprise

program because its owner is black.

The bid specifications call for the statues to be removed by mid-May, officials have said they will be stored in a city warehouse until officials decide on a permanent location, such as a park or museum, where they can be placed and viewed in their "proper context."

The Monumental Task Committee, a preservation group that has led a legal fight to keep the monuments standing, said in a statement that the lack of bids should cause the Landrieu administration to give up on the process and instead use the money it has received to erect new statues.

"One bid in two years further demonstrates the unpopularity of removing historic features of New Orleans," Pierre McGraw, the group's president, said in the statement. "It is obvious to all except the mayor that very few people want these monuments hidden away. And it perfectly illustrates why lawmakers in Baton Rouge should support the three bills to preserve history and respect military veterans."

McGraw referred to three bills that have been filed in advance of this spring's legislative session, each of which would block the removal of the monuments.

Previous attempts to secure a company to handle the removal had been fraught with issues. The first firm selected pulled out after its owner said he received threats, prompting the city to put the project out for public bid.

Some firms whose names appeared on a publicly available list of companies that viewed the bid documents reported receiving harassing phone calls from those who support keeping the statues in place. That bid request was eventually scrapped when it appeared the court case would drag on indefinitely.

Tuesday, opponents of removing the monuments shared the phone number of the bidding company and information about its owner on social media, urging others to call and express their displeasure or threaten to boycott the firm.

At Landrieu's request, the City Council voted 6-1 in December 2015 to declare the statues "nuisances" and have them removed from public property. But their actual removal has been stalled by lawsuits seeking to keep them standing. That roadblock was lifted earlier this year, when the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals denied a request to issue an order prohibiting the city from removing the monuments while a full trial plays out in U.S. District Court.