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Louisiana Parish Seeks Expertise in Negotiating Wastewater System Contract.

Ascension Parish, La., is seeking an expert in public-private partnerships to serve as its technical advisor and act as the parish's representative for the procurement of a wastewater treatment system project.

The consultant must have the qualifications to negotiate a design-build-finance-operate P3 agreement and provide implementation and oversight support for the project's development, according to the RFQ notice the parish issued on Jan. 26. The deadline for responses is Feb. 23.

Ascension Parish decided in December to begin negotiating the \$300 million project with a single bidder, Ascension Environmental LLC, which would build, own and operate a regional wastewater system for 30 years. At the end of the term, the system's ownership would revert to the parish.

The parish's decision to negotiate the P3 with a single bidder followed multiple unsuccessful attempts over eight years to build a system to treat sewage from its east bank without imposing new taxes or hefty user fees.

The partners expect to raise \$240 million in private capital through debt offerings. The remainder will come from a \$60 million loan the parish obtained from the state during an earlier attempt to finance the project on its own, reported The Advocate on Dec. 27.

The plan involves a buyout of two local wastewater treatment plants to increase the new plant's customer base, which is expected to yield more than 16,000 customers by year one, 1,000 of which will be commercial users. One of the buyout targets, Ascension Wastewater Treatment, has joined Ascension Environmental's development team. The Louisiana Public Service Commission will review the buyout plan before it can be finalized to ensure it will be of public benefit.

The first three phases of the project, which would be conducted over five to six years, would involve closing down up to 40 neighborhood wastewater treatment plants annually, beginning in 2018, as replacement plants open. The cost to build a fourth plant and its service network was not disclosed but the partners expect the number of customers to have increased enough by then to cover the expense. When switched to the new system, customers will move from a flat fee to a user-based fee system.

NCPPP

By Editor

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