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Panel OKs new water test deal

By RICHARD BROOKS

GEL Engineering would continue monitoring for pollution.

GEL Engineering LLC would continue to monitor local water quality if the Beaufort County Council approves a contract Monday.

The council's Natural Resources Committee recommended the contract with the Charleston firm, which has monitored the county's water quality for two years.

The total contract would cost $247,968, with the county paying $169,535 and the remainder paid by four municipalities.

"It's a different twist. … It's one contract but four monitoring plans," said county Stormwater Manager Dan Ahern.

The scope of the contract calls for separate monitoring programs north and south of the Broad River, according to a memo Ahearn sent to the Natural Resources Committee.

The county would pay $63,250 of monitoring costs south of the Broad. The towns of Bluffton and Hilton Head Island would sign separate contracts with GEL, paying $20,508 and $45,000, respectively.

The county's share of north of the Broad monitoring would be $106,286, with the city of Beaufort and town of Port Royal each paying 25 percent of the contract.

The current contract with GEL Engineering ends Oct. 31. The new contract would start Nov. 1 and end Oct. 31, 2010, and can be extended by the county for up to five years.

Six water-quality monitoring proposals were received in July and evaluated by a panel of two county and four municipal members.

Other bidders included: Terry Environmental Services of Summerville, $359,700; WPC Engineering of Savannah, $309,266; Tidewater Environmental Services of John's Island, $217,417; BP Barber & Associates of Charleston, $308,634; and Integrated Science & Engineering of Savannah, $281,043.

The panel narrowed the field Sept. 18 to GEL and Tidewater. The companies made presentations Sept. 29 before the panel recommended GEL.

Testing water-quality samples in local rivers and creeks for pollutants is part of the Beaufort County Stormwater Management Plan adopted in 2006.

Monitoring tracks long-term water-quality trends in areas with significant increases in impervious surfaces because of development to determine if the current Best Management Practices are effective and to establish a data baseline for later comparisons.