

City of Hutto and Hutto ISD left behind regarding landfill hosting fees

As some of you may have read in *The Hutto News* and *The Taylor Daily Press*, Williamson County's landfill contractor, Waste Management of Texas (or WMI) has filed a lawsuit against the Texas Attorney General and against Williamson County to try to keep secret the amount of the discounted tipping fees paid by commercial haulers at the Williamson County landfill. The lawsuit came after I made an open records request to the county for public disclosure of these rates and after the Texas Attorney General agreed with me that the information should be made public. This past Monday I filed as a personal intervenor in that lawsuit.

These secret tipping fees for commercial haulers are significant because WMI's own hauling company receives the discount—which is set by WMI itself—in a classic example of self-dealing. My open records request threatened to expose the arrangement. This issue is significant for Hutto and the Hutto Independent School District because Hutto deserves the same kind of hosting fee deal that WMI has made with the City of New Braunfels, and Comal County, and the Edgewood Independent School District related to landfills proximate to those institutions, amounting to over a million dollars per year in payments. Instead of going to a corporate bottom line, these funds should benefit the City of Hutto and the Hutto ISD as compensatory hosting fees because of the economic and environmental fallout from the landfill north of Hutto.

Yes, Williamson County made available to the City of Hutto a 25-acre tract of land next to the landfill for use as a soccer field, but that deal fell flat when Hutto voters failed to approve the bonds that would have been sold for the money needed to develop that property because this white-elephant gift wasn't suitable—located in a floodplain next to an environmentally objectionable landfill. And yes, it is true, that the new landfill contract sets aside one percent of annual revenues for the benefit of the Hutto area. But that benefit—paltry though it is—is not cash. It would be for parks or other improvements determined only by the county and which the county *already* ought to be providing through other means. I urge you to join me and others as an intervenor in this lawsuit in the interest of transparency in government. Let's expose the secret and find out how much Hutto is losing. All documents related to this case are online at: www.gismedia.com/agreement .