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Special Election Feb. 13 to Fill Wasserstrom Seat

BY CARON CONWAY

The City of Hollywood will hold a special election to fill the seat of suspended Commissioner Keith Wasserstrom, who is awaiting trial on five felony charges for his role in helping a sludge-processing company secure an \$18 million contract with the city.

Commissioners unanimously voted Oct. 18 to hold the election, which will cost the city about \$58,000 and is tentatively set for Feb. 13. The qualifying period for the race will be Jan. 3 to 9. Wasserstrom's term would have expired in 2008.

Gov. Jeb Bush removed the commissioner from office Oct. 11, one day after the Broward State Attorney's Office charged Wasserstrom with four felony counts of official misconduct and one felony count of unlawful compensation. If convicted, he faces up to 25 years in prison. Wasserstrom pleaded not guilty at his Oct. 26 arraignment.

According to prosecutors, Wasserstrom entered into an illegal agreement with a lobbying firm to persuade fellow city commissioners to choose Schwing Bioset, a sludge-processing company whose bid was almost \$6 million higher than a competing company and which was ranked lowest among three companies by a six-member committee of experts formed by the city.

As part of his deal with The Normandy Group, a consulting firm that worked for Schwing Bioset and was run by his aunt's ex-husband, Wasserstrom's law firm would profit from lobbying fees for any cities that piggybacked on the Hollywood contract, according to prosecutors. Wasserstrom also was allegedly lobbying other local governments on behalf

of Schwing Bioset nearly a year before he persuaded fellow commissioners to award the company the contract in 2004.

Commissioners voted 3-2 in favor of Schwing Bioset, a subsidiary of Minnesota-based Schwing America. Wasserstrom and Mayor Mara Giuliani, whose son was Wasserstrom's law partner at the time, abstained from vote on the sludge-processing contract, citing the appearance of a conflict of interest.

In the wake of Wasserstrom's arrest on the felony charges, South Broward cities that pay Hollywood to treat their sewage are re-examining the arrangement and at least one city, Dania Beach, is considering taking legal action to force Hollywood to establish a regional authority that would give users an official voice in operations at the plant at 1621 N. 14th Ave.

Hollywood was established as the regional waste-treatment provider by the Florida Legislature in 1978. The other cities that pay Hollywood for sewage treatment are Hallandale Beach, Miramar, Pembroke Park and Pembroke Pines.

Schwing Bioset originally wanted \$27 million for the five-year Hollywood contract, but agreed to reduce the price to \$18 before the deal was signed. The company's sludge-processing technology, its trademark Bioset process, involves adding lime and powdered acid to wastewater and sewage. The mixture is then cooked and pressurized, converting it into "biosolids" that are recycled as fertilizer pellets. The company is part of a German-based group that manufactures specialized pumps and equipment used in power plants, dredging and oil refineries, in addition to wastewater treatment plants.



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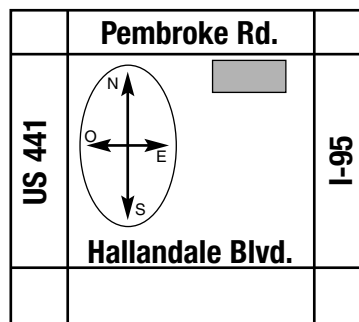
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