

The Hutto Citizens Group

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Morrison now the '**decider**' on the landfill

Using a word from the vocabulary of President George W. Bush, it's clear that Williamson County Precinct 4 Commissioner Ron Morrison is now the “**decider**” regarding what will transpire regarding the county's landfill north of Hutto.

The reason Morrison now has that status and authority is because three other members of commissioners court—Pct. 1 Commissioner Lisa Birkman, Pct. 2 Commissioner Cynthia Long, and Pct. 3 Commissioner Valerie Covey—have stated that they look to Morrison to take the lead regarding what the county will do on the landfill contract and permit, and they also have said that they will follow his lead. And Morrison has said nothing to indicate otherwise, thereby accepting the point-man status.

Morrison has been the “**decider**” for quite awhile now, at least since August 28, 2007, when commissioners voted 4-1 to table the proposed, renegotiated landfill contract between the county and Waste Management (WMI). Apparently County Judge Dan Gattis doesn't hold the same view as Birkan, Long and Covey regarding following Morrison's lead, inasmuch as Gattis cast the sole dissenting vote on that motion to table and, in the opinion of the Hutto Citizens Group (HCG), appears to be acting in a ham-handed manner to get a majority of commissioners to approve a new contract with WMI. Based on media reports, it appears that a draft of the renegotiated contract will be brought up for a vote in commissioners court in late September or early October.

Morrison shut down dialogue with Hutto citizens regarding the landfill during the third week in July as citizens awaited a *charrette* he had committed to set up on July 28. The *charrette* had been requested by members of the Hutto City Council. Morrison failed to follow through, however, and the *charrette* was not held. Despite requests from the HCG to Morrison that he state publicly whether or not he endorsed the components which the HCG sees as necessary in a renegotiated contract, Morrison failed to respond, except for a press release issued through the county on August 11, stating that it was his “desire” to accommodate the Hutto citizens regarding what they want in the contract and that he favors “recycling”.

It was at the regular commissioners court meeting the following day (August 12) when Gattis issued what has been described as his *gag scenario*, in which he asked other members of commissioners court not to discuss the terms and conditions of the new contract being negotiated. The HCG invited Morrison to its next regular meeting on August 19, *not to discuss the terms and conditions* of the pending contract, but to determine his reason for not *publicly* supporting his constituents' views on the landfill, a discussion which would not have been in violation of Gattis' *gag scenario*. Not only did Morrison not show up for the HCG's August 19 meeting, he didn't respond to any of the HCG's executive board to say he wouldn't be coming.

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In addition, Pete Correa, the top county employee on Morrison's staff who took the message about the invitation by phone, was asked to sit in for Morrison in the event the commissioner was unable to attend. However, Correa didn't attend the August 19 meeting either, and no regrets were sent by him before or after the meeting.

Based on what Birkman, Long and Covey consistently have said over time, the decision made by the county is up to Morrison, even if it has to come through a 4-1 vote with Gattis not voting with the majority.

On the other hand, Morrison would be remiss if he forgets that his constituents are counting on him to represent their interests, especially in light of the detailed input which has been provided to him regarding what must be included in the landfill contract, and what subsequent action needs to be taken on the permit amendment expansion application (1405-B) which is awaiting the county's go-ahead before being scheduled for a hearing at the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). The details of the HCG's position can be found in the July 28 letter sent to Morrison which is posted at www.huttocg.com.

Based on the information Morrison has received from the HCG prior to Gattis' *gag* instruction, he is fully aware of the difference between a *good* contract with WMI and a *bad* contract with WMI.

If the proposed contract which emerges is *bad* for the county's citizens, taxpayers, the City of Hutto, and residents of the Hutto area, Morrison knows that to properly represent his constituents, he must vote against it and take the lead in stopping it from being passed.

If he does, then Birkman, Long and Covey will have some serious explaining to do if they don't follow Morrison's lead.

On the other hand, if Morrison, as the “**decider**” votes *for a bad* contract, he also should know that Gattis' *gag* scenario no longer applies, so he'll be able to look forward to a long and intensive public discussion regarding why he voted the way he did.

That's the kind of accountability which accompanies being a “**decider**”.

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