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# Regional waste authority finalizing contract with AI-led disposal and recycling provider



Stephen Katz/The Virginian-Pilot

The Southeastern Public Service Authority, which handles the Southside cities' waste disposal, is negotiating a contract with Commonwealth Sortation LLC, an alternative waste disposal provider that uses artificial intelligence and other technology to improve recycling efforts, repurpose waste and prolong the life of the regional landfill, which is on track to fill up in a few decades.



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The Southeastern Public Service Authority, which handles South Hampton Roads cities' waste disposal, is closing in on a new provider to help improve recycling efforts for member cities, repurpose waste and prolong the life of the regional landfill.

The SPSA board passed a resolution at its February meeting to finalize negotiations for a contract with Commonwealth Sortation, a process expected to take several months, according to SPSA Executive Director Dennis Bagley.

SPSA has spent a year requesting and reviewing several bids from alternative waste disposal services because of the [closure of the WIN Waste plant](#), formerly known as the Wheelabrator facility, which burned 80% of the region's trash for decades. The former plant also converted waste into steam energy for the Norfolk Naval Shipyard. Then, 30% of the ash left over was diverted to the landfill.

The plant's closure resulted in added pressure at the regional landfill, prompting a need for alternative waste disposal that's also more environmentally sustainable.

So SPSA is now moving forward with Commonwealth Sortation LLC, a subsidiary of AMP Robotics — a Colorado-based alternative waste disposal provider that uses artificial intelligence and robotics to extract mixed recyclables and organic material from municipal solid waste. It removes and sorts recyclables from mixed waste streams and repurposes organic waste to produce biochar, a charcoal-like material that can be sold and used in concrete, for example, for roads and other infrastructure.

AMP Robotics is set up in Portsmouth to process waste at a facility owned by Recycling and Disposal Solutions of Virginia. Bagley said the move to expand work with the company is exciting, adding that its technology will ensure less contaminated recyclables can be repurposed as commodities that can be sold.

"Now we'll be looking at our waste stream as an asset, and that's something that we've been working on for a long time, and it's long overdue," Bagley said. "Our industry is changing, and we're talking about using AI in the trash industry. That speaks volumes of what we're doing with technology."

The authority [handles hundreds of thousands of tons of waste](#) for Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk and Virginia Beach, in addition to surrounding localities such as Franklin and Southampton and Isle of Wight counties.

Bagley said the company would remove recyclables “to the tune of about 20% of the total volume.” Cities are currently recycling roughly 6% of total volume.

Another 30% of collected waste would be the extraction of organic materials to repurpose and produce the biochar, he said.

Commonwealth Sortation touts a \$100 million investment for the region, according to its bid, Bagley said. Though the final contract cost is being negotiated, the final agreed-upon price per ton will include costs associated with SPSA's operation of transfer stations, the cost to use the landfill, transportation and disposal charges from Commonwealth Sortation.

SPSA is also working to expand the landfill and extend the life by constructing additional parcels of land called “cells.” The expansion of two cells is underway, another is permitted and two more are being requested with wetland mitigation credits. A current [environmental impact statement](#) to expand cells is available online, with a public comment period open until March 31.

Bagley said while the additional requested cells will extend the landfill's capacity to 2060, “this alternative waste disposal option would increase our capacity at the regional landfill through the end of the century.” Further expansion of the landfill wouldn't be allowed.

As the SPSA board awaits a final contract to vote on, SPSA is touching base with all participating cities to urge use and support agreement renewals before the June 2027 renewal date. The goal is to expedite the timeline in coordination with a contract award to Commonwealth Sortation.

Those agreements are automatically renewed for a decade, so cities have to notify SPSA 18 months in advance if they don't wish to renew. Bagley said no participating cities have expressed any interest in pulling out, but SPSA is currently encouraging bumping agreements up from 10 years to 20 years.

“We see the success of our operations in Portsmouth as a blueprint for SPSA and municipalities across the country looking to extend the life of their landfills and reach ambitious diversion targets,” AMP CEO Tim Stuart said in a statement.

“The economic and environmental opportunity in extracting value from the municipal solid waste stream is significant, and we look forward to delivering on that promise in South Hampton Roads.”

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