

St. Paul

Trash collection foes reach number needed for vote

City says ending contract would violate state statutes

By **Frederick Melo**
fmelo@pioneerpress.com

Opponents of St. Paul's new system of organized trash collection have submitted enough valid signatures to get their petition on a public ballot, but the St. Paul City Council thinks it has the legal means to block the effort.

After conferring with the city attorney's office, city officials say any efforts to sever the contract the city signed in November 2017 with a coalition of trash haulers would violate state statutes.

They highlight two statutes that allow cities to adopt rates for rubbish removal and authorize them to organize trash collection through a variety of means, including bid contracts.

In a resolution to be voted upon Wednesday, council members are calling the anti-trash collection petition "an unconstitutional interference with the agreement between the city and the consortium (of trash haulers)" that "conflicts with state public policy."

Alisa Lein, a property man-

ager who helped collect signatures against the city contract, said she would have a public comment to share on Monday.

Organized trash collection began Oct. 1, with particular haulers assigned to particular streets and neighborhoods.

As a result, for the first time since the 1970s, each St. Paul block is serviced by a single hauler instead of multiple garbage removal companies.

Proponents have said residents will benefit from uniform citywide rates and less wear-and-tear on city streets from trucks. Opponents say the rates are too high and object to the city requiring all households to maintain separate trash carts.

In the past, tenants of apartment buildings and condos shared carts with neighbors, cutting down on costs while providing extra incentive to recycle and produce less garbage in the first place.

Dubbing themselves St. Paul Trash and St. Paul Cartless, a coalition of residents opposed to the new contract submitted a petition to the

Ramsey County Elections office on Oct. 19.

The petition, which contained more than 6,400 signatures, seeks a public referendum on city ordinance 18-39, which was instrumental in establishing organized trash collection in the city for homes of one to four units.

Of those signatures, the county found 5,541 of them to be valid, as in unique signatures from registered voters.

The council resolution that will be voted upon next week acknowledges that the petition more than met the required threshold of 4,932 signatures, equivalent to 8 percent of those who voted for mayor in 2017.

On Friday, at least one city council member said residents should be given the opportunity to vote.

"If it's on the ballot, and it's that great a program, then the citizens will endorse it heartily," council member Dan Bostrom said.

Frederick Melo can be reached at 651-228-2172 and fmelo@pioneerpress.com, or on Twitter at @FrederickMelo.