

Huntington Beach declares local emergency in response to impacts of refuse collection strikes



Members of Teamsters Local 396 go on strike at the Republic Services facilities in Huntington Beach earlier this month. The city declared a local emergency in response. (Kevin Chang / Staff Photographer)

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The Huntington Beach City Council on Tuesday night unanimously declared a local emergency in response to an ongoing labor dispute between the city's waste hauler, Republic Services, and its employees.

The declaration authorizes city staff to administratively issue limited and temporary permits to a company to perform trash collection and waive some regulations related to the co-mingling of refuse and the transfer of refuse across county lines.

This move allows the execution of an alternative service plan to mitigate disruption in trash collection during labor negotiations.

The city entered a contract with Republic Services in 2006. City Manager Oliver Chi said the city was notified about the ongoing labor dispute between the company and its staff on Dec. 9.

Unionized staff — represented by Teamsters Local 396 — have been [on strike since Dec. 9](#), forming picket lines in front of the company's facilities in Huntington Beach and Anaheim.

Employees allege there have been unfair labor practices committed during negotiations, including threats to employees that spoke to media after the union voted to authorize the strike in late November. Other complaints include being required to work 14-hour shifts, poor work conditions, allegations of the company's use of non-contracted labor and retaliation when employees filed grievances with the company.

City officials met with representatives from Republic Services on Dec. 11.

Chi said the city then issued a notice to the company that stated it was failing to do its contractual obligations and that the city, per the contract, was allowed to identify an alternative service for refuse collection at the company's cost. Chi said that plan was to be executed by Wednesday at 5 p.m. if the issue was not resolved.

Additionally, Chi said the contract with Republic Services can be canceled if the contractor is unable to perform its obligations within the timeframe outlined.

Chi said staff hopes for the plan to be implemented by this weekend.

Republic Services general manager Chris Kentopp said during public comments that the company valued its long-standing relationship with the city of Huntington Beach and other neighboring jurisdictions, adding that the company was continuing to negotiate in good faith.

However, Kentopp asserted Republic Services officials believe the city did not need to engage a third-party hauler to provide services in the city as it might cause further confusion or disruptions.

Representatives from Teamsters Local 396 also spoke at Tuesday night's meeting. They described negotiations earlier that day as very positive and said they were optimistic about reaching a resolution soon.

Mayor Pro Tem Mike Posey described the actions by council on Tuesday as a proactive step to delegate authority to staff if it is needed and a step that can be revoked if that authority is no longer needed.

“This is kind of wild that this got added to [the meeting's] agenda. We all assumed that this was kind of a one-day stoppage when this kind of came out. I know some of the community said we should have known about this, blah, blah, blah. ‘This was in November!’ Well, there was a strike

authorization, but not a vote to strike. This surprised I think everybody, including folks in organized labor,” said Councilman Dan Kalmick.

“So, kudos to staff on just jamming on getting alternatives set up,” Kalmick continued, adding that he was hopeful the company and its employees could soon come to an agreement. “I do agree with Mayor Pro Tem Posey that we have to put some tools in our tool belt for contingency plans to make sure that we don’t have to come back tomorrow night to do something that we could have done tonight.”

Residents are advised to put their trash bins out on their regularly scheduled collection days. If their trash is not picked up, then they are asked to leave the bins out until they are emptied.

Street sweeping is also expected to continue, but the city will not be issuing sweeping citations through Dec. 26.

If residents are in urgent need of disposal services, they are encouraged to drop off their trash from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday at the city’s public works yard at 17371 Gothard St., Greer Park, Edison Park, Murdy Park and the Meadowlark Golf Club.