

## **Business**

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### **County may change how it buys goods and services**

By [JOURNAL STAFF](#)

When King County awarded an office-supplies contract last year to the highest bidder, a complaint was filed with the county ombudsman. The incident touched off calls for the county to become more transparent about how it buys goods and services.

The County Council followed up on Monday by approving a motion that calls for the county executive to review the county code and procurement practices. The executive is expected to submit a report, and possibly proposed legislation, to the council by July 17.

The goal is to make it clearer to bidders and the public why a particular bidder was selected for a specific contract.

“King County used to award contracts on a straight price basis, but has since adopted a more nuanced procurement system to ensure taxpayers realize the greatest overall value from each contract,” said Council Chairman Dow Constantine. “Unfortunately, this point system makes it harder for observers — including the bidders themselves

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— to determine exactly why a contract was awarded to a specific bidder.”

Constantine also said he's heard complaints that procurement has become “unduly complex and burdensome.”

The county motion could lead to more streamlined procedures based on best practices of other governments and large corporations.

The county has two processes for purchasing goods and services.

Under one — an invitation to bid — the lowest, most responsive responsible bidder must get the contract. Under the other process — a request for proposals — price is only one of several factors the county considers along with other criteria such as expertise, the ability to conduct e-commerce and small-business status.

The RFP process, like the one that generated the complaint about the office-supplies contract, also allows the county to negotiate the terms and conditions of the contract.

Changes in the procurement of goods and services would not affect how the county bids its construction contracts, technical services or architecture, engineering and professional services.

The county's procurement Web site is [procurement.kingcounty.gov/procurement\\_OVR](http://procurement.kingcounty.gov/procurement_OVR). Users can find bid opportunities, the status of the solicitation, which firms expressed interest, which firms submitted bids or proposals, and which firm was awarded a contract.

Those who want more detailed information can contact the county buyer listed on the solicitation and get copies of the ranking forms used to award a particular contract. Though the information is not posted on the Web site due to the large volume of contracts and bids awarded each year — around 20,000 — it is available to those who ask for it.

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