

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 2001 SESSION

CHAPTER 498

An Act to amend and reenact §§ 15.2-2100, 15.2-2101 and 15.2-2102 of the Code of Virginia, relating to granting of franchises.

[H 2094]

Approved March 22, 2001

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 15.2-2100, 15.2-2101 and 15.2-2102 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 15.2-2100. Restrictions on selling certain municipal public property and granting franchises.

A. No rights of a city or town in and to its waterfront, wharf property, public landings, wharves, docks, streets, avenues, parks, bridges, or other public places, or its gas, water, or electric works shall be sold except by an ordinance passed by a recorded affirmative vote of three-fourths of all the members elected to the council, notwithstanding any contrary provision of law, general or special, and under such other restrictions as may be imposed by law. Notwithstanding any contrary provision of law, general or special, in case of a veto by the mayor of such an ordinance, it shall require a recorded affirmative vote of three-fourths of all the members elected to the council to override the veto.

B. No franchise, lease or right of any kind to use any such public property or any other public property or easement of any description, in a manner not permitted to the general public, shall be granted for a period longer than forty years, except for air rights together with easements for columns for support, which may be granted for a period not exceeding sixty years.

Before granting any such franchise or privilege for a term in excess of five years, except for a trunk railway, the city or town shall, after due advertisement, publicly receive bids therefor, in such manner as is provided by § 15.2-2102, and shall then act as may be required by law.

Such grant, and any contract in pursuance thereof, may provide that, upon the termination of the grant, the plant as well as the property, if any, of the grantee in the streets, avenues and other public places shall thereupon, without compensation to the grantee, or upon the payment of a fair valuation become the property of the city or town; but the grantee shall be entitled to no payment by reason of the value of the franchise. Any such plant or property acquired by a city or town may be sold or leased or, if authorized by general law, maintained, controlled, and operated by such city or town. Every such grant shall specify the mode of determining any valuation therein provided for and shall make adequate provisions by way of forfeiture of the grant, or otherwise, to secure efficiency of public service at reasonable rates and the maintenance of the property in good order throughout the term of the grant.

C. Any additional restriction now required in any existing municipal charter relating to the powers of cities and towns in selling or granting franchises or leasing any of their property is hereby superseded; however, nothing herein contained shall be construed as affecting the term of any existing franchise, lease or right. The requirement of an affirmative three-fourths vote of council shall apply only to the sale of the listed properties and not to their franchise, lease or use.

D. The provisions of this section shall only apply to cities or towns and shall not apply to counties or other political subdivisions.

§ 15.2-2101. Ordinance proposing grant of franchise, etc., to be advertised.

A. Before granting any franchise, privilege, lease or right of any kind to use any public property described in § 15.2-2100 or easement of any description, for a term in excess of five years, except in the case of and for a trunk railway, the city or town proposing to make the grant shall advertise a descriptive notice of the ordinance proposing to make the grant once a week for ~~four~~ two successive weeks in a newspaper having general circulation in the city or town. The descriptive notice of the ordinance may also be advertised as many times in such other newspaper or newspapers, published outside the city, town or Commonwealth, as the council may determine. The advertisement shall include a statement that a copy of the full text of the ordinance is on file in the office of the clerk of the city or town council.

B. The advertisement shall invite bids for the franchise, privilege, lease or right proposed to be granted in the ordinance. The bids shall be in writing and delivered upon the day and hour named in the advertisement; ~~in open session, to the presiding officer of the council of the city or town and shall be opened in public session and marked for identification by the person designated in the advertisement to receive such bids.~~ The cost of the required advertisement shall be paid by the city or town which shall be reimbursed by the person to whom the grant is made. The city or town shall have the right to reject any and all bids and shall reserve this right in the advertisement.

§ 15.2-2102. How bids received and to whom franchise awarded.

The presiding officer shall read aloud, or cause to be read aloud, a brief summary of *each* of the bids

that have been received, for public information, and shall then inquire if any further bids are offered. If further bids are offered, they shall be received. The presiding officer shall thereafter declare the bidding closed. *The presiding officer shall receive recommendations from the staff relative to any bids received in advance and staff's recommendations, if any, on any bids received at the advertised council meeting.* After ~~reference to a committee, if there is one,~~ and such other investigation as the council sees fit to make, the council shall accept the highest bid from a responsible bidder and shall adopt the ordinance as advertised, without substantial variation, except to insert the name of the accepted bidder. However, the council, by a recorded vote of a majority of the members elected to the council, may reject a higher bid and accept a lower bid from a responsible bidder and award the franchise, right, lease or privilege to the lower bidder, if, in its opinion, some reason affecting the interest of the city or town makes it advisable to do so, which reason shall be expressed in the body of the subsequent ordinance granting the franchise, right, lease or privilege. *The process described in this section may run concurrently with any other advertisement or public ordinance requirements of this title, or such requirements as may be contained in charters of such cities or towns.*