

Lewisville may crack down on hiring of illegal immigrants

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Lewisville may become the next area city to tackle the thorny issue of immigration.

The City Council next month will discuss requiring city contractors to ensure that their employees are working legally in the United States.

"I want people we do business with to show they're doing their due diligence," said council member John Gorena, an opponent of illegal immigration who narrowly won a seat on the council last year.

He's proposing that the city expand its use of E-Verify, a federally maintained electronic database system containing Social Security and other records. The system is used by the federal government for sizable contracts.

Twelve states require the use of some elements of the system to verify employment status of workers. Three states – Arizona, Mississippi and South Carolina – require all employers to use some level of E-Verify. Texas has no such requirement.

Lewisville already uses E-verify for its employees. The city also requires that its contractors comply with federal immigration laws. However, the city has no way to verify that contractors are hiring only legal workers.

That would change under Gorena's proposal to require contractors to confirm workers' employment status with E-Verify.

His proposal is modeled after a program in Mission Viejo, Calif. That city became one of the first in the nation to require contractors to check the immigration status of their workers with the government verification system.

Businesses that benefit from city tax dollars should be required to comply, Gorena said.

"Some companies in Lewisville already use E-Verify," he said at Monday's council meeting. "This is something we can ask our contractors to do."

Gorena's proposal, made this week, received a lukewarm reception from other council members, who were concerned about straying too far into immigration policies.

Farmers Branch has become known for its battles over illegal immigration and is in costly litigation over its ordinance banning illegal immigrants from renting apartments.

Gorena's motion to draft an ordinance on his proposal died for lack of a second. Another motion, to increase the number of Lewisville police officers trained to perform some immigration law enforcement duties, also died.

Despite the lack of support, Gorena's colleagues on the council agreed with the goal of discouraging the use of illegal workers.

"No one here is in favor of people working illegally," council member David Thornhill said.

But members had numerous questions about how the program would be enforced. They want to know whether it could open the city to federal penalties and about limitations of the system.

"I have two pages of questions," said council member Greg Tierney, who said the issue required more discussion. His motion to include the E-Verify proposal on the agenda for next month's council retreat was approved.

The retreat is scheduled for Feb. 4-6 at the Lewisville Convention Center.

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