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Ariel Brown, a homeschool student, holds up a dress while browsing during Eblen Charities' Prom Dress Express event at the Bill Waddell Warehouse on March 25 in Asheville. The event provides free attire for prom and other special occasions to those in need. PHOTOS BY JOSH BELL/ASHEVILLE CITIZEN TIMES

A perfect fit

Eblen Charities offers free formalwear to Asheville teens



McKalynn Davis, a virtual student, right, and her mother Cristy Davis look at a dress during Eblen Charities' Prom Dress Express event at the Bill Waddell Warehouse.



Ray Brown adjusts a dress while trying it on during Eblen Charities' Prom Dress Express event at the Bill Waddell Warehouse on March 25.

Current city bus operator to continue in Asheville

RATP Dev gets contract again

Sarah Honosky
Asheville Citizen Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

ASHEVILLE – City Council authorized execution of a new four-year, multimillion-dollar contract for operation of its bus system on March 24, ultimately choosing to remain with the same vendor who has run the system for the last nine years.

Asheville City Council voted 4-3 to allow City Manager DK Wesley to execute a \$54.9 million contract with RATP Dev USA, though previous years of operation have not been without critique and frustration.

Vice Mayor Antanette Mosley and council members Sheneika Smith and Sage Turner voted against its approval.

The selected company is the North American subsidiary of Paris-based RATP Dev, the world's third largest urban transportation operator, according to its website. It runs several other transit systems in the state, including Winston-Salem and Greensboro.

The \$82.1 million contract with RATP Dev, which has funded operations and maintenance of the city's bus system, known as Asheville Rides Transit for nearly a decade, is up in June. The city rebid for the service in October.

Though it received three other responses, Assistant Transportation Director Jessica Morriss said none of the others clinched a technical proposal rating above the threshold needed to advance.

Council member Kim Roney, a frequent rider who has taken the bus for 18 years, said when people heard rumors that the city would stay with the current operator, "the nicest word I can think of to use is 'disdain.'"

"It's not going well," she said at the March meeting, noting issues like late or early buses, dirty bus stops, or lack of care at the transit station.

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GOP representatives push back on DHS funding legislation

Zachary Schermele
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – Republicans in the House of Representatives revolted at the 11th hour against a deal to end the six-week-long Department of Homeland Security shutdown, hurling the prospects of any impending solution into serious political jeopardy.

After a long call with fellow GOP lawmakers on March 27, House Speaker Mike Johnson denounced the compromise the Senate unanimously passed

in the dead of night. In a highly visible split between House and Senate Republicans, Johnson said the agreement to fund all of DHS minus Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Customs and Border Protection wasn't palatable to his members.

Airports have been in turmoil, with wait times hitting historic highs as hundreds of temporarily unpaid Transportation Security Administration workers have resigned and more have increasingly called out. The Senate's late-night dealmaking came after

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President Donald Trump said that he would pay TSA workers with or without the help of Congress.

Speaking from the Senate floor after 2 a.m., a weary and frustrated Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-South

Dakota, said Trump should "never have had to step in to rescue TSA workers."

"Republicans funded the Department of Homeland Security piecemeal. It's not the way to fund the department," he said. "But we were out of time."

At that moment, prospects for passage looked rosy. But many conservative hard-liners woke up furious about the situation, pledging to withhold support unless the agreement added

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