

**CITY OF TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES
PUBLIC UTILITY ADVISORY BOARD
MONDAY, MAY 17, 2021**

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

Regular meeting of the Public Utility Advisory Board of the City of Truth or Consequences, New Mexico to be held in the City Commission Chambers, 405 W. Third, Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, on Monday, May 17, 2021 at 5:30 pm.

CALL TO ORDER

ROLL CALL:

George Szigeti, Chairman
Jeff Dornbusch, Vice-Chairman – ABSENT
Ron Pacourek, Member
Gil Avelar, Member
Don Armijo, Member

ALSO PRESENT

Bruce Swingle, City Manager
Traci Alvarez, Community Development Director
Alfredo Holguin, Wilson & Company
Bo Easley, Electric Department Director
Sonya Williams, Utility Office Manager
Pricilla Fuentes, Electric Department Administrative Assistant
Dawn C. Barclay – Deputy City Clerk

1. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Member Pacourek made a motion to approve the agenda. Member Armijo seconded.
Motion carried unanimously.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

a. Regular meeting of April 19, 2021.

Member Pacourek made a motion to approve the minutes. Member Avelar seconded.
Motion carried unanimously.

3. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC: (3 Minute rule applies)

Ariel Dougherty – Was present and addressed the board in person. She would like to continue to supply the utility department a photograph of her electric meter as proof of customer supplied readings. She requested that there be no additional charges to accounts that supply their own meter readings.

Ron Fenn – Was present and addressed the board in person. He began with the utility charge for not having a smart meter. He provided a handout to board which was a proposed contract between himself and the city along with a billing proposal. He requested to be added to next month's meeting agenda. He went on to address the inadequate invoicing regarding lack of proper information on the utility bills. He offered to work with the utility department to help design a new format for the monthly customer bill.

Susie Crow – Addressed the board remotely. Her comments are attached and made part of these minutes.

4. OLD BUSINESS:

- a. **Discussion/Action: Set time and date for Ordinance 664, Electricity Cogeneration Workshop. George Szigeti, Chairman**

It was determined to tentatively meet on June 14, 2021 at 5:30pm in the City Chambers.

5. NEW BUSINESS

- a. **Discussion/Update: Water/Wastewater Project Update. Traci Alvarez, Community Development Director**

Traci Alvarez, Community Development Director – Ms. Alvarez began by addressing the board with an introducing to Mr. Alfredo Holguin who was present and in person. He was a representative from "Wilson & Company" who is conducting water and waste water projects for the City of T or C. Mr. Holguin provided a handout which is attached and made part of these minutes. The handout showed all current active projects at this time.

- b. **Discussion/Update: Electric Pole Replacement Project. Bo Easley, Electric Department Director**

Bo Easley, Electric Department Director - Mr. Easley began by addressing the board then gave an update to the electric pole replacement projects. He stated "Bohannon & Huston" is in the final stages and is approximately 95% done with completion. He made reference to his

provided handouts showing all locations for each of the current projects. He gave updates in detail of each project locations.

c. Discussion/Action: Recommendation of Meter Reading Fee for Non-AMI Customers. George Szigeti, Chairman

Chairman Szigeti – Began by discussing how the City Commission proposed a value for the meter reading fee. It was based upon the cost Sierra Electric charges for their service call's which is currently \$50.00. This gave a starting point to discuss further among the PUAB board.

Moving forward, he began discussion with a prior conversation he had with Ex City Manager, Morris Madrid on another issue. They had discussed and calculated what an hourly cost of an average City Employee would cost. It was calculated based upon salary, benefits, and insurance and workers compensation. They concluded an average cost per employee comes to \$50,000. He stated there are about 2,000 work hours a year. So they divided \$50,000 by 2,000 that gives an average hourly rate of \$25.00 per hour.

He proposed there are two ways to read the AMI Meters. Send a meter reader to the location they would record the reading and report it as usual. Second, would be for the customer to read the meter and send information back to the utility office. The office would then transcribe it into the system.

He pointed out transportation time would not be an issue due to the size of the town, but went on to say, the city employee will have to get in the vehicle, drive to the location, read the meter then drive back. He estimate it would take about 30 minutes to complete this task. Due to the customers being on different meter cycles one meter reader cannot read all meters at one time. Confirming this applies to Non-AMI customers only. The meter reader must enter the reading into a hand held devise then return to the utility office so the information can be down loaded to the system. When the bills are ready to be generated, a button is pushed and all of the data that was collected is uploaded into the Tyler. He pointed out, if the customer was to send in their own meters readings, this would require a city employee to manually enter the reading into the system, causing an increase in labor time, but not as substantial as the cost of a meter reader going to the customer's location. During his visit at the utility office with Ms. Williams, he became aware there is approximately 1,800 records just in "Cycle A". The system does generate some flags that must be addressed and they are separated into priority levels. The utility office does their best to address all of the system flags. He was concerned with the added work load to the utility office with customers sending in their readings. He pointed out meter reading fees are not unusual with utilities that have AMI Meters. Sending in a reading or having a meter will always have an associated cost. He feels that Non-AMI Meter customers should have to share some of the costs responsibilities involved. In his opinion the \$50.00 proposed rate is excessive. Using the labor cost calculation of \$25.00 per hour, he proposed reducing the service charge to \$25.00.

Member Pacourek – Asked, how many Non-AMI Meter are in use?

Bo Easley, Electric Department Director - replied 7.

Member Pacourek – Agreed \$50.00 is excessive. \$25.00 is more acceptable, but does not totally agree this would be the final agreeable charge. He suggested \$10.00 might be more appropriate.

Chairman Szigeti – Asked Mr. Easley if all 7 customers were residential customers and if they all had chosen to opt-out?

Bo Easley, Electric Department Director – Confirmed with a yes.

Chairman Szigeti – Asked Mr. Easley, if the commercial customers have been all converted to the new AMI Meters?

Bo Easley, Electric Department Director – Confirmed with a yes. He went on to say initially at the beginning there was some delay. This was due to the meter can/box having to be updated to fit the new AMI Meters.

Chairman Szigeti – Reiterated, commercial customers are converted over to AMI Meter and that only leaves 7 residential customers who choose not to have an AMI Meter.

Bo Easley, Electric Department Director – Confirmed, yes.

Member Pacourek – Was concerned with customers not having an email, smart phone or a way to digitally send their meter reading.

Chairman Szigeti – Pointed out a deadline should be addressed if customers were going to read their own meter with some sort of penalty if a meter reader had to be dispatched.

Bruce Swingle, City Manager - Asked for clarification on “self-reporting” option. He wanted to know that was an ordinance?

Chairman Szigeti – Replied, it is not an ordinance but was presented as a viable option.

Bruce Swingle, City Manager - Took a minute, commended and acknowledge the staff at the utility departments. He understands there may be some issues that are related to policy inconsistencies. He advised the board in what whatever recommendation they decide to make to the City Commission regarding this issue, to keep in mind that their decision can be applied consistently over time and not limit their scope to just the seven customers in question and to have knowledge on the impact it may have regarding productivity in the utility department.

Chairman Szigeti – Agreed. Gave some examples of potentially loss of time in the utility department.

Bruce Swingle, City Manager - Confirmed with the board, he was not discouraging “self-reporting”. But encouraged the board to think it through clearly and apply their recommendation based upon consistency. It would then go to the City Commissioner’s for their approval.

Chairman Szigeti – Agreed with Mr. Swingle. He then had a question for Sonya Williams, Utility Office Manager Williams asking her how long would she thought it would take to complete one

billing cycle process doing it the way she would like to see it done by not being rushed through the process.

Sonya Williams, Utility Office Manager – She replied, it could take her all day. She took a minute to expand her reply to let the board know, that no matter which way the board decides to recommend, she will make sure the procedure is completed, no matter the time involved.

Member Pacourek – Asked Sonya Williams, Utility Office Manager her ideas or thoughts on how it would be best handled in the utility office?

Sonya Williams, Utility Office Manager – She is understood both points, self-reading vs. meter reading. She pointed out that during billing she must send out meter readers and if there is an inconsistencies, she must pull a meter reader off of their duties to go and verify the issue because billing takes the priority. Example....while she is billing for "Cycle B" meter readers are out reading for "Cycle C". She was ok with receiving emails if that what the board chooses but was not open to receiving cards. She reassured the board that whatever decision they recommend, she will do what it takes to get the job done.

Member Avelar - Some concerns he had was with the added time the utility office will incur. He pointed out it always doesn't run as smoothly as sitting down for 30 min with uninterrupted time, always something will come up.

Member Pacourek – Is concerned with each of the 7 customers and their current ability to send in readings. He stated again, he is for a \$10.00 service fee if submitted on time, if not then the \$50.00 late fee can be implemented.

Chairman Szigeti – Went over some of the pros and cons of the two options.

Sonya Williams, Utility Office Manager – She wanted to the board to know her department handles many system errors anywhere from 50 to 60 sometimes more.

Chairman Szigeti made a motion that all Non-AMI customers will have their meters read by a city meter reader and they will be charged \$25.00 a month service fee. **Member Armijo** seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Szigeti – Offered to present this motion at the City Commissioners meeting. Requested that the "Comments" portion of the agenda be added back.

Bruce Swingle, City Manager - Agreed with Chairman Szigeti that staff needs to be given an opportunity to have communication time with the board.

Dawn Barclay, Deputy City Clerk - noted the request and confirmed the "Comments" portion of the agenda would be added back on all the board agendas.

6. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Public Utility Advisory Board, Chairman Szigeti requested for a motion to adjourn meeting. Member Pacourek seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned.

PASSED AND APPROVED ON THE 21ST DAY OF JUNE 2021.


George Szigeti, Chairman
Public Utility Advisory Board