

City agrees to meet with SEC

By Wanda Moeller, El Defensor Chieftain Editor Jul 25, 2019

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Two years – that’s how long Socorro Mayor Ravi Bhasker has been waiting for a conversation to discuss Socorro Electric Cooperative (SEC) rate hikes. Monday night, Socorro Electric Cooperative Trustee Donald Wolberg asked Bhasker and three councilors to come to the table to discuss the potential economic impact of the City starting its own municipal utility.

Earlier in this month, Socorro City Council approved moving forward with establishing its own municipal utility, by selecting Guzman Energy as its partner.

Wolberg acknowledged he and two other SEC Trustees would welcome an exchange with Bhasker and councilors.

“We’re comfortable with anything,” said Wolberg of the meeting scheduled for 9 a.m. Wednesday at the Socorro Public Library. “We can have an exchange to discuss the misconceptions of our industry or the economic challenges of our community.”

Representing the City at the meeting will be Mayor Bhasker as well as Councilors Michael Olguin Jr. and Deborah Dean. SEC Trustees appointed to the committee by SEC Board of Trustees President Anne Dorough were Wolberg, Leroy Anaya and Luis Aguilar.

July 2017

It was in late July 2017, Bhasker proposed three potential solutions to continuing the franchise agreement – which is currently on a month-to-month basis – between the co-op and the City of Socorro. One of options, Bhasker said, would be for the city to acquire the cooperative in its entirety, in effect shutting down the 72 year old institution.

With all seven trustees and General Manager Joseph Herrera in attendance, as well as two representatives from Tri-State Generation and Transmission, the mayor read from a prepared statement. He said one solution would be for SEC to sell of its assets for the grid within the Socorro city limits.

“We will assume all debts,” he said. “We then would proceed to do a mutual agreement with a company to do (operations and maintenance).”

A second solution, Bhasker said, would be for Socorro Electric to sell the entire co-op to the City of Socorro. Bhasker’s third option would be the City’s proposition “to continue serving a small industrial section of the community and provide them with electricity at a lower rate.”

In defense of the City’s proposed separation, in part or entirely, from the cooperative, Bhasker said the City Council, residents and businesses alike “have expressed some concerns...” He said these included, “consumer complaints about customer relations and the quality of electrical service, and the lack of participation of the Socorro Electric Co-op in renewable energy generation as allowed under its agreement with its wholesale provider, Tri-State Generation and Transmission.”

He also mentioned “an unwillingness to participate in initiatives to foster economic development and a resistance to proposals by outside companies to improve and benefit the well-being of our community.”

One concern Bhasker has been particularly vocal about over the past couple of years was the above average rate for “industrial users, which is hindering the City’s ability to attract businesses to spur economic growth in the City of Socorro.”

It was during that July 2017 meeting at the Socorro Electric Cooperative, Bhasker asked to have a conversation about the proposed rate hikes that were affecting businesses, New Mexico Tech and Socorro residents.