

City of Socorro Regular Scheduled City Council Meeting
City Hall, 111 School of Mines Road, Socorro, NM 87801
May 18, 2020

Mayor Ravi Bhasker called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Mayor Bhasker took roll call.

Members physically present at roll call were: Mayor Ravi Bhasker

Members remotely present at roll call were: Councilor Mary Ann Chavez-Lopez, Councilor Michael Olguin, Councilor Anton Salome, Councilor Gordy Hicks, Councilor Peter Romero and Councilor Nick Fleming. Councilor Toby Jaramillo and Councilor Deborah Dean were absent.

Councilor Dean was not present at roll call but became present at some point during the meeting.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Bhasker led all present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Bhasker stated that this City Council meeting is in compliance with the standards set forth by the NM Attorney' General's Office for teleconference meetings held during the COVID-19 pandemic.

APPROVAL OF MAY 18, 2020 CITY COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA

Councilor Hicks made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Councilor Chavez-Lopez. Mayor Bhasker took a roll call vote, motion passed unanimously.

CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES

a. April 20, 2020

Councilor Hicks made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Councilor Romero. Mayor Bhasker took a roll call vote, motion passed unanimously.

Mayor Bhasker stated that Public Forum is not on the agenda but asked if anyone had a comment.

Leann Lynch stated that she has several complaints about her neighbors (loud music, motor bikes, broken beer bottles in her yard) and that she is being harassed by them. Ms. Lynch apologized for the way she recently spoke to a City Hall employee. Ms. Lynch stated that she is frustrated and has to keep calling the police. Mayor Bhasker stated that he would meet with the Police Chief and the City Administrator and they will come by her house Wednesday at 9 a.m. Ms. Lynch agreed and stated that she is seeking a lawyer regarding these issues.

DISCUSSION AND DELIBERATION

a. Request for a Street & Alley Abandonment/Vacation – Veronica Chavez

Mayor Bhasker stated that Veronica Chavez has made a request to the City to vacate an alley (located on her property) and a portion of Main Street (next to her property located at 212 S. 2nd Street). Kristy Padilla, Planning and Zoning Administrator, stated that at the request of the City Council, Ms. Chavez acquired an updated survey of the property. Mayor Bhasker stated that he feels the City Council should finalize the issue with a motion and a vote. Ms. Chavez stated that she got an updated survey done by Dennis Engineering. Ms. Chavez stated that there is a 16-foot-wide alley running down the middle of her property. Ms. Chavez stated that she is requesting that the City vacate the alley along with the 30 feet of Main Street that is on her side of the property (30 feet is 1/2 of the Main Street, leaving 30 feet of Main Street to the owner of the other side of the road). Mayor Bhasker stated that there has been a precedent of the City doing vacations in the past. Mayor Bhasker stated that he feels Ms. Chavez's request is reasonable. Councilor Salome asked Ms. Chavez to explain her reason for the request. Ms. Chavez stated that she would like to fence in

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the entire property as sometimes people walk through the alley and she would like the whole property properly documented. Councilor Romero asked if an appraisal of the property had been done. A clear answer to this question was not given. Ms. Padilla stated that she drove by the property and you cannot see the alley because that area is covered in brush and trees. Councilor Hicks asked how many houses were located in Block 2 to which Ms. Chavez replied none. Councilor Salome stated that the original survey looks like the property was meant to be a trailer park and asked Ms. Chavez if she agreed. Ms. Chavez said she “believed so”. Councilor Salome asked if her request includes spaces 1 through 3 and 22 through 24. Ms. Chavez stated no; she owns spaces 4 through 12 and 13 through 21. Ms. Chavez stated that she believes Terry Sebastian owns the other spaces. Ms. Chavez reiterated that people walk all over her property and she would like to fence it in to prevent that. Councilor Salome stated that there seems to be more layers to the matter the more it is discussed. Councilor Salome stated that surrounding property owners need to be able to access their property. Ms. Chavez stated that they have other access to their property.

Councilor Salome started to make a comment about Main Street but Mayor Bhasker stated that there should be a motion and a second on the floor before further discussion. Councilor Salome made a motion to approve the vacation request. The motion was seconded by Councilor Romero.

Councilor Salome stated that it is hard to say whether or not the railroad may need access to Main Street in the future. Councilor Salome stated that it is incumbent upon the City Council to look out for the residents. Councilor Salome stated that it cannot be predicted whether or not the property will be used in the future. Councilor Salome stated that requests for vacation on Smith Road and requests made by Betty Houston have been denied in the past. Councilor Fleming stated that he does not have a problem with vacating the alley, but he does have concerns over vacating Main Street as the railroad may need access to it in the future. Ms. Chavez reiterated that the other half of the street belongs to someone else other than the railroad. Mayor Bhasker stated that the motion on the floor is to approve vacation of both the alley and Main Street and asked if anyone would want to make a motion to amend the original motion to say only vacate the alley and not Main Street.

Ms. Chavez stated that she would be willing to pay the City \$500 for the portion of Main Street. Mayor Bhasker stated that he offered an amendment but since it was not accepted, the vote will be for the vacation of the alley and Main Street.

Mayor Bhasker took a roll call vote, motion did not pass with a unanimous “no” vote.

Mayor Bhasker stated that Ms. Chavez is welcome to reapproach the City in the future. Ms. Padilla asked the City Council to drive by the property and see that it is full of brush. Ms. Padilla stated that ½ of Ms. Chavez’s septic tank is on Main Street. Ms. Padilla stated that she believes the owner of the property on the other side of Main Street has the last name Barry. Mayor Bhasker stated that the City Council’s concerns seem to be mainly about the railroad having access to Main Street. Mayor Bhasker stated that Ms. Chavez may need to provide more information before the Council will consider another request. Mayor Bhasker stated that the City Administration will try to get an appraisal of the portion on Main Street.

Bill Stone, the NM Tech liaison, provided the following update via chat message which was read by Ms. Padilla: Mr. Stone stated that NM Tech summer classes will be offered online only but that there will be some labs on campus. The remainder of Dr. Stone’s message was unable to be heard due to an echo on the recording. Mayor Bhasker stated that he feels COVID-19 testing should be done on campus.

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b. Resolution No. 20-05-18 – CDBG Application

Donald Monette, City Administrator, presented Resolution No. 20-05-18, which, if approved, authorizes the City to prepare and submit a CDBG application to the NM Department of Finance & Administration for the Cuba Road Street & Drainage Improvements Project. Mr. Monette stated that the City Council approved Cuba Road for the CDBG project at a previous City Council meeting.

Councilor Romero made a motion to approve Resolution No. 20-05-18. The motion was seconded by Councilor Chavez-Lopez. Mayor Bhasker took a roll call vote, motion passed unanimously.

c. Resolution No. 001A – Preliminary Budget Approval for FY 20-21

Mayor Bhasker presented Resolution No. 001A which, if approved, adopts the City's preliminary budget for FY 20-21. Mayor Bhasker thanked City staff and the Budget Committee for their work on the budget. Mayor Bhasker stated that the City has a healthy cash balance. Mayor Bhasker stated that he feels the budget will be impacted from June to August due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mayor Bhasker stated that he is unsure how the state and federal government will help municipalities. Mayor Bhasker stated that recent project awards from the legislative session were put on hold but that he emphasized to the State that the upgrade of the 911 system is needed. Ruby Lopez, Finance Officer, stated that this new budget contains a 25% decrease in revenue and a 15% decrease in expenditures. Mayor Bhasker stated that there were no salary cuts and the medical premiums did not have an increase.

Councilor Hicks made a motion to approve Resolution No. 001A. The motion was seconded by Councilor Romero. Mayor Bhasker took a roll call vote, motion passed unanimously.

d. Resolution No. 20-05-18b – Utility Billing Write-Offs

Ruby Lopez, Finance Officer, presented Resolution No. 20-05-18b which, if approved, removes uncollectible utility billing accounts from 2015, in the amount of \$41,668.51, from the City's list of accounts. Mayor Bhasker stated that the City will still put out delinquent slips to requests payment on these accounts.

Councilor Fleming made a motion to approve Resolution No. 20-05-18b. The motion was seconded by Councilor Dean. Mayor Bhasker took a roll call vote, motion passed unanimously.

e. Resolution No. 20-05-18c – Loan Resolution for Vector Truck

Mayor Bhasker presented Resolution No. 20-05-18c which, if approved, authorizes the City of Socorro to submit a loan application to the NM Finance Authority for purpose of purchasing a vector truck. Ms. Lopez stated that the loan is for \$250,000. Ms. Lopez stated that the USDA has agreed to provide \$50,000 as the vector truck costs \$304,000. Ms. Lopez stated that \$150,000 of the \$250,000 will be interest free.

Councilor Fleming made a motion to approve Resolution No. 20-05-18c. The motion was seconded by Councilor Dean. Mayor Bhasker took a roll call vote, motion passed unanimously.

f. Budget/Personnel Adjustments Caused by COVID-19 Pandemic – Discussion Only

Mr. Monette stated that the Administration is keeping an eye on the budget during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Monette stated that hopefully, gross receipts revenues will stay on track. Mr. Monette stated that there may be budget changes in the future. Mr. Monette stated that the City

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furloughed 15 temporary employees, but permanent employees have not been touched. Mr. Monette stated that there is concern over what the months of June and July will look like. Mr. Monette stated that a 5% cut in salaries would net the City \$280,000. Mr. Monette stated that the City is trying to use just the reserves.

Chelsea Lyons, Library Director, stated that she submitted a grant application to get help subsidizing some of the projects the library is working on and should hear the results by June 1st. Ms. Lyons stated that library staff has been busy archiving items. Ms. Lyons stated that the library has a social-distancing plan ready for when it can reopen to the public.

Joe Gonzales, Fire Chief, stated that it is “business as usual” at the Fire Department with training classes ongoing for employees. Chief Gonzales stated that the department did receive a grant for a new ambulance.

Mayor Bhasker stated that there are/were three COVID patients at the local hospital who are/were not on ventilators. Mayor Bhasker stated that the hospital has done a great job. Mayor Bhasker stated that Socorro’s COVID numbers seem to have plateaued. Mayor Bhasker stated that with the help of Tara Jaramillo, Alamo now has water.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Placement of Flag at Cemetery for Memorial Day – Councilor Romero

Councilor Romero stated that this item was already completed with the help of Mr. Monette.

Councilor Romero asked if the Administration was going to open the swimming pool and if no, could it be opened for medical rehab. Mayor Bhasker stated no and that the City does not offer medical rehab at the pool so one would have to use Socorro Physical Therapy. Mayor Bhasker stated that recreational activities may not return until August or September. Mayor Bhasker stated that there has been a spike in the number of children with COVID-19 and New Mexico has the 2nd highest number of children infected. Mayor Bhasker stated the City cannot take the chance of spreading the virus. Councilor Romero asked Mayor Bhasker to clarify the requirement to wear masks. Mayor Bhasker stated that he saw 8 or 9 people gathered outside the burrito truck at the Plaza and no one was wearing masks. Mayor Bhasker stated that state requirement only permits gatherings of 5 people or less. Mayor Bhasker stated that if you are walking alone, you do not have to wear a mask but if 2 or more people are walking, you must wear a mask. Mayor Bhasker stated that the high school did a graduation parade, with 4 or 5 people to a car, and they weren’t wearing masks. Mayor Bhasker stated that the emcee of the graduation was high-fiving, hand-slapping and putting a microphone close to everyone’s face which is not social distancing. Mayor Bhasker stated that if the City is going to loosen up the restrictions, people cannot be breaking the rules. Mayor Bhasker stated that this could create an uptick in numbers and the City cannot reopen if this is happening. Mayor Bhasker stated the 3 most important things are social distancing, wearing masks and good hygiene. Councilor Olguin asked about the applications that were submitted by local businesses to reopen which met with the City’s approval but not with the governor’s requirements. Councilor Olguin asked if there will be consequences for those businesses if they open up now. Mayor Bhasker stated that he told the high school the guidelines for the parade and they did not listen. Mayor Bhasker stated that the City Administration and Police Department will not get in the way if businesses reopen but he reminded those businesses that if they have some sort of state licensure, they could put their license in jeopardy. Mayor Bhasker stated that he drove by a golf course and he saw people golfing in groups and doing high-fives. Mayor Bhasker stated that he hopes businesses do not let their guard down but rather stay strict with their social distancing protocols.

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Mr. Monette stated that the Transportation Department is now funded at 100% through the federal CARES Act. Carlos Savedra, Transportation Director, stated that he has had questions about restarting the Belen route and that Albuquerque Transit is still closed for 2 more weeks.

Mr. Monette asked Councilors to start thinking about ICIP projects as the application is due in September and there will be public comment sessions between now and then.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

None.

MAYOR'S REPORT

a. Personnel Changes

Councilor Hicks motioned to approve the Personnel Changes as read by Mayor Bhasker:

Weylin Melton – 5-1-20 – Police – Resignation

Gonzalo Lopez – 5-18-20 – Police – New Hire (Police Officer) – D-45

Ricky Silva – 5-1-20 – Fire – Completed Probation & Certification (EMTB) – A-32 to A-35

The motion was seconded by Councilor Romero. Mayor Bhasker took a roll call vote, motion passed unanimously.

b. Business Registrations

Councilor Romero motioned to approve the Business Registrations as read by Mayor Bhasker:

Socorro Local Tires - C-2 - 1311 State Road 1 - James Esquibel - Tire Shop

Forget Me Not - C-1 - 104 Neel - Roxann Scott - Thrift Store

DKD Electric LLC - Out of Town - Albuquerque, NM – Corporation - Electrical Contractor

Cubish - Transient Vendor – Datil, NM - Hannah Sanchez - Mobile Food Unit

Northrup Grumman Systems Corporation - NM Tech - Falls Church, VA – Corporation - Tank Ammunition Testing

The motion was seconded by Councilor Chavez-Lopez. Mayor Bhasker took a roll call vote, motion passed unanimously.

c. Voucher Run

Councilor Fleming made a motion to approve vouchers 150807 to 150994 in the amount of \$477,358.74, plus Payroll Transfers (\$290,043.75), for a total of \$767,402.49. The motion was seconded by Councilor Dean. Mayor Bhasker took a roll call vote, motion passed unanimously.

d. Announcement – Next City Council Meeting Date and Time

Mayor Bhasker suggested the June 1, 2020 meeting be cancelled and the next regular meeting be held June 15, 2020. The City Council agreed.

Mayor Bhasker stated that the next regular City Council meeting will be held on Monday, June 15, 2020 at 6:00 p.m. in the City Hall Council Chambers (111 School of Mines Road).

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:02 p.m.

