

**City of Socorro Regular Scheduled City Council Meeting**  
**City Hall, 111 School of Mines Road, Socorro, NM 87801**  
**December 7, 2015**

Mayor Ravi Bhasker called the meeting to order. Pat Salome, City Clerk, took roll call. Members present at roll call were: Councilor Gordy Hicks, Councilor Mary Ann Chavez-Lopez, Councilor Peter Romero, Councilor Michael Olguin, Councilor Toby Jaramillo, Councilor Donald Monette, Councilor Nick Fleming and Councilor Ernest Pargas.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Mayor Bhasker led all present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 7, 2015 CITY COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA**

Councilor Hicks made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Seconded by Councilor Jaramillo, motion passed unanimously.

**CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES**

**a. November 16, 2015**

Councilor Romero made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Seconded by Councilor Pargas, motion passed unanimously.

**PUBLIC FORUM**

**a. Civil Air Patrol – Wreaths Across America**

Second Lieutenant Cases with the Civil Air Patrol stated the local Civil Air Patrol along with “Wreaths Across America” will be holding a wreath laying ceremony at Isidro Baca Park. Sponsoring a wreath is \$15.00 (donation) and orders are received from Maine in honor of all branches of the military. Locally, wreaths will be laid at the Catholic and Protestant cemeteries. The Civil Air Patrol meets once a week with the new squadron which is in its second year and currently has 15-16 cadets. The squadron meets at the High School during regular class time. To participate in Civil Air Patrol you need to be 12-21 years old (11 years old if in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade). Mayor Bhasker acknowledged that the City sponsors Civil Air Patrol by paying the application costs for Civil Air Patrol students.

**SECOND READING OF ORDINANCES – PUBLIC HEARING & CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL**

**b. Ordinance No. 15-11-02 – Uniform Traffic Ordinance**

Mayor Bhasker presented Ordinance No. 15-11-02. City Clerk Pat Salome stated that the purpose of the Uniform Traffic Ordinance is to establish traffic laws throughout the City.

Councilor Hicks made a motion to go into public hearing. Seconded by Councilor Romero, motion passed unanimously.

There were no comments from the public.

Councilor Hicks made a motion to go back into regular session. Seconded by Councilor Chavez-Lopez, motion passed unanimously.

Councilor Hicks made the motion to approve Ordinance No. 15-11-02. Seconded by Councilor Monette, motion passed unanimously. The change being considered surrounded “autocycles”.

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**DISCUSSION AND DELIBERATION**

**a. Festival of the Cranes – Update**

Mayor Bhasker spoke on behalf of Michael Hanauer regarding the recent Festival. The Mayor reported that Mr. Hanauer felt this year's Festival of the Cranes was once again very successful. It was stated that photography has become a huge part of the event. 5500 people attended this year's event. Rosemary Rosas and the Transportation Department did a good job providing transportation to attendees. Chief Winders and the Socorro Police Department provided security. The Mayor felt that it was a very positive event.

**b. Smith's Decision to Discontinue Operation**

Dave Wheelock, Socorro resident, started an online petition along with Melissa Begay to Kroger (parent company of Smith's) regarding Smith's decision to discontinue operations in Socorro. 20% of people who have signed the petition left comments about the great employees and how important Smith's is to Socorro. Mr Wheelock stated that economists are predicting a recession and the crisis is larger than Socorro.

Eric Scarsgard stated that he wanted to know why Smith's is closing, was the rent too high? The Mayor stated that the lease is owned by Blackstone (investment group) and the rent is \$36,000 a month. Mayor Bhasker explained that in 1976 we had Safeway, then it changed to Furr's and now Smith's. The lease on the building runs through 2018. Smith's had discussed (with Smith's management) closing three years ago as they are losing \$800,000 to \$900,000 a year in Socorro. It was stated Socorro Smith's was the third leading pharmacy in the State of New Mexico. Mayor Bhasker stated he has spoken to two different independent pharmacists who may want to come to Socorro. The Mayor also stated that CVS has shown an interest in Socorro. Wal Mart in Socorro may take some of Smith's pharmacy employees. Eric Scarsgard stated that Socorro has lost other businesses including Carquest and Western Mercantile. Mayor Bhasker stated we have added three dollar stores, Wal Mart, Tech is doing well and retail is doing well. Socorro has been able to hold its own economically. Mr Scarsgard asked the City Council to assure him we won't become a ghost town. Mayor Bhasker stated that Councilor Olguin is on the Economic Development Committee and that this committee is seeking ways to improve the City's economy. Mayor Bhasker also stated that the City cannot charge additional taxes nor do we have the authority to give tax breaks. Even with the departure of Smith's we are very positive about our economy. The University is topped out and as in years past, gross receipts is exceeding previous year's amounts. Mayor Bhasker stated he has talked to Wal Mart and they want to acquire Smith's customers.

Mr Wheelock stated that the petition is at [www.thepetitionsite.com](http://www.thepetitionsite.com), search for Save Our Smiths.

Richard Sonchfeld stated he is concerned that there is only going to be one pharmacy in town. Mayor Bhasker again stated that there are independent pharmacist's interested. Councilor Monette agreed with Mr. Wheelock, it is time to stay focused, promote our city and shop Socorro.

Debra Bankson of Socorro Mental Health made a comment about substance abuse and the departure of Smith's.

Mayor Bhasker stated that Kelby Stevens remodeled Socorro Physical Therapy making a substantial investment in our community. The Mayor also stated that when Wal Mart came in the volume at

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Smith's dropped but in two years it went back up. Mayor Bhasker stated that there are bigger Smith's in Albuquerque where rent is only \$15,000.

Councilor Hicks addressed the crowd, stated that they are preaching to the choir. When a big company makes up its mind, he doesn't know what a community can do about it. Gross receipts tax revenue community wide is higher and that is a blessing.

Mr. Paul Kreibel said that he heard that the City isn't going to do anything about Smith's leaving. Taco Bell, KFC and Denny's also closed, they were asked to remodel and were not interested in making the required improvements. Mayor Bhasker asked how can local elected officials ask businesses that are losing money to stay open? Mr. Kreibel stated that they just want to be able to continue shopping at Smith's. Mayor Bhasker replied that Councilor Olguin might have some ideas to attract something like a Smith's. Mr. Kreibel stated that products that Smith's didn't sell were given to the local storehouse. Mayor Bhasker stated he would take any suggestions. Mr. Kreibel stated that the City buy the property to save Smith's. The Mayor stated on eminent domain, a judge will say the City has to buy the property at fair market value.

Councilor Hicks stated that 32% of people go out of town to shop. Mr. Kreibel again stated we need to buy local, comment after comment (on petition page) stated that they only shop at Smith's. Mr. Kreibel stated that if a CVS comes to Socorro then he believes no grocery store will ever come in.

Councilor Pargas stated that he worked at Smith's for 28 years and raised 6 kids and the problem with Smith's was poor management, shrinkage, misuse of overtime and theft.

Councilor Olguin stated that he loved his community but the past is the past. It all starts now and it needs to be a community effort. Councilor Olguin also stated that he sees the glass as half full, he sees opportunity. Councilor Olguin stated that his answer was area wide economic development. Stronger local economies to grow and prosper. Networking with Valencia, T or C and Socorro will make the entire area stronger. [www.mrgeda.com](http://www.mrgeda.com).

Councilor Jaramillo stated he would like to thank everyone for coming out and helping with his 46<sup>th</sup> annual food drive.

Councilor Romero stated that like Solaro, all businesses should hire local.

Councilor Monette stated that people who work here need to live here.

Mayor Bhasker stated that although we may be losing Smith's, people who had to go out of town for dialysis in Los Lunas will soon be able to receive treatment here.

Mr. Paul Kreibel asked where are the 1800 families represented on the petition, going to go shopping for food? Wal Mart should be made to improve.

Ignacio Chavez asked who will do the upkeep on the building once Smith's leaves. Mayor stated there is a lease until 2018.

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A citizen stated that Smith's closing hit close to home, KFC, Taco Bell, Denny's also hit close to home. A woman (no name given) stated that there are only 20-30 people here (at this meeting) "where is the community, we have a beautiful plaza, where are the people"?

City Clerk Pat Salome stated that gross receipts numbers show more money is being spent in town. Maybe someone should ask John Brooks to make changes in their product line. With 1800 people (potential customers) who signed the petition, you will have leverage with John Brooks to institute some change.

Melissa Begay stated that she is going to set up a meeting with John Brooks, she sees some light there. She stated she has shopped at Costco but will change. Mrs. Begay stated that they will send the petition with signatures on December 16, 2015.

Mayor Bhasker asked the City Clerk to put together a resolution regarding Smith's decision to leave town.

Councilor Chavez-Lopez asked if we would have a special City Council Meeting for the resolution.

Paul Kreibel asked if we know what triggered Smith's decision. Councilor Pargas stated that \$900,000 in loss, theft, rent, and poor management.

It was stated that Brixmore Property Group at 212-869-3000 is who manages the Smith's Building.

\_\_\_\_\_5 minute break\_\_\_\_\_

**c. Resolution No. 15-12-07 – La Vega Road.**

Pat read Resolution No. 15-12-17 – La Vega Road.

Councilor Hicks motioned to approve Resolution 15-12-07. Seconded by Councilor Chavez-Lopez, motion passed unanimously.

**COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Councilor Chavez-Lopez mentioned she issued report to MFA for review. Planning grant for \$40,000 to bring affordable housing and an assisted living facility to Socorro. Utility Committee – The Mayor stated natural gas prices are low country wide and the utility committee should meet to consider increasing the City's mark-up for bonding future projects.

**NEW BUSINESS**

None.

**OLD BUSINESS**

None.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

**MAYOR'S REPORT**

**a. Personnel Changes**

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Mayor Bhasker stated that if the Councilors have any concerns with personnel to come to him or Pat instead of going to the specific employees, this could lead to problems. City Council is for policy making and budget and operations are led by the Administration.

Councilor Chavez-Lopez said that the light parade was nice and well attended as were the festivities at the Plaza. Councilor Hicks also agreed that the parade was awesome.

Personnel change list was presented as follows:

Luis Espino – 11-19-15 – Fire – Resignation  
Michael Chavez – 11-25-15 – Police – Certification – B-37 to B-40  
Gilbert Gonzales – 11-30-15 – Police – New Hire (Facilities Security Officer) – A-30  
Sergio Cuevas – 12-7-15 – Street – New Hire (Crewman) – A-15  
Pat Salome – 12-31-15 – Administration - Retirement

**b. Business Registrations**

Councilor Fleming motioned to approve the business registrations as read by Mayor Bhasker:

Alliance Abstract and Title LLC – C-2 – 413 N. California – Lori & Alfred Fernandez – Abstract and Title  
Santa Fe Mazda – Out of Town – Santa Fe, NM – Jud Careswell – Auto Dealership  
Sunset Quick Stop – C-2 – 202 California – Precillia Torres – Convenience Store

Seconded by Councilor Romero, motion passed unanimously.

All employee meeting will be held on December 14, 2015 at 2:00 pm at Finley Gym.

**c. Announcement – Next City Council Meeting Date and Time – December 21, 2015 @ 6:00 p.m.**

Councilor Hicks stated that the next regular City Council meeting would be held on December 21, 2015 at 6:00 p.m. in the City Hall Council Chambers.

**ADJOURNMENT**

At 7:59 p.m., Councilor Hicks motioned to adjourn. Seconded by Councilor Monette, motion passed unanimously.

**THE CITY OF SOCORRO – a municipal corporation**

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/s/  
**Ravi Bhasker, Mayor**

**ATTEST:**

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/s/  
**Pat Salome, City Clerk**

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