

## Las Cruces Utilities

Minutes of the Regular Meeting on  
Thursday, January 9, 2020  
2:10 pm  
Utilities Board Room 225

### Board Members Present

William Little, Chairman  
Ed Archuleta, Vice-Chairman  
Jim Carmichael, Commissioner  
Dr. Harry Johnson, Commissioner  
Gill Sorg, Commissioner  
Gabriel Vasquez, Commissioner

### Board Members Absent:

Steven Baumgarn, Commissioner

### Ex-Officio Members Present:

Jorge A. Garcia, Utilities Director  
William Studer, Assistant City Manager

### Others:

Becky Baum, RC Creations, LLC  
Cassie McClure, Pubic Outreach Consultant  
Suzanne Michaels, Public Outreach  
Consultant  
Beth Bardwell, League of Women Voters  
Greg Shervanick  
Julie Herlands, TischlerBise

### City Staff Present:

Robert Cabello, Sr. Assistant City Attorney  
Carl Clark, Deputy Director RES/TS  
Rhonda Diaz, Water Conservation Program  
Coordinator  
Jeff Dillard, Business Systems Analyst  
Lucio Garcia, Deputy Director Gas  
Valerie Marrs, Senior Customer Service Rep.  
John Mrozek, Deputy Director Wastewater  
Jose Provencio, Deputy Director Business  
Services  
Mario Puentes, Gas Business Analyst  
Peggy Risner, Administrative Assistant  
Domonique Rodriguez, Rate and Economic  
Analysis Manager  
Alma Ruiz, Senior Office Manager  
Victoria Strouse, Senior Office Assistant  
Steven Valdez, Billing and Receiving  
Supervisor  
Delilah Walsh, Utilities Assistant Director  
Adrienne Widmer, Deputy Director Water

Chair Little called the regular meeting to order at approximately 2:10 p.m.

### 1. Conflict of Interest:

Chair Little: The first order of business is to inquire of the Board and staff and any person here has any Conflict of Interest with any item on the agenda.

### There were none.

Chair Little: Thank you. Before we go on, I want to note that this will be Councilor Vasquez' last meeting with the Board. He will be replaced by City Commissioner Johana Bencomo at the February meeting. Want to thank you for your time and service.

Vasquez: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Commissioners. I currently sit on three other Boards including chairing the South Central Solid Waste Authority Board. I want to give an opportunity to a new Council Member to join one of these fine Boards and Commissions. This meeting happens to conflict with another work

meeting that I have. So, it's a good opportunity to have Councilor Bencomo join the Utilities Commissions. Thank you all.

Chair Little: We're looking forward to having her be with us.

Vasquez: Thank you.

Chair Little: She'll soon find out that it's hard to work and some other cases.

Vasquez: She'll be the only woman in the entire Commission.

Chair Little: That didn't always be the case. As a matter of fact, through the life of the Board there have been several years where women were the majority.

Sorg: Majority?

Dr. Garcia: Ms. DeMouche was the first Chair at the meeting.

Chair Little: Yes.

Dr. Garcia: When she was a member of the public.

**2. Acceptance of Agenda:**

Chair Little: Next item of business is the Acceptance of Agenda.

Johnson: So moved.

Chair Little: Thank you. A second?

Archuleta: Second.

Chair Little: Any additions or corrections to the agenda? Seeing none.

Commissioner Johnson - Aye; Commissioner Carmichael - Aye; Commissioner Archuleta - Aye; Commissioner Sorg - Aye; Commissioner Vasquez - Aye; and Chair Little - Aye; Commissioner Baumgarn - Absent.

**The Agenda was Accepted 6-0.**

**3. \*Acceptance of Minutes:**

**\*a. Regular Meeting on December 12, 2019**

**The Minutes were Approved Unanimously 6-0.**



#### **4. Public Participation:**

Chair Little: The next item of business is Public Participation. Are there members of the public present who would care to be heard? Seeing none.

**There was none.**

#### **5. Administrative Report**

Chair Little: The next item is the Administrative Report.

Dr. Garcia: Mr. Provencio.

Provencio: Good afternoon Chairman, Commissioners. Jose Provencio, Deputy Business Services Director. I'll provide you your regular monthly update with respect to our programs to assist our customers in various manners and meanings with their utility billing. The main point here is this is activity as of December and we still have the same general pattern in terms of uses and applications of all the programs we do have. LIHEAP (Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program), which is a state funded program, is providing assistance to 156 customers. Total assistance level of about a little over, almost \$45,000.00. Again, just to remind you that this program is in effect, at least on the gas side, beginning November 15th and finishing up in March. This is a program that we assist and help our customers in coordination with the state program. Moving to the next item here with respect to...

Sorg: Mr. Chairman? Could I ask a question?

Chair Little: Please.

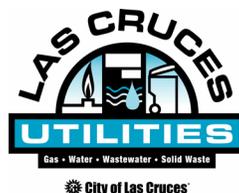
Sorg: Have we ever had a study where we determine energy efficiency of homes that are heated in the City ever, going back, ever, a long time?

Dr. Garcia: Mr. Chairman. Not the Utility.

Sorg: Okay. Just wondering.

Chair Little: Go ahead.

Provencio: Okay. Moving on to the progress with respect to the Casa de Peregrinos program. We are on track and slightly ahead of the mid-point. The graphical representation here it's about 52% at the mid-year, which indicates a good deal of success and utilization of the funds to help our customers with their City utility bills. With that, I'll stand by with any questions you may have.



Chair Little: Seeing none. Thank you.

Dr. Garcia: Ms. Walsh.

Walsh: Thank you. Good afternoon Mr. Chair, Commissioners. Delilah Walsh, Assistant Utilities Director. As promised, when it comes to the HR Activities Report and Vacancy Report, I'm going to be giving you monthly progress now that we actually have three months of data.

Since November 1<sup>st</sup>, we've reduced our vacancies by a net of three FTE's, but in reality, that's eight and I'll explain that a little bit further. It is misleading because when we went through the Munis reports we identified five other positions that were actually open within the Utility, but we weren't actively filling them. We hadn't had those tracked. Technically, if you look back in November 1st when we had 47 vacancies, that number really should have been 52. I didn't want to make that adjustment on this report until I notified you why, but that will be on the next report. So essentially, we did move from 52 to 44 vacancies.

Chair Little: Question.

Walsh: Yes sir.

Chair Little: Those that had not been actively recruited, are they excess to our needs?

Walsh: Mr. Chairman, Commissioners. That's a great question. Actually, not necessarily. One was a meter reader position that we had re-classed to a different type of position, but it hadn't actually made that action yet. Another was a holdover from a budget planning process that we simply just didn't identify when we were doing the recruiting. Others are being filled by temps and so that's a big push since we weren't actively needing that position. We already had somebody filling a body there, it wasn't being an overly actively recruited position, but we are now. All of those have been identified and we are looking at our vacancies.

Chair Little: Thank you.

Walsh: That question is excellent obviously for the information but also because we have a directive. I'm not sure if you know our City Manager has informed us that we really need to look at any positions that have been open for a year or more and identify if we're going to eliminate those positions or utilize them somewhere else. We've made a big, big push to identify those long open



positions and move them in different areas of the utility. I'll actually report on that in the next slide.

Sorg: Mr. Chairman?

Chair Little: Go ahead.

Sorg: Ms. Walsh. I just got appointed to the State Workforce Development Board.

Walsh: Great.

Sorg: I was at a seminar this morning in which the representative from the National, I'm not going to know her actual organization, but it's the National Labor in the federal government. What they're trying to do even locally here is to go by sectors and ask the businesses that need employees what they need and work from that point. My question is, have you contacted Workforce Solutions offices for these positions?

Walsh: Mr. Chairman, Commissioners. We have, I have their contact information. I've looked into a few of the programs. The issues that we have, those positions are typically great for entry level employees. The difficulty we have is the trades.

Sorg: What?

Walsh: The trades.

Sorg: Trades.

Walsh: A certain level of certification for a plumber or for a water operator, wastewater operator, an electrician. The Workforce Solution programs have excellent programs for entry level staff.

Sorg: That's what they're going to change.

Walsh: That's wonderful.

Sorg: They're going to have to find pathways to get a person that is untrained...

Walsh: Correct.

Sorg: ...or uneducated, either way, a pathway to positions like you're talking about. They need us and these businesses to work with them on a sector by sector.



In our case we're utilities, government utilities, I don't know what sector we call ourselves but that's something that they're looking for. Just a heads up, that should be coming along, and I hope we're willing to work with them on this.

Walsh: Absolutely. Commissioner Sorg if you have any information or anybody, I need to touch base with in order to make that start happening, we're very much on board with that. That's an activity that we're trying ourselves to grow our staff and start with that untrained, uncertified, unqualified entry level position and grow our own professionals within the Utility. I would love to partner with them in that effort. Thank you.

Sorg: Great. Thank you.

Walsh: For administration in Solid Waste if you look at the chart on the right, we really only have one opening and mine continues to be the HR position that we obviously need. Admin Services and our Environmental Services, Technical Services are showing more openings in January because that's where we moved the five vacancies. They earned some positions they didn't know they had anymore. I've re-classed them.

Gas has been fairly flat in our efforts to hire, but they are meeting consistently weekly as an entire group with HR to close that gap soon. Water's really made the most progress and they're demonstrating good movements. You see by the chart they had seven, they're down to five on just in those few times. Wastewater's progress has been hindered by some HR delays and John's, I'm sorry 18 to three. I apologize on Water and Wastewater. John got really aggressive this month. I'm proud of him. He's been able to get that moving now.

Regarding our strategic business plan results to fill vacancies within six weeks, we're still very far off that target. The January report of 25 weeks in process is somewhat misleading only because I've added in those five new positions where we've only been actively recruiting for zero weeks. So, it does skew our numbers a little bit because of those additions. We do have good news though. We actually have three positions in Gas that have been opened for close to 70 weeks and we finally have candidates waiting who have been ranked in HR and we're waiting to make offers. That's really good news. Again, it comes down to that professional services and the fact that they're simply low on employment when it comes to trade services. Especially here in Las Cruces. I'm sure you've all heard about our growth and that's the market we're competing with when it comes to employees.



We have made great positive progress in the task owner work stoppage areas. The chart on your right reflects whenever we're in the hiring process and it's a giant flow chart. I'll have to make a presentation on that once I understand it even better. Every time there's a stoppage within the process—we're actually tracking that on a weekly basis. The good progress we've made is most of the stoppages now at the Human Resources department and not within LCU. Sixty-nine percent of the tasks are sitting at HR for the next step whereas 31% are sitting with us. That's a good progress because that means we're pushing out our paperwork timely but we're still reliant on another department in order to move forward.

Essentially what we've done is identified all available openings within our budget, hence we found five more. We've reclassified five positions to meet the departmental need. However, as of today that number's six. We've identified our long-term openings. Dr. Garcia and I met earlier in the week and we moved some of the positions that have been open too long into other sections. We've created a new tracking report for temporary positions. This comes to that employee development wherein we're tracking; are we filling permanent positions with temps? If so, we need to be more aggressive about making that transition into a permanent position; and are there opportunities for us to take those temporary workers and grow them into regular employees within the Utility? Because what's wonderful is you've got this temp who's been with the City for six months, learns our systems, learns our processes, learns our names, and then they're gone, and that's not what we want. We want that to be a path rather than just a gap-fill.

We've remitted outstanding PAQ requests. This is a request for a new job description and a new pay classification. We've turned that in for eight positions meaning we're awaiting new job descriptions before we can advertise those positions. That packet, I think it's went to HR yesterday. We've launched our new LMS system, Learning Management for Training. That's a new online system that will help us track our PEAK goals regarding training and staff training. We'll be able to use canned training courses that are included with the LMS, but we'll also be able to track our own personal live person-to-person training as well as any specialized training required by that section.

We've also identified changes needed to combine our GIS mapping in Technical Services and Gas. We'll be combining those into one GIS mapping program and that reclassification request has gone to the City Manager, as well as one for locating the mapping. Right now, we have locaters in Water and locaters in Gas, and as I've mentioned before we're trying to combine those tasks to serve the entire Utility. We're not sending out, when we have to locate a line, we're not going to send out a Water locater and a Gas locater. Once everybody's



cross-trained we send one person; that will really help us, again when you see our growth and our work demand. With that I stand for any questions.

Chair Little: Questions? Commissioner Carmichael.

Carmichael: The two recent articles, the one in the Bulletin and one in Sun News were just really excellent. Especially stressing longevity and the stability of employment with the organization. I think the more of that that we can do every month is probably going to be a big help.

Walsh: Absolutely. Thank you, Commissioner Carmichael. As a matter of fact, we just approved another one to go out today on another line of business in Utilities. It really is an effort that we're making to show or demonstrate why this is such a great place to work.

Chair Little: Suzanne Michaels, please smile.

Sorg: She has been.

Chair Little: Go ahead.

Walsh: Commissioners. Any other questions? All right. I'll turn it over to Dr. Garcia. Thank you.

Dr. Garcia: Mr. Chairman. This is just very short. No new developments on TX v. NM. We have a conference call with the attorneys tomorrow so they can brief us on any new development.

The second thing on the Griggs Walnut, I informed you before that some of the technical elements of the Statement of Work we've agreed upon after our trip to Dallas to meet with EPA. At the end of December, we submitted a revised Consent Decree, that's the main document that we need to settle with, with some changes that we wanted from the federal government. We haven't heard back so that's the drafts going back and forth, but we think we're getting close. There's a few issues that deal with some attorney fees that we may have to mitigate later or go back to the judge, but those are a small piece of the bigger picture. For now, the elements that we wanted in that Consent Decree were submitted to the feds so we're waiting to see what their response is. Any questions? Mr. Clark.

Clark: Mr. Chairman, Commissioners. Carl Clark, Deputy Director, Environmental Technical Support. I'm here to give you the January 2020 Projects Update. The three projects I selected are there: Airport Booster Station Improvements, the



Jacob Hands Wastewater Treatment Facility Primary Feeder Project, and the Talavera Regulator Station - Rockwall Installation.

The first project, the Airport Booster Station Improvements, the contractor is Diamond Construction. The contract cost is \$647,000.00 approximately and contract time of 188 working days. They started this project April 23, 2019 with an estimated completion of March 5, 2020. They're approximately 85% in regard to construction and 70% in regard to payment. I've reported on this project before. The Booster Station basically is needed so that way we can do a review and an examination of the standpipe tank we have out at the airport that's due for an inspection. It was built back in the 1980s and has not been inspected in some time, so we have to mimic that pressure head of that tank and we're going to be doing that with this Booster Station at this location.

Currently the Booster Station is in the building. As you all recall, we purchased that from Canariis out of Florida. The contractor is currently working on the expansion joint. You can see that Buna rubber expansion joint up on the upper right photo. That'll be tied to the dark blue piping coming up through the ground and then the skid will, with a gray piping on the top is from the skid so that'll handle all the expansion and vibration that goes on between the two. The building renovations are continuing to go forward. Rawson has worked on the doors and completed those. The remaining work includes electrical and SCADA connections, which is scheduled for this month. They have been working on controllers that are on the ground tank. That Booster Skid Station will be pulling water from the ground tank and then mimicking the pressure head of the standpipe tank that we have out there at the airport. Put another photo of the skid and all the control system that's currently being worked on. You can see where all the work is going to be. It's electrical and the SCADA connecting points that are going on there as well as electrical that needs to take place in the ground set tank eventually will be tying on to some of the controls that are part of the standpipe tank. Any questions?

***Bill Studer stepped out 2:27 p.m. and returned 2:29 p.m.***

Chair Little: Seeing none. Thank you.

Clark: You're welcome. The Jacob Hands Wastewater Treatment Facility Primary Feeder. Contractor's Carver Electric on that project. The contract cost of approximately \$500,000.00. This project was to actually replace one of the existing feeder connections out there at the treatment plant that's been there for 30 years, bring it up to date with the electrical codes. The contractor, Carver Electric continues to work on this project. They have 210 workdays.



They started back in May 13, 2019. Estimated completion early March of 2020. They're about 89% in regard to construction and payment.

All the conduit banks have been installed and the cables have been pulled through the conduits. I put a couple nice photos on there of the crane system used to pull the cables. As you can see the lower right photo the size of the cabling and it takes three men to handle that cable, it's so large. That's the reason for the crane to pull through the conduit. The remaining work is precast boxes and lids, switching stations, and the final electrical pipe hot testing has to go on as part of that electrical systems. Any questions on that?

Then the final project is the Talavera Regulator Station - Rockwall Installation. This is the new one that has been brought forward to you all. It's a small contract that we put together on the site. The design of that rock wall and the security and the gates and the grading that's taking place for it, that was designed in-house by our own techs. We've done a few rock walls, so we feel it's easier for us to do that here and prepare instead of bidding documents. Then we solicited bids from three bidders. FSC was the low bidder. Thirty-three thousand dollars was the cost of this rock wall with 45 workdays. They started this back in October with an estimated completion of February 18, 2020. They're about 80% in regard to construction and 70% in regard to payment. We're having to suspend the contract or extend the contract because of the high-pressure gas line project which is in the way right now.

The remaining portion of rock wall is the driveway, which the high-pressure gas line goes right by the driveway; we have open trenches and some exposed steel gas line as the testing goes forward. That's why we haven't completed the Rockwall site. All the rock wall is completed. Upper right photo is the footing. You can see the size of it as that gentleman tries to straddle the footing and start, if you know anything about the rock walls they do a very dry mix, they pour it, and then they start stabbing the rock into the concrete footing so that way it ties it together and then they start tying in the rock from there as it goes upward. That is a six-foot rock wall with security wire on top and then a nice wrought iron fence.

In the area that we're at, in the Talavera area, everybody has rock walls and we were trying to match the area and that was one of the requests from the Curry's as well. He wanted to have a nice cover for the Reg Station. He really didn't want the Reg Station exposed to what people see in that area. He has a lot more development that's going on out there. He gave us the 50x50 easement or site to put the Reg Station on. We did not pay for it, we designed the rock wall to be within that easement. It's about 31x26 or 28 dimensions. The Gas Reg Station that's going to go in is constructed in-house. Once we get



the piping in then gas section will go in and install the Reg Station and tie it into the high-pressure gas line and get that prepared and ready to go for low-pressure site.

Two or three projects going on at the same time and trying to bring it all together as one. It's been rather interesting. Any questions on that?

No, then I'm done. Thank you.

Chair Little: Thank you.

**6. Resolutions for Discussion:**

**6a. Resolution 15-16-102A:**

Chair Little: Board resolutions. We have two resolutions for discussion today.

First one is Resolution 15-16-102A: A Resolution to Authorize Change Order #2 to Increase the Contract Amount of \$29,785.94 to Bohannon Huston Inc., of Las Cruces, New Mexico, for the Support of the Talavera High Pressure Gas Pipeline Extension Phase 1, Project Number 15-16-102, for a New Total Contract Amount of \$190,349.75.

Sorg: Move to approve.

Chair Little: Thank you.

Johnson: Second.

Chair Little: Thank you. Discussion.

Clark: Thank you Chairman, Commissioners. Basically, Change Order #2 is to shore up our construction Admin dollars. We had a couple of things that the contractor or consultant has to be on board with us. Number one was the fiber optic line that's been problematic throughout this installation of this high-pressure gas line was getting into the middle of the trench, we were responding back to the contractor in regard to changes and different demands.

The second thing was the County. We've had a lot to deal with the County in regard to the right-of-way. They didn't want us touching the pavement whatsoever. We've had to work with them on traffic control designs, trying to shift the traffic over to the south a bit so the contractor has enough room to bring in dump trucks to work within the easement, take the trench material out, dump it into dump trucks so we can start installing the line, bring it back



and then reinstall it into the pipe. It took a lot of planning and redesign to try and do all this.

The third one was the trespass. Well, even though the contractor's the one that trespassed and he did pay the fine for the trespass, we as the owner of the permit had to meet with the BLM and talk about the issues and give them timelines when things were going to be corrected and move forward on that aspect. The consultant pretty much exhausted his construction admin fees and so he needs help shoring up those fees because he's running out of money and we still need to complete this project. That's the reason for this change order.

Chair Little: Comments or questions? Ready for a vote.

Commissioner Vasquez - Aye; Commissioner Sorg - Aye; Commissioner Archuleta - Aye; Commissioner Carmichael - Aye; Commissioner Johnson - Aye; and Chair Little - Aye; Commissioner Baumgarn - Absent.

***The motion was Unanimously Approved 6-0.***

**6b. Resolution 19-20-LCU015:**

Chair Little: The next resolution is Resolution 19-20-LCU015: A Resolution Recommending the Full Cost Option to City Council for the Las Cruces Utilities Solid Waste Rate Review. Motion to approve?

Sorg: Move to approve.

Chair Little: Thank you. And a second?

Vasquez: Second.

Chair Little: Thank you. Discussion.

Provencio: Chairman, customers. Chairman Commissioners. Pardon me.

Carmichael: We're those too.

Provencio: Thank you. Resolution 19-20-LCU015 is the Board Resolution we're recommending to City Council to approve the full cost option for the Solid Waste service. At this stage, it's the summary culmination of the step that goes forward to the City Council for the Rate Review for Solid Waste service charges. Just to provide a summary here of what has transpired over the past several months.



The Rate Review determined that there was a shortfall in rate requirement to continue to properly fund operations. The other shortfall was determined to be below or less, required \$1.34 million to fully establish a revenue requirement of \$13.37 million or 11.14% of our current revenue levels. The next step involved allocating the Cost of Service for each of the unique classes of service, for residential and commercial, and the development of proposed rate design. The Utility Customer Advisory Group conducted the public outreach and submitted their full-cost option recommendation to you the Board in the December meeting. With that brief summary, the department compares in terms of current and the proposed bill impacts for residential standard 96-gallon container and the current and proposed charges for the 64-gallon container. At this point, I stand by for any questions which will be followed by the expected timeline for this review at City Council. I'll stand by for any questions on the general requirements for the resolution.

Chair Little: Questions?

Vasquez: Yes, Mr. Provencio. When would the, if approved by the Council, when would the change in rates take effect?

Provencio: With that, I'll lead into the timeline for the rate review and its implementation.

Vasquez: Thank you.

Provencio: I'll ask Domonique Rodriguez to do that.

Rodriguez: We are looking, Chairman, Commissioners, for this to go in Work Session February 24th to City Council. We have requested to then take it for approval to City Council March 16<sup>th</sup>, I believe, which then means we will come back here. The Utilities Board is the one who approves the tariffs in April which would give us an effective date May 1st.

Vasquez: If I may ask another question, Mr. Chair?

Chair Little: Of course.

Vasquez: Have we, did we discuss our regular Wastewater review time period after this Wastewater Rate Review? Dr. Garcia or anyone.

Dr. Garcia: Mr. Chairman. We're done with Wastewater. In our strategic plan we said we're going to look at the rates annually to report to the Board on the Cost of Service and review them every four years. We just approved the Wastewater and we're looking at Water. The one we need to look at next is Gas. That's the last one,



then we're going to continue the cycle again to stay in the 4-year cycle because one of the criticisms we received, especially the Water/Wastewater we waited 10 years and that impact is too large.

Vasquez: Absolutely.

Dr. Garcia: This one is five years and we think \$2.00 a reasonable amount for the five years, but again, I think doing it every four years is going to be much easier on the customer and on the Utility as well.

Vasquez: Thank you.

Sorg: Mr. Chairman.

Chair Little: Okay. Any other comments or questions?

Sorg: Yes.

Chair Little: Go ahead.

Sorg: It's been five years since we set the rates on Solid Waste. Well first of all, where's the time gone? Secondly, is there a specific cause for this increase that is developed in the last five years or just the general cost of CPI for example caused it to go up like this? I want an answer to when they ask me why we're raising the rate.

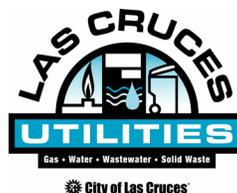
Provencio: Chairman, Commissioner Sorg. It's the general driver has been the significant cost increases in heavy equipment, in the large replacement cycle of the collection vehicles. The other driver has been changes and increases in salaries, and wages, and benefits.

Sorg: Okay.

Provencio: You have other items that have increased, but those are the prime drivers as well as the option of investigating and planning the phasing in of certain vehicles that are eco-friendly; those pieces coming together over the past five years. However, the main driver is the cost of equipment and it's relentless in terms of the heavy equipment.

Sorg: Eco?

Provencio: Eco-friendly.



Sorg: Friendly.

Provencio: Vehicles.

Sorg: Vehicles.

Provencio: Is a small portion. Is a piece of the increase that's driving this and this was detailed in all the presentations with the customers as well as the cost study. Those are the prime drivers, Commissioner.

Sorg: An eco-friendly, are we talking about hybrids or electric vehicles?

Provencio: The vehicles that we're looking at are more hybrid than purely electric.

Sorg: Okay.

Provencio: There are, especially in the heavy-duty vehicles, the large vehicles there's no electric, but they are of a hybrid nature.

Sorg: Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Vasquez: One more question. Mr. Chair.

Chair Little: Go ahead.

Vasquez: I notice with the grappler announcement you sent out for the letters that were miss-sent or sent to the wrong addresses, a text message was sent that went along with that as part of the rapid response protocol. I'm assuming, to make sure folks are getting their grappler collection dates correct. I'm thinking if it would make sense as we have these rate changes that are coming up, if that system would be appropriate for customers to be able to get more information online, to say, "Rates are changing." And they can visit a website that tells them a little bit more why. Just for whole transparency because a lot of folks are going to be hit by surprise by this. I know the reach that those messages have, to almost every customer with a cell phone, I'm assuming signs up for them, or I don't know if they sign up or not. It would be a good way to send the information because it is only \$2.00, but that's almost 15% or something, 14%. It's significant enough I think that people on fixed income should know more about why their rates are going up. Just an idea to throw out there for consideration.

Provencio: Chairman, Commissioner Vasquez. That's correct. I mean since we've started the whole process getting the word out to the citizens and the customers about



the rate review process has been challenging. Readership in the newspapers is probably not what it should be, or it's been declining. We've tried all different avenues in terms of the social media. What you bring up here is an excellent idea in terms of the Everbridge System which went live just recently. It was an effective outreach. It kind of got everybody's attention and it's certainly another tool that we can utilize in terms of information subject to review and approval.

Vasquez: Sure. Thank you. I appreciate your thoughtfulness on that consideration. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chair Little: Okay. Anything else?

Provencio: No.

Chair Little: All right ready for a vote to send this consideration to the City Council.

Commissioner Johnson - Aye; Commissioner Carmichael - Aye; Commissioner Archuleta - Aye; Commissioner Sorg - Aye; Commissioner Vasquez - Aye; and Chair Little - Aye; Commissioner Baumgarn - Absent.

***The motion was Unanimously Approved 6-0.***

**7. Old Business:**

Chair Little: That concludes the Resolutions. Next item of business is Old Business.

Dr. Garcia: A couple of things, Mr. Chairman. One is we will request a Work Session, shorter, probably just one hour. It is very likely that we'll need to present to the Board the part two of the Performance Contract. If you recall we broke the contract with Johnson Controls into Water and Wastewater phases. We're ready to show you Water, Wastewater excuse me, potential projects and in a Work Session setting so we would like to do that in February.

Chair Little: Any conflicts with the Board that's present? Okay.

Dr. Garcia: That would be probably starting at 2:00 p.m. rather than 1:30.

Chair Little: That would be great. Go ahead and calendar that for us.

Dr. Garcia: The other thing that you will be seeing in February as part of the administrative report and the City Council is familiar with this but there's going to be changes and there's a very volatile environment in the recycling arena. We will be having a presentation from Mr. Peck on the February meeting and he will be



also at the Council Meeting, Work Session on the 24th to have some discussion as to where we go from here.

Chair Little: That will be welcome.

Dr. Garcia: Yes. He's prepared to come in February and then the same presentation will be given to the City Council in discussion on the 24th Work Session.

Johnson: That will be in the Regular Meeting, not a special?

Dr. Garcia: Yes, Administrative Reports. We don't need a full Work Session item for that. The last thing is I'd like to have Jeff, since Councilor Vasquez's already brought up the problem, we've had with our computer databases explain what happened briefly and what measures we've taken to mitigate this problem from happening again.

Dillard: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, Commissioners. As Councilor Vasquez mentioned, we did have a problem with the database when our first grappler calendar was mailed out on the 31st of December. We initially started receiving notification back from the customers that they were getting the wrong information and immediately took action to correct that. We'll be having the corrected calendars starting to be re-mailed next week. We'll be doing the remaining parts of the cycle and the first cycle will be done at the end so everybody will get updated information.

To speak on the Everbridge side, that was, as you noted, a key way we were able to connect to people and let them know what's going on, and I thank you for your suggestion to allow us to go with rate review cases and other significant items of interest. I did want to point out that during this whole time online through our City website the grappler calendar has been available, and we have been referring people to that for correct information as well.

Any questions?

Sorg: Could I add my agreement with Councilor Vasquez in when that happened. I was totally shocked when I got the notice. Also like you said, I appreciate the website which you could just tap on and go directly to, that's really handy. Keep it up. Thank you.

Dillard: Thank you.

Chair Little: Commissioner Johnson.



Johnson: Did we identify anything significant in why the error occurred?

Dillard: The base reason for that is we made a small change. The previous year when we had mailed them, we sent them just to the physical address. This year we were trying to provide a little bit more customer friendly experience by sending it to the customers mailing preferred address, and that's where the problem came in. The two databases meshed partially, they didn't connect in all areas; so, somebody received the calendar for routes one, two, and three, but they actually lived in route four or route six. As part of our correction for this, we are going to complete this mailing using physical addresses again. I'll be spending much more time this year making sure that this error does not happen again by making a single data source that will handle it.

Dr. Garcia: If I may add also Mr. Chairman, Commissioner Johnson, part of the problem we have to merge databases because the Munis system doesn't allow us to have the routes. We have nine residential Solid Waste routes and that's part of the problem. If we could have that all in Munis in the billing system, there's not a problem. Maybe in the future we can look at working with Munis, I know, and trying to see if we can insert the route database in the system. That way there's no database meshing or having to have them work together because the true database is what we have in the field especially with the new software on Solid Waste that you saw a presentation. We know exactly where the containers are, but that customer may be receiving his bill somewhere else and that's what caused the problem. Physical address of a customer is not necessarily the same as the billing address.

Chair Little: Okay. Anything else? Thank you.

Dillard: Thank you.

Dr. Garcia: That's what we have for old business Mr. Chairman.

Chair Little: If I may go back to the suggestion about using this broadcast system about rate changes. I certainly would recommend that we not do that until after the City Council acts on it.

Dr. Garcia: Mr. Chairman. We wouldn't take any action until the City Council has approved by resolution, even though we've done a lot of our public outreach through the UCAG and Suzanne has done some work as to what's coming, we've never sent any messages that it is a done deal.

## **8. New Business:**

Chair Little: Okay. Now New Business.



Dr. Garcia: Not from staff. I was going to mention the Council Work Session on the 24th is going to be interesting because we're going to take to the Council three Utility related items. One is the Water/Wastewater development fees, the Solid Waste rates, and an extensive discussion on recycling. Ought to be an interesting and potentially fairly long Work Session.

**9. Board's General Discussion:**

Chair Little: Boards General Discussion. Go ahead.

Vasquez: Thank you Mr. Chair. Actually, I had a question for Dr. Garcia or staff. Is the online utility payment system functional? Is that working right?

Dr. Garcia: Jeff, can you explain? We had a lapse. Explain what happened and what is going on right now.

Dillard: With the online utility bill function?

Dr. Garcia: Yes.

Dillard: There was a problem created by IT changing the link to where that information lives. We experienced that last month where people had saved the link on their computer and it was the old information. The system itself has been remaining up and working functionally for everyone, but because it has a new address not everyone got that correct information. As soon as we realized that that hadn't been updated on the bill, we had that made to post approach so that they could get the correct information on their billing statement. In terms of our notifying people at that link, it was only a couple of days where the wrong information was going out before we caught that; but it was just getting people's attention to understand.

Vasquez: If I may, so I pay my bill online and I got an e-mail with the wrong link. I didn't have a link saved as you mentioned that caused me...you sent us the wrong.

Dillard: Right. That's what I was referring to. There was that minor lapse where e-mails were going out with the old link and as soon as we realized that we got that corrected so the next cycle got the correct information.

Vasquez: That link, that was the old link, I clicked on it every week for a month to figure out if it would work because I did not receive any communications saying there was a link otherwise. I think when it comes to paying your bill, just like the grappler calendar, we need to let our customers know that there's a new link or send follow up e-mail and say, "Here's the correct link". I'm wondering if some customers didn't even go into default from not paying their account that



month. Collecting; obviously, revenue is very important for the Utility and I think something like that happens, I think that should be a priority to correct that information with the customer right away. I did go pay my bill in person and did not receive any answers from our customer service bills as to why that happened. They should also have the correct information. Folks are, I think going to customer service and ask a question.

Dillard: Yes sir. We'll make sure that's not going to happen again. I do know that our Receivables Department did work with the people who had the wrong information and had been unable to make that payment because they didn't realize. Once we knew we did take steps to keep them from suffering penalty because of our problem.

Vasquez: That's great. Thank you for that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chair Little: Anything else?

Dr. Garcia: We have one more. We always give a little goody bag to the Councilors that are leaving, the Commissioners that are leaving, so we have Alma has prepared something that you need to study and there's a lot of information and stuff.

Vasquez: Thank you.

Dr. Garcia: Thank you for your service and thank you for, of course I see Councilor Vasquez at South Central. It was good to have you at this Board.

**10. Next meeting Date:  
a. February 13, 2020**

Chair Little: Our next meeting is February 13th beginning with a Work Session at 2:00 p.m. and the regular meeting to begin immediately thereafter.

**11. Adjournment:**

Chair Little: I would entertain a motion.

Sorg: To adjourn? So moved.

Archuleta: Second.

Chair Little: Thank you. Those in favor say aye.

Meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:57 p.m.



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William M. Little  
Las Cruces Utilities Board Chair

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Date

DRAFT

