ITEM:

Approve the minutes of the Public Utility Advisory Board for June 19th, 2017.

BACKGROUND:

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the minutes.
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, June 19, 2017 at 5:39 P.M.

INTRODUCTION:

PRESENT:
George Szigeti, Chairman
Jeff Dornbusch, Vice-Chairman
Ron Pacourek, Member
Gil Avelar, Member
Randy Ashbaugh, Member

ALSO PRESENT:
Juan Fuentes, City Manager
John Appel, City Attorney
Renee L. Cantin, City Clerk
Robbie Travis, Building Inspector
Melissa Torres, Finance Director
Andy Alvarez, Sanitation Director
Jesus Salayandia, Water/Wastewater Admin. Director
Bo Easley, Electric Division Director
Arnie Castaneda, Water/Wastewater Department Supervisor
Traci Burnette, Grant Project Coordinator
Ruby Otero-Vallejos, Water/Wastewater Administrative Assistant
Tammy Gardner, Electric Division Administrative Assistant
Sonya Williams, Utility Office Manager
Angela A. Torres, Deputy City Clerk
APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Member Pacourek moved approval of the agenda.

Member Avelar seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Regular meeting of Monday, May 15, 2017:

Chairman Szigeti asked that the request for materials be added to the minutes.

Vice Chairman Dornbusch moved approval of the May 15, 2017 minutes as amended.

Member Pacourek seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC:

Klaus Wittern - Requested that the agenda packet information be provided to the Board at least 72 hours prior to the meeting. He feels that will help the Board make an informed recommendation to the City Commission.

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC:

City Manager Fuentes – Mr. Wittern is completely misinformed and inaccurate in his assumptions that he is making in regards to the meetings. This project that will be discussed with the City Commission on the June 28th has been in the works for going on 3 years. It has been discussed with the Public Utility Advisory Board and the City Commission on multiple occasions. And the City Commission through the recommendation of the Utility Board did proceed forward with the IGA which is being finalized. All of that information will be presented at the Joint Workshop. What we’ve experienced in the past is having a Joint Meeting to share information and data, works best for everyone. He understands that Mr. Wittern has his own opinion, but he is off kilter on this one.

NEW BUSINESS:

Discussion/Update: Explanation of Utility Bills – Melissa Torres, Finance Director & Sonya Williams, Utility Office Manager:

Utility Office Manager Sonya Williams- They are here today to explain the utility bills to the Board. They’ve looked at other utility bills, like for instance, Sierra Electric Coop, and El Paso Electric, because we want our bills to be comparable. We want everyone to be able to understand our bills. She has requested several changes from Tyler that have been recommendations requested by the Board.
Ms. Williams reviewed her PowerPoint presentation with the Board which included the following:

**Changes made by the request of the Advisory Board:**

- Separated out the Electric and Pass Through Charges
- Added Water and Electric Graph of Consumption
- Added Sewer Average
- Added the word “Average” to Sewer.

Please note – These changes were made free of charge by Tyler (City Financial and Utility System); however, any future changes will be charged to the City starting at $5,000.00 per change.

Ms. Williams provided an example of the city utility bill as well as examples of bills of other entities and included them in her presentation.

**Conclusion:**

**The City of Truth or Consequences includes the following information on our Utility bills:**

- Account number
- Billing, service, and due dates (including penalty dates)
- Current charges, including penalties
- Payments received and balance due
- An information section for customers
- A 13-month graph depicting usage

These items are comparable with the information that other local service providers include on their bills.

Utility Office Manager Sonya Williams- Advised the Board that all changes to the utility bills were made free of charge from Tyler. However, from here on out, to have the layout of the bill changed, we will be charged a starting price of $5,000 for any additional changes.

Finance Director Melissa Torres- To add to what Ms. Williams stated, each of these changes were individual changes, these were not all at once. Maybe it would be something different if all of these requests were done at the same time, but these were individual requests that we have made for these changes.

Chairman Szigeti – So if we do this again, it would be in our best interest to collect several changes, and do it all at once? In that case the charge would be $5,000, but if we came in and did it five separate times, then it would become costly.

Member Pacourek – Asked how often does the city re-calculate customers on budget billing?
Utility Office Manager Sonya Williams – Budget billing is re-calculated every August, in April they re-calculate the sewer average, sewer base fee and in July they re-calculate the sewer cost per 1000 gallons and the trash rate by 5%.

Discussion/Update: Sanitation Department – Andy Alvarez, Sanitation Director:

Sanitation Director Andy Alvarez reported the following:

- He hired Kirsten Weddle for the scale house attendant position and the Sanitation Supervisor position is still open. Advertisement has been advertised in the newspaper, posted on the city website and also broadcast through KCHS Radio.
- They received three new trucks for his department, and three are going to other departments.
- The engine blew on his backhoe last week so he has to send it up to Albuquerque, to Wagner Equipment, to see if it is still under warranty. He is in the process of requesting three quotes for a new backhoe to use as a backup.

Chairman Szigiti – Made suggestions on different places the city could advertise for open positions.

Jeff Dornbusch - Asked Mr. Alvarez if the wood chipper is up and running.

Sanitation Director Alvarez – As of right now, we do not have the personnel to do wood chipping. However, we do receive it from the Bureau of Reclamation, and it is available at the Recycle Center.

Member Avelar asked if the residential trucks are holding up.

Sanitation Director Alvarez – One of his priorities for the new Fiscal Year was to replace one of his side loader dumpster trucks but then his backhoe blew up so he will have to wait on that. Maybe he can look into a new side loader truck the following Fiscal Year.

Member Pacourek- Asked where we were with the Butler Mobile Home Park. In the code of ordinance Section 11-14, it states that “In circumstances determined by the Solid Waste Department that a residence will be better serviced with a dumpster.” But it doesn’t say “and billed appropriately”. About 23 people in that particular Mobile Home Park are being charged for Poly-Carts that they don’t have. They have 5 dumpsters, and the owner of the property is not being charged for those dumpsters. It does not say anything in that section of the code of ordinance about being connected to an electric bill.

Utility Office Manager Sonya Williams - She knows in the code it does say that if you are provided with an electric or water meter you are to be billed for trash. As far as that Mobile Home Park, it is...

Member Pacourek- This is just an example of a situation that needs to be corrected as far as he’s concerned.

Chairman Szigiti – Asked member Pacourek to please let Ms. Williams finish.

Utility Office Manager Sonya Williams - As far as the Mobile Home Park, each customer if they have an electric meter, they are being charged for trash. Now if you remember, not too long ago, everyone was being charged for trash, and there was one dumpster in the alley. For a lot of these places it is the same
way. A lot of those residences don’t want to have to push the Poly-Cart all the way out to the road every week, and that is something between the renter and the landlord. It’s not our decision to make. They sign something when they move into the property regarding whether they are going to be charged for trash or not.

Chairman Szigiti advised Member Pacourek to add that as an agenda item if he would like to further discuss it.

Discussion/Update: Electric Department - Bo Easley, Electric Division Director:

Electric Department Director Bo Easley reported the following:

- The Paragon Transformers should be here tomorrow, and will be ready next week then hopefully the electric car charging system will be up for Tesla cars.
- They built the 3 Phase line at the Hospital and they are now waiting on the contractor to start the construction so we can get the underground put in.
- Bids close on June 21st for the Fitness Center at the High School.
- There will be a Joint City Commission/PUAB meeting on June 28th with YESCO.
- He and Robbie Travis have been working with Sunstate for a Verizon Tower at the Ball Fields.
- The contractors have been working on the Animal Shelter. They already have a 3 phase line built for that.
- He has contractors replacing 3 poles going up Carrie Tingly hill from Broadway, to Van Patten. They are also replacing 4 poles north of Caballo. They already have three of them done, and they still have one left to do.
- The price to test the poles that are rotting will be $12.00 per pole, which comes out to $6,000 for 500 poles. They will move forward with that in July.

Discussion/Update: Water/Wastewater Department - Jesus Salayandia, Water/Wastewater Director:

Water/Wastewater Director Jesus Salayandia reported the following:

- They’ve been having a little bit of trouble maintaining the water level on the upper zone. We dropped down as far as 15 ft.
- Arnie has been working on some quotes for well #7. We received two quotes. One came in and was outrageous. It was $79,000 just to acidize a well, flush it and clean it. The other quote that came in was for $19,000. We went with the second quote and are hoping that they will be in sometime next week to start on that.
- Phase 2a at the Wastewater Plant has been set back until September, or whenever the river goes down. It turns out that the water table has come up quite a bit.
- 3 out of 6 wells are operating at the moment. They are averaging about 1800 gallons a minute, which isn’t too bad for only operating on 3 wells. We are a bit lower than usual this year, but there is plenty of water and there is no need for concern.
Member Avelar asked if the contract for Phase 2 was time sensitive.

Water/Wastewater Director Salayandia - No, not on this project.

Chairman Szigeti- Asked if they were having trouble with the water line a week or so ago up by Morgan Street.

Member Ashbaugh- It looked like a pipe broke or something, on the East Side of Morgan Street.

Water/Wastewater Director Salayandia - That was just an air release valve, and sometimes it gets stuck. We are looking at getting that replaced.

Brief discussion ensued regarding acidizing the wells.

Discussion: June 28, 2017 Joint PUAB & City Commission Meeting – George Szigeti, Chairman:

Chairman Szigeti - As a board member, he felt that the way these Workshops were conducted, is that the participation of the Advisory Board was somehow minimized. He doesn't have an objection to having a joint meeting. However, he does request that the information for this meeting be sent to them as far in advance as possible so that the new members of the board have a chance to look over the documents. He specifically requests, when they have this meeting, the floor be turned over to the Public Utility Advisory Board to allow them discuss and question the presenter before the City Commission has a chance to give their input.

City Manager Fuentes recommended that Chairman Szigeti reach out to Mayor Green to express his concerns. He does not believe that Chairman Szigeti's request will be an issue because the intent of the Joint Workshop is to receive everybody's input.

Member Pacourek- Is the Water Department capable of replacing water meters on a regular basis?

City Manager Fuentes – Those questions will be addressed during the Joint Workshop on the 28th. That would be the appropriate time to discuss and address your question.

Discussion/Action: Standardizing language in City Ordinances concerning Utility Rates – George Szigeti, Chairman:

Chairman Szigeti- He was looking through the City Utility Ordinances and there is quite of a variance on how items are discussed. Last week there was a pass-thru which was related to fuel costs, and operational costs, and there is discussion for each of the utilities of a pass through charge, but it is not uniformly handled. He would like to start looking at the code where they discuss utilities, and try to standardize things.

Member Pacourek volunteered to help Chairman Szigeti with Standardizing language in City Ordinances concerning Utility Rates.
COMMENTS FROM THE BOARD:

Member Ashbaugh- Asked that his fellow members take a little bit of time to review, and study the New Mexico Development Fee Act.

Member Pacourek- Asked where we are at with a formula for the pass-thru rates.

Chairman Szigeti- He brought that before the City Commission last week and they approved the name change and formula. The only change they had was to re-calculate it once a year, so it does not place an undue burden on staff.

Chairman Szigeti compared the City of T or C Utility Bill to Sierra Electric Coop’s Electric Bill to show that the City’s rates are in fact cheaper than Sierra Electric Coop.

COMMENTS FROM STAFF:

There were no additional comments from staff.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business to come before the Public Utility Advisory Board, George Szigeti, Chairman, declared the meeting adjourned.

APPROVAL:

PASSED AND APPROVED this 17th day of July, 2017, on a motion duly made by Jeff Dornbusch, seconded by Ron Pacourek, and carried.

George Szigeti, Chairman
Public Utility Advisory Board