

Council picks firm for study of utility

by [Jonathan Miller](#) | August 20, 2015 | Filed under: [News](#)

The Socorro City Council voted to approve Forsgren Associates, Inc. out of Albuquerque to move forward with an electric feasibility study Monday during its bimonthly meeting at City Hall.

The environmental engineering firm was founded in 1962, and the council voted unanimously to accept the Request For Quote it submitted earlier this summer. The study, which will cost about \$38,000, is intended to give the council a clearer picture on how the city can proceed with establishing its own electric utility.

Senior engineer Sam Senn represented Forsgren at Monday's meeting, and broke the study down into five separate tasks. He pointed out that the American Public Utilities Association recognizes more than 2,000 public utilities similar to the one Socorro is considering forming, and those utilities provide 43 million people with power.

"We're going to work closely with your staff," Senn told Mayor Ravi Bhasker, "because each task is going to need some input from the city."

Step one Senn said, will begin with identifying the service area, and that the Industrial Park will play a big role in installing physical infrastructure. Right now the only two significant users in the park are Presbyterian Hospital and Socorro High School, and Senn said the city would likely need more.

"We do have some users out there, but to be able to install the infrastructure and provide power, we're going to need a little more," Senn said. "That's where the challenge in this study will come."

The second task will be determining who is currently using power, and how much they're using. Step three is analyzing available power supplies, and step four will involve mapping the Socorro Electric Cooperative's existing infrastructure. Senn said that the Co-op likely wouldn't agree to that mapping willingly, but that the city had the authority to do so.

The final step is completing a financial analysis, and Senn said that would be the most important aspect of the study — trying to figure out how to make establishing a city public utility affordable. Senn pointed to the possibility of utilizing different types of energy like solar power, hydroelectric and natural gas.

"You can generate electricity for about 4.5 cents per kilowatt hour with natural gas," he said. "That's an enticing thing to look at."

Perhaps as importantly, Senn stressed that the study would be a challenge to complete, but that it was doable.

"We're not shy about this," he said. "It's probably going to be an uphill battle ... the most important thing I want to stress is that this feasibility study is going to have to be realistic."

According to Senn the firm will begin the study this week, and it could possibly be completed as early as the second week of October.

The council seemed to welcome the idea of having some reliable data to consider when coming to a decision about moving forward with an electric utility.

"I do like that you're not going to sugar coat it," Councilor Mike Olguin Jr., said. "Me personally, I want solid facts and my decision can be based on solid facts. I'm looking forward to what comes out of this."

Bhasker remained diligent in his desire to let the Co-op know the city was taking legitimate and deliberate steps toward forming its own utility.

“We want to make it very clear to the Co-op that the city continues to be serious in what we’re doing,” he said. “We’re doing it in a very methodical way, and we’ll come to a conclusion one way or the other. We’re still very serious in the municipality’s ability to provide electricity.”

The next Socorro City Council meeting will take place 6 p.m. Tuesday, Sep. 8 at City Hall.