122912-Cheiftain-amendment defeated “Electric Co-op member-owners defeat amendments at meeting.” From the December 12, 2012 – Chieftain . The article was not on the on-line version of the publication. (see also article about SEC activities in the Chieftain “year end review”.

More than 600 member-owners turned out at the Socorro Electric Cooperative annual meeting April 14 to defeat 14 of 15 proposed amendments to the bylaws put forth by a board of trustees that chose to sue the co-op's members in a dispute over new bylaws members approved two years ago.

The only measure that passed was a plan to realign districts to make for more equitable representation — something members mandated at the 2010 annual meeting when a movement to reform the democratically controlled co-op took hold.

In addition to defeating the board-sponsored proposals, several motions from the floor, giving members more voice in determining how their co-op is run, were approved at what was an often contentious meeting.

The trustees faced agitated member-owners at the outset of the meeting with meeting attendees reigning boos during the introduction of trustees and dispensing catcalls toward Paul Bustamante, the co-op's president.

Diminished trust in the co-op's board of trustees was a theme throughout the meeting.

Bustamante and other co-op officials were at times heckled by the crowd, which filled the seats of the New Mexico Tech Macey Center auditorium and spilled out to the aisles and lobby.

"You sued us!" shouted one man, reminding the board of the lawsuit it filed against all of Socorro Electric's member-owners in an effort to block new bylaws passed in 2010 calling for the co-op to operate with greater transparency.

Since Socorro Electric Cooperative is a private, nonprofit corporation owned by its members — who are also its customers — it was effectively a case of the co-op suing itself and leaving the members to foot the bill.

With the lawsuit looming, many members boycotted the 2011 annual meeting and a quorum was not achieved.

A month later, a judge decided the case against the co-op board, ruling bylaws requiring the co-op to follow open meeting and inspection of public records rules were valid and properly adopted.

All but one of the board-sponsored amendments at the 2012 annual meeting were defeated by nearly 5-to-1 margins. The measure to approve the redistricting plan, which paves the way for the co-op's five districts to be represented by just one trustee in each district, won by an even greater margin.

Including the 141 mail-in ballots that were cast, approval was won 612-101.

In addition to the lawsuit, three of the resolutions proposed by the board at this year's meeting would have served to undo what members approved in 2010.

One would have set the size of the board at seven members, another would have doubled the board's spending cap and a third would have reinstated the

File photo

Close to 700 people overflow the New Mexico Tech Macey Center on April 14 for the Socorro Electric Cooperative's annual membership meeting to discuss proposed new bylaws.

board's authority to distribute contributions to adult service organizations and sponsor certain events and projects.

A motion to hold district meetings annually was one of three proposals that received approval.

However, an attorney for the co-op explained motions from the floor don't immediately go into effect. Instead, they are placed on the agenda for the annual meeting to be put up for final approval the following year.

The other two proposals that will be on the ballot for the annual meeting in 2013 are for mail-in ballots to be counted toward the quorum and, since the redistricting plan was approved, for trustees from each of the five districts to appoint a judge and two alternatives to count ballots at the annual meeting.