

## **(Socorro) Council talks co-op appraisal**

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"We have engaged an appraiser to appraise the amount, the value, of the electric cooperative in the city of Socorro," Bhasker said, adding the city officials recently met with the director of the New Mexico Rural Electric Cooperative Association. "The city is moving ahead with it; the city is not reluctant at all to make sure the public and the city of Socorro is represented."

Echoing the sentiments of weeks past, Bhasker said he still would like to see a consensus from the members of the co-op as to whether they are pleased with the current set-up of service in the city or whether they would like to see the city try to acquire its portion of the utility or sever the contract with the service provider.

A letter sent to city council from SEC Board of Trustees President Anne Dorough stated trying to get a full quorum for the co-op together, as the company is still reviewing its management practices, would be unnecessary at this time.

"The City has suggested that SEC call a meeting of the members to vote 'up or down' whether the City should take over the SEC franchise within its jurisdiction," the letter from Dorough stated. "At such time where there is a specific offer by the City to purchase of the SEC franchise, it is premature to call such a meeting."

Dorough stated two-thirds of the SEC members must approve the sale of the city assets of the co-op, with at least half of the members residing outside of the city.

Council voted to renew the city's membership with South Central Council of Governments (SCCOG) during the meeting, after Executive Director Jerry Armijo visited to give a comprehensive update on the organization's proceedings.

The city pays \$2,663 for SCCOG membership. The organization also plans to establish a full-time engineer in the area.

"I believe the city will be able to get in the next cycle for Community Development Block Grants," Armijo said, which is a process of applying for funding for projects the city enters each year. SCCOG is an affiliation in assisting the process.

One project that has been recommended by the SCCOG is planned for water management in San Antonio just south of Socorro through Colonias funding.

A public hearing and planning session with the SCCOG is scheduled 6 p.m. Monday, Sept. 22 at the Socorro County Annex Building. Members of the public will be able to voice their opinion on transportation and community projects for state legislative funding.

All law enforcement personnel under the Socorro Police Department will receive a three-step, or 7.5 percent, pay increase. According to a resolution passed by the council, the salary ranges and job descriptions for the city were last adopted in 2003.

In the resolution, the document stated, "The City Administration and the Chief of Police have reviewed the salary structure for the City's Police Department and have determined that in order for the salary structure to remain competitive with other agencies, the salaries of police department personnel should be adjusted."

Chief Mike Winders said he thinks this will attract new police officers to Socorro, as it brings the base salaries near equality of surrounding counties'.

"It moves us back up there close to ... Valencia County; it closes the (competitive wage) gap," Winders said during the meeting. "I'm very happy with it."

The city is looking to implement an ordinance that would fund plans for the recently-acquired armory building.

"This is on top of gross receipt, lodgers and this is another \$1.50 specifically and, by statute, could only be used for the ... convention center," Bhasker said. The reason for the bedroom tax is so that it is not (necessarily) imposed on the people of Socorro directly but rather the visitors who would utilize the center.

Bhasker said the \$1.50 tab on each bill should bring in somewhere between \$100,000 to \$150,000 annually. The New Mexico Legislature recently approved for cities of 50,000 to tag on a specific tax that allows them to recoup funding, but the money can only be used for the armory, if an ordinance is passed by council.

"It's helped everybody and, as the mayor said, it's going to bring in a lot of money," Councilor Gordie Hicks said.