



AGENDA MEMO

3/6/2018 Agenda

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM: Dale Harwell, Director of Information Services

SUBJECT: Consider and Act on an Ordinance Approving a Tariff Authorizing an Annual Rate Review Mechanism (RRM) with Atmos Energy Corporation

BACKGROUND:

The City, along with 171 other Mid-Texas Cities Served by Atmos Energy Corporation, Mid-Tex Division ("Atmos Mid-Tex" or "Company"), is a member of the Steering Committee of Cities Served by Atmos ("Cities"). In 2007, the Cities and Atmos Mid-Tex settled a rate application filed by the Company pursuant to Section 104.301 of the Texas Utilities Code for an interim rate adjustment commonly referred to as a GRIP filing (arising out of the Gas Reliability Infrastructure Program legislation). That settlement created a substitute rate review process, referred to as Rate Review Mechanism ("RRM"), as a substitute for future filings under the GRIP statute.

Since 2007, there have been several modifications to the original RRM Tariff. The Ordinance that resolved the Company's application under the RRM Tariff in 2017 also terminated the existing RRM Tariff and required a renegotiation of the terms of that tariff. Negotiations have taken place over the past several months, and have resulted in a revised RRM Tariff that has been agreed to by the Company. The Cities' Executive Committee has recommended acceptance of the revised RRM Tariff, which is attached to the Ordinance.

CITIES' OBJECTION TO THE SECTION 104.301 GRIP PROCESS

Cities strongly opposed the GRIP process because it constitutes piecemeal ratemaking by ignoring declining expenses and increasing revenues and rewarding the Company for increasing capital investment. The GRIP process does not allow any review of the reasonableness of capital investment and does not allow cities to participate in the Railroad Commission's review of annual GRIP filings or recover their rate case expenses. The Railroad Commission undertakes a mere administrative review of GRIP filings (instead of a full hearing) and rate increases go into effect without any material adjustments. In the Steering Committee's view, the GRIP process unfairly raises customers' rates without any regulatory oversight. In contrast, the RRM process has allowed for a more comprehensive rate review and annual evaluation of expenses and revenues, as well as capital investment.

CHANGES TO THE RRM TARIFF

The RRM Tariff on which the 2017 rates were based allowed a rate of return on equity of 10.50%. The revised RRM Tariff reduces that to 9.8%. The revised RRM Tariff also captures the reduction in federal income tax rates from 35% to 21%, and should result in a rate reduction effective by mid-March, 2018. Prior RRM tariffs allowed Cities only three months to review the Company's filing. The new revised Tariff expands that time period by two months. New applications by the Company should be made on or about April 1 of each year, with new rates effective October 1. A rate order from the Railroad Commission in an Atmos Texas Pipeline rate case adopted the position of Cities with regard to incentive compensation related to Atmos' Shared Services Unit that reduced allowed expenses, and that reduced level of expenses will be applicable under the new RRM Tariff.

EXPLANATION OF "BE IT ORDAINED" PARAGRAPHS

1. This section approves all findings in the Ordinance.
2. This section adopts the attached RRM Tariff and finds the adoption of the Tariff to be just, reasonable, and in the public interest. The prior tariff expired by its own terms.
3. This section requires the Company to reimburse the City for expenses associated with adoption of the Ordinance and RRM Tariff and in processing future applications pursuant to the Ordinance.
4. This section repeals any resolution or ordinance that is inconsistent with this Ordinance.
5. This section finds that the meeting was conducted in compliance with the Texas Open Meetings Act, Texas Government Code, Chapter 551.
6. This section is a savings clause, which provides that if any section is later found to be unconstitutional or invalid, that finding shall not affect, impair, or invalidate the remaining provisions of this Ordinance. This section further directs that the remaining provisions of the Ordinance are to be interpreted as if the offending section or clause never existed.
7. This section provides for an effective date upon passage.
8. This section directs that a copy of the signed Ordinance be sent to a representative of the Company and legal counsel for the Steering Committee.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of this ordinance.

ATTACHMENTS:

Mid-Tex RRM Tariff
Exhibit A to RRM Tariff