



Legislation Text

File #: ORD-3596, Version: 1

Consider adopting Ordinance No. 3596 approving a negotiated settlement between the Atmos Cities Steering Committee and Atmos Energy Corp., Mid-Tex Division that adopts new natural gas rates for the City of Farmers Branch; and take appropriate action.

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 Atmos Cities Steering Committee (“ACSC”). In 2007, ACSC 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 most recent iteration of an RRM Tariff was reflected in an ordinance adopted by ACSC members in 2018. On or about April 1, 2019, the Company filed a rate request pursuant to the RRM Tariff adopted by ACSC members. The Company claimed that its cost-of-service in a test year ending December 31, 2018, entitled it to additional system-wide revenues of \$70 million. After the Company reviewed ACSC’s consultants’ report, ACSC’s Executive Committee and the Company negotiated a settlement whereby the Company would receive an increase of \$35.4 million from ACSC Cities. The Executive Committee recommends a settlement at this amount. The Effective Date for new rates is October 1, 2019. ACSC members should take action approving the Ordinance before the end of September.

Atmos generated proof that the rate tariffs attached to the Ordinance will generate \$35.4 million in additional revenues from ACSC Cities. That proof is attached as Attachment 1 to this Staff Report. ACSC consultants have agreed that Atmos’ Proof of Revenues is accurate.

The impact of the settlement on average residential rates is an increase of \$2.05 on a monthly basis, or 3.7 percent. The increase for average commercial usage will be \$6.18 or 2.31 percent. A bill impact comparison is attached as Attachment 2.

DISCUSSION:

ACSC strongly opposed the GRIP process because it constitutes piecemeal ratemaking by ignoring declining expenses and increasing revenues while rewarding the Company for increasing capital investment on an annual basis. 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 allow recovery of Cities’ 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 ACSC’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.

While residents outside municipal limits must pay rates governed by GRIP, there are some cities served by Atmos Mid-Tex that chose to remain under GRIP rather than adopt RRM. Additionally, the City of Dallas adopted a variation of RRM which is referred to as DARR. When new rates become effective on October 1, 2019, ACSC residents will have a slight economic monthly advantage over comparable GRIP and comparable DARR rates (see Attachment 3).

The Legislature's GRIP process allowed gas utilities to receive annual rate increases associated with capital investments. The RRM process has proven to result in a more efficient and less costly (both from a consumer rate impact perspective and from a ratemaking perspective) than the GRIP process. Given Atmos Mid-Tex's claim that its historic cost of service should entitle it to recover \$70 million in additional system-wide revenues, or \$54 million from ACSC Cities, the RRM settlement at \$35.4 million for ACSC Cities reflects substantial savings to ACSC Cities in the amount of \$18.6 million. ACSC's consultants produced a report indicating that Atmos had justified increased revenues for ACSC Cities of at least \$32.7 million. Settlement at \$35.4 million is fair and reasonable. The ACSC Executive Committee consisting of city employees of 18 ACSC members urges all ACSC members to pass the Ordinance before September 30, 2019. New rates become effective October 1, 2019.

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommended motion by City Administration to adopt Ordinance No. 3596 approving a negotiated settlement between the Atmos Cities Steering Committee and Atmos Energy Corp., Mid-Tex Division that adopts new natural gas rates for the City of Farmers Branch.

POSSIBLE COUNCIL ACTION:

1. I move to approve Ordinance No. 3596 approving a negotiated settlement between the Atmos Cities Steering Committee and Atmos Energy Corp., Mid-Tex Division that adopts new natural gas rates for the City of Farmers Branch.
2. I move to table the issue for further study or take no action.

ATTACHMENT(S):

1. Attachments 1, 2, and 3 to Staff Report
2. Ordinance No. 3596 with Exhibits A, B, and C
3. Atmos RRM Frequently Asked Questions