



Legislation Text

File #: R2020-125, Version: 1

Consider approving Resolution No. 2020-125 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 March 31, 2020, 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, 2019, entitled it to additional system-wide revenues of \$141.2 million. Application of the standards set forth in ACSC’s RRM Tariff required Atmos to reduce its request to \$136.3 million, \$98.7 million of which would be applicable to ACSC members. ACSC’s consultants concluded that the system-wide deficiency under the RRM regime should be \$111.5 million instead of the claimed \$136.3 million. The amount of the \$111.5 million deficiency applicable to ACSC members would be \$80.8 million. After the Company reviewed ACSC’s consultant’s report, ACSC’s Executive Committee and the Company negotiated a settlement whereby the Company would receive an increase of \$90 million from ACSC Cities, but with a two-month delay in the Effective Date until December 1, 2020. This should save ratepayers approximately \$9 million such that the case is functionally equivalent to ACSC’s consultants’ recommendation of \$80.8 million. The Executive Committee recommends a settlement at \$90 million. The Effective Date for new rates is December 1, 2020. ACSC members should take action approving the Resolution before November 1, 2020.

Atmos generated proof that the rate tariffs attached to the Resolution will generate \$90 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 \$5.15 on a monthly basis, or 9.9 percent. The increase for average commercial usage will be \$15.48 or 6.56 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.

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 \$141.2 million in additional system-wide revenues, the RRM settlement at \$90 million for ACSC Cities reflects substantial savings to ACSC Cities. ACSC's consultants produced a report indicating that Atmos had justified increased revenues for ACSC Cities of at least \$81 million. Settlement at \$90 million (equivalent to \$81 million with a two-month delay) is fair and reasonable. The ACSC Executive Committee consisting of city employees of 18 ACSC members urges all ACSC members to pass the Resolution before November 1, 2020. New rates become effective December 1, 2020.

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommended motion by City Administration to adopt Resolution No. 2020-125 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 Resolution No. 2020-125 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. Resolution No. 2020-125 with Exhibits A, B, and C
3. Atmos RRM FAQ's