

Minutes

City of Soledad Joint
City Council/Successor Agency
Regular Meeting

August 18, 2021

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Velazquez called the City Council/Successor Agency Meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

ROLL CALL

The Following Councilmembers/Agencymembers were present when the meeting was called to order:

Mayor/Chair	Anna M. Velazquez
Mayor Pro Tem/Vice Chair	Carla Strobridge
Councilmember/Agencymember	Alejandro Chavez
Councilmember/Agencymember	Ben Jimenez, Jr.
Councilmember/Agencymember	Marisela Lara

THE FOLLOWING COUNCILMEMBER WAS ABSENT

- None

PUBLIC COMMENT ON CLOSED SESSION ITEMS

- None

MEETING RECESS FOR CLOSED SESSION

Mayor Velazquez recessed to closed session at 6:02 p.m.

MEETING RECONVENED FROM CLOSED SESSION

Mayor Velazquez reconvened from closed session at 6:36 p.m.

CLOSED SESSION

1. The City Council will recess to closed session to confer with its attorney regarding litigation pursuant to Government Code Section 54956.9(d)(2)- significant exposure to litigation.
2. The City Council will recess to closed session pursuant to Government Code 54956.8 to give instructions to the City's real property negotiator (City Manager) concerning sale/exchange/lease of property located at the 700 Block of Front Street, City of Soledad, APN: 022-211-022. Instructions will include price, terms of payment and other relevant conditions.

CLOSED SESSION REPORTS

1. With respect to item no. 1, the council conferred with its Attorney and the City Manager. No other reportable action taken.
2. With respect to item no 2, the council conferred with its real property negotiator, the City Manager. No other reportable action was taken.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

- Led by Jacqueline Simon

ADDITIONS/MODIFICATIONS TO THE AGENDA

1. Mayor Velazquez has opened the Public meeting in memory of Alfred Diaz-Infante. She would also like to close the meeting in his honor at the adjournment of the council meeting. She also highlighted accomplishments Mr. Infante had in Monterey County and specifically in the City of Soledad.
2. City Manager Slama indicated there is an amendment to item no. C-4 located on the dais.
3. City Manager Slama Introduced the new City Engineer, Oscar Espinoza.
 - City Engineer Oscar Espinoza thanked the council for welcoming him. He is happy to be here in the City of Soledad.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- None

COUNCIL PRESENTATION

1. A Proclamation of the City of Soledad Recognizing the Month of August 2021 as "Breastfeeding Awareness Month".
 - Monterey County Health Department representative Lupe Covarrubias-Martinez was present in the meeting to accept the Proclamation. She thanked the Community and the council for welcoming the event and for participating.
2. A Proclamation of the City of Soledad Recognizing August 26th as "Women's Equality Day".
 - Ms. Jacqueline Simon and Ms. Zandra Jo Galvan were both present in the meeting to accept the proclamation in honor of "Women's Equality Day". Both Ms. Jacqueline Simon and Ms. Zandra Jo Galvan thanked the council for observing the date and presenting the proclamation.

Mayor Pro Tem Strobridge said she is very proud to be a part of the council at this time.

Councilmember Jimenez said he feels proud of women and the strides that have been taken throughout history and is happy to be apart of the City Council working along side women who are strong, capable and great examples to the community.

At this time Mayor Velazquez asked that a quick photo be taken with Ms. Jacqueline Simon, Ms. Zandra Jo Galvan and the council.

CONSENT CALENDAR

Councilmember Jimenez asked to have further discussion on item no. C-2.

There were no public comments at this time.

Councilmember Jimenez asked why there were credit card reimbursements due for \$899 and \$2,470; he asked if staff might have access to a City credit card so that reimbursements like this can be avoided.

City Manager Slama said staff does have access to a City credit card. At the time of these particular expenses, the startup fees exceeded the amount of the City Credit Card credit limit. The charges have been reviewed and approved through the City Manager.

Motion: Councilmember Jimenez made motion to approve items C-1 through C-4. Motion was seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Strobridge and carried by unanimous vote:

Action:

Ayes: Jimenez, Strobridge, Chavez, Lara, Velazquez
Noes: None
Abstain: None
Absent: None

C-1. Approval of Minutes

Joint City Council/Successor Agency Regular Meeting Minutes of August 04, 2021.

C-2. Warrants

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C-3. Resolution No. No. 5737, A Resolution of the City Council of the City of Soledad Establishing the Job Classifications of Fitness Instructors for the Parks and Recreation Department and Establishing a Salary Range.

C-4. Resolution No. 5738, A Resolution of the City Council of the City of Soledad Approving the Purchase of Kompan Inc. Playground Equipment, By Sole Source Procurement, and Authorizing the City Manager to Execute an Equipment Sales Agreement for the Procurement of Kompan Inc. Playground Equipment for an Amount Not-to-Exceed \$408,746.17.

BUSINESS

B-1. Receive the 2021 Utility Rate Study Findings and Recommendations and Provide Direction to Implement the Proposition 218 Noticing Process for Holding a Public Hearing on October 20, 2021, on Changes to Water and Wastewater Utility Rates.

Finance Director Mike Howard presented the staff report and introduced Willdan Financial Services Kevin Burnett and Chris Fisher.

Willdan Financial Services Kevin Burnett presented the item through a PowerPoint presentation.

Mayor Jimenez thanked Willdan for the presentation. He asked if he was correct in his understanding that there will be an increase of 54% in water and a 44% increase in sewer.

Willdan Financial Services Kevin Burnett said that is correct.

Councilmember Jimenez said those increases are high and he is concerned for the families in the Community and the impact these increases may have.

Mayor Pro Tem Strobridge said she also feels concerned. She asked Attorney Mike Rodriguez if the council has to approve this for this year or can these increases be pushed into the following year.

City Attorney Mike Rodriguez said if the fees are not adopted the City will not be able to meet the cost of these services.

City Manager Slama said there has been no increase in two years. The longer the increase is postponed, the higher the amount due will be. Cost will go up and affect the capital projects. There is no requirement for council to move forward at this time, but it does delay the inevitable.

Willdan Financial Services Chris Fisher said there is no legal issue, but the debt service coverage requirement, which is the bond covenant, requires the City to maintain a coverage requirement of \$1.20 for each dollar of debt. Without the rate increase in the first year this would put the City in technical default. Technical Default means the City is not meeting the debt service requirement and that could have impacts later on when the City needs access to capital markets again for future capital projects. Technical default does need to be reported and the City should definitely avoid it.

City Manager Slama said if rates are not raised the only way the City will meet the debt services requirements is to either cut capital or cut operations; he will not cut operations so the outcome will be cutting the capital projects.

Finance Director Mike Howard said the City currently has a AAA bond rating. If the City gets downgraded to a B, the City will not have favorable rates and might not be able to build in capital projects. The City will become "risky" to the financial world.

Mayor Velazquez asked Financial Director Mike Howard what the annual payment is to the debt services.

Finance Director Mike Howard said the sewer fund annual payment is 1.5 million dollars and that fund was refinanced five years ago to a forty-year rate. The water bonds were just refunded so the debt services on the water bonds is just under three-hundred thousand.

Mayor Pro Tem Strobridge would like to see the Utility Assistance Program promoted on the utility billing.

Councilmember Chavez asked if there is a way for the percentages to be shifted around so the total is still 54% in the end; Is there a way to make the increase less in the beginning and more towards the end.

Willdan Financial Services Chris Fisher said they did think of shifting the percentages but in the end, it does not work out to where the City needs to be. Unfortunately, it cannot be done because of where the City is in the process. The revenue increases compound on each other and in the end the City would not meet the target cash reserve line in 2023/2024.

Councilmember Lara said this may impact the people because of the pandemic.

Mayor Velazquez said from now on things like this should be done in a timely manner so that the people are not put in a situation like this in the future. She asked if it would be possible to be able to factor in the ARPA funds into the rate increases, and if that is possible would doing so change anything. Also, how much would be needed in order to make a difference.

Willdan Financial Services Kevin Burnett said he is not familiar with the requirements or legality of using the ARPA money. If this money was able to be used, the rate revenue increase would still be carried into the following year. Rates may be able to be reduced a little and may allow for some wiggle room but injecting one-time money into a long-term financial plan and not making the revenue adjustments that were actually needed.

Councilmember Chavez asked if the one-time money was put forth could the City add the increase at the back end in the last year.

Willdan Financial Services Kevin Burnett said conceptually that could be done but it will not significantly reduce the debt.

Mayor Velazquez asked Finance Director Mike Howard asked if it possible to juggle the ARPA money into what is needed.

Finance Director Mike Howard said the City can do that.

Mayor Velazquez asked if the City has a peak usage time.

City Manager Slama said the City does not have water meters set up to indicate what time is best time to use the water, but a household will get punished after using a certain amount of volume.

Councilmember Lara said she believes the people of Soledad can handle the rate increase. They have pledged to be a part of Measure S and build housing for the teachers. The rates should be implemented, and the City should move forward with the public hearing.

Councilmember Chavez agrees that ARPA funds should be factored in, and the numbers should be looked at. If the amount drops, the cost saving should be given to the residents. Whatever the commitment is, the City needs to look at what can be decreased on the front end and decreased in the back end.

Mayor Velazquez agree that the ARPA funding should be funneled in. The ARPA funding is one-time monies that the City will receive. The ARPA funds can be used towards water and infrastructure projects. Since there is already a list of CIPs that need improvements, the City needs to look into how that money can be used for the CIP's. Doing this will help alleviate the bigger increases in the beginning. This will give the residents a chance to come out of the pandemic more financially stable.

Finance Director Mike Howard said staff will look into different scenarios and bring the information back to council.

City Attorney Mike Rodriguez asked City Manager Slama when the ARPA funds were going to come to the council for discussion.

City Manager Slama said the ARPA item would come to council in the month of September. There are many categories that will be included in the discussion.

There were no public comments at this time.

City Manager Slama said item B-1 will be brought back in November after looking at the percentage rates and looking at a number of scenarios.

City Attorney Mike Rodriguez asked if there needs to be an established protocol regarding how the City can commit ARPA funds.

Financial Director Mike Howard said the City has still not received regulations on how to calculate what the City's lost revenue is.

Motion:

Information was received by council.

The council provided direction.

No Action taken for this item.

B-2. Update on Economic Development Programs.

Economic Development & Housing Program Coordinator Tencia Vargas gave update on the Business Loan Program and the 211 Rental and Utility Assistance Program.

Councilmember Chavez asked if there were other programs through United Way and not through the City.

Economic Development & Housing Program Coordinator Tencia Vargas said there are other programs offered and she will always provide the information to the resident. There are many resources.

Mayor Velazquez thanked Economic Development & Housing Program Coordinator Tencia Vargas and the staff for helping the residents through the process of getting the needed assistance.

Councilmember Jimenez also thanked the staff for assisting the residents through the process.

Mayor Pro Tem Strobridge thanked Economic Development & Housing Program Coordinator Tencia Vargas and the staff for going above and beyond for the residents of Soledad.

Ivan Ibarra-Mora asked if there has been any collaboration with the family liaisons in the school district.

Economic Development & Housing Program Coordinator Tencia Vargas said she has not yet but asked if he could please forward the information to her or to the family liaison's and she will be happy to work through the details so that families do not fall to the wayside.

Motion:

Information was received by council.

No Action taken for this item.

B-3. Receive Report from the City/Soledad Mission Recreation District Subcommittee Regarding Potential Future Partnerships.

City Manager Slama presented the staff report and a brief update.

Mayor Velazquez said they have taken time to look at the budget on the recreation side of it. There is agreement that being partners is the best option for the residents and there will be further discussion on how to do that.

Councilmember Chavez said there was a tight timeline and not enough information was available. Both sides have decided to take smaller steps to work towards making larger steps either together or separate but still working together. The Soledad Mission Recreation District will be meeting and coming back with further ideas.

Councilmember Jimenez said the goal is to provide the best services possible to the community and he is happy to move forward in doing so.

There were no public comments at this time.

Motion:

Information was received by council.

No Action taken for this item.

PRESENTATIONS

- None

MAYORS' REPORT

- On 08/05 she participated in the Centennial Cruise Night.
- On 08/05 she also met with Alliance on Ageing and ITN.
- On 08/06 she met with the City Manager and the Recreation Manager.
- On 08/09 she met with Public Works Director Oscar Antillon regarding upcoming Projects.
- On 08/09 she met with the Salinas Valley Mayor and Managers Group.
- On 08/10 she participated in the Joint meeting with the Soledad Mission Recreation District Sub Committee.
- On 08/15 she participated in Celebration Nation providing school supplies.
- On 08/15 she participated in the Our Lady of Solitude fiesta.
- On 08/16 she met with Jeana Arnold from PG&E.
- On 08/17 she met with Perla Alvarez and Diego Barragan with Voler.

Mayor Pro Tem Strobridge said she would like the Voler contract to be agendaized in the next meeting to be discussed in a public session because she does not agree with the contract. She said it looks to be \$8,000 per video, \$2,700 a minute (3-minute recording). She feels more dialog should be included from the whole council.

Mayor Velazquez said the contract has already been established and executed, and already includes what Voler's commitment is.

Mayor Pro Tem Strobridge asked City Manager Slama to please send her and the rest of the council, a copy of the Voler contract.

Councilmember Lara asked if the rest of the council would be able to have input on the scope of work.

Mayor Velazquez said the council has had input and the scope of work they are seeing listed is based on her conversation with Voler. She asked council to remember the larger vision for Soledad. The larger concept is to promote Soledad. The last conversation regarding Voler was regarding what the council needed Voler to do; highlighting Soledad and attract business to Soledad. The success of Voler is dependent upon the City Manager and the directors to utilize Voler.

Councilmember Lara said there is nothing listed that represents any of her input. If she is going to be a part of this, she would like to see some of her input as well.

Mayor Velazquez asked Councilmember Lara to elaborate on her point because she is not understanding.

Councilmember Lara feels the list is being given to the council and they have no input on the matter, and she does not agree with decisions like that.

Mayor Pro Tem Strobridge said this item needs to be on the upcoming agenda and discussed with the whole council.

Councilmember Jimenez asked City Attorney Mike Rodriguez if the contract can be brought back up for council discussion.

City Attorney Mike Rodriguez said the item can be agendized. He asked City Manager Slama if this was a contract approved under his limit.

City Manager Slama said this contract was approved under his limit.

Councilmember Lara would like to further discuss the scope of the services and the details of what the videos should include and would like the discussion to be amongst all of council.

City Manager Slama said this item will be agendized.

Mayor Velazquez said when the item does come back for discussion, it is important for each councilmember to come prepared with input. The videos are to highlight Soledad, not to highlight each individual. The videos should be a regional highlight of the economic development of Soledad.

Mayor Pro Tem Strobridge said she does agree with Mayor Velazquez regarding the videos highlighting Soledad but also recalls making the point at the last meeting of the importance of the entire council needing to have input on matter. Please agendize this matter for the 09/01/2021 meeting and include the scope of work and the contract that was approved.

Mayor Velazquez said she still feels very unclear about what, in the information given to the council, is not within the regional vision of the City.

Mayor Pro Tem Strobridge said she feels irritated because the contract was approved by the City Manager even though the majority of the council did not want a contract with this group. She feels very upset about this and she does not appreciate this being done the way it was done.

Mayor Velazquez believes Mayor Pro Tem Strobridge has an issue with the contractor and feels the issue should be set aside.

Mayor Pro Tem Strobridge said she does have issue with the contractor because they are not local. The contractor is located in San Jose and have not been available during crucial times, like the most recent power outages. She also has issue with paying money for no services.

Mayor Velazquez said in terms of what is in the contract, she needs the City Manager and the directors to reach out to Voler when services are needed.

Councilmember Jimenez said the contract should have never been approved. The majority of the council did not want it. There is an item on the agenda today which deals with increasing the public water and sewer fees, and everyone feels concerned about it, but yet the City is paying someone \$24,000 a year to do nothing. He is not against the vender, but believes the City is able to take care of these services in-house at this point.

Councilmember Chavez feels the City needs the expertise of a Public Information Officer (PIO). There needs to be clear communication to the public and a PIO would provide that communication. The council needs to figure out if it is going to utilize the PIO. If the PIO will not be utilized, then the City should move on and figure things out from within.

COUNCILMEMBERS' ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REPORTS

Councilmember Jimenez reported:

- On 08/05 he attended the ACCAPS gold tournament.
- On 08/15 he attended the Our Lady of Solitude fiesta.
- On 08/19 he will be attending an ACCAPS meeting.
- On 08/19 he will be attending the Salinas Valley Solid Waste Authority meeting.
- He also encouraged the public to get vaccinated.

Mayor Pro Tem Strobridge reported:

- On 08/06 she attended the Soledad Cruise Night.
- On 08/11 she attended the AMBAG meeting
- On 08/14 she attended the Girl Scouts ceremony
- On 08/14 she participated in a Ride-along with Soledad Police Officer Yasin.
- On 08/18 she participated in a Zoom meeting with Supervisor Lopez, City Manager Slama and Chief Wasson regarding animal sheltering services.

Councilmember Chavez

- On 08/10 he participated in the Joint meeting with the Soledad Mission Recreation District Sub Committee.
- On 08/05 he participated in the South County Breastfeeding Awareness Walk at Vosti Park.
- He also reported that vaccination rates in the City are very low, and the City should strive to bring those numbers up.

Councilmember Lara

- On 08/05 he participated in the South County Breastfeeding Awareness Walk at Vosti Park.
- She also encouraged the public to get vaccinated.

COUNCILMEMBERS' PRAISES

Councilmember Lara praised everyone who is taking all the Covid-19 precautions.

Councilmember Chavez praised the staff for all the work they have put forth this summer. He also praised the Soledad Unified School District for getting the kids back in school. He agrees with Councilmember Jimenez in that the vaccinations are extremely important. The Hartnell Board of Trustees made the decision that all student athletes need to be vaccinated or tested three times a week.

Councilmember Jimenez praised the members of the council. He praised the women on the council for being good examples to the young girls in the Community. He also praised the staff for their examples and effective leadership as well.

Mayor Pro Tem Strobridge thanked Officer Yasin for allowing her to ride along on calls. She also praised the members of the community for not being afraid to call in suspicious behavior.

Mayor Velazquez praised CalFire and the public safety personnel fighting the fires in northern California during this time of wildfires. She also praised the community members who have reached out regarding housing and other issues in the City. She thanked the City for the iWork's program that is available to the public.

Motion:

The council provided direction to staff.

No Action taken for this item.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

- City Manager Slama thanked the staff and CalFire for their efforts when the EOC was activated.
- He also thanked the staff for organizing the events of the Brass Era Cars & Coffee on Saturday 08/21 and Ciclovía on 08/22.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Councilmember Jimenez had 1 item:

1. He would like to know if the City has hired a Lobbyist yet and if not, he would like an update.
 - City Manager Slama said there has been conversations with one lobbyist in particular, but the City has not moved forward yet in hiring. He will provide an update.

Mayor Pro Tem Strobridge had 3 items:

1. On the ride along she participated in she seen many street markings throughout the City, especially in front of the schools, are very faded; she would like to know if that job is on any kind of schedule to be done.
2. The turn of Rubion Drive and Metz Road is extremely dangerous; there is no way to see to the left without pulling halfway into the crossing lane. She thinks there may need to be a three-way stop for that area.
3. There were planned traffic studies to be done on Metz, San Vicente, Orchard, and a few others; she would like to know when those traffic studies will be done.

Councilmember Chavez would like to adjourn the meeting in honor and memory of Alfred Diaz-Infante and Carlos Ramos. Carlos Ramos served as the California Vice President of LULAC and a part of the leadership of LULAC Monterey County. He was a great leader.

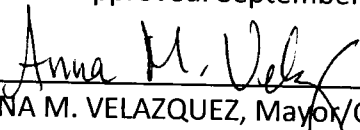
Mayor Velazquez agreed with Councilmember Chavez.

Mayor Velazquez adjourned the meeting in honor and memory of Alfred Diaz-Infante, Carlos Ramos. She also sends out prayers to the women and families in turmoil because of what is happening in Afghanistan.


ADJOURNMENT

- 9:35 p.m.

Minutes Approved: September 01, 2021



ANNA M. VELAZQUEZ, Mayor/Chair



BRENT SLAMA, City Clerk/Agency Secretary

