Utilities Customer Advisory Group
Minutes for the Meeting on
January 9, 2019
3:00 p.m.
Utilities Center
Conference Room 225

Committee Members Present
Eugene Suttmiller, Chairman
Shirley Clark, Vice-Chairman
Robert Snyder, Committee Member

City Staff Present
Jorge A. Garcia, Utilities Director
Jose Provencio, Business Services Administrator
Donomique Rodriguez, Rate Econ. Analyst Mgr.
Mario Puentes, Gas Business Analyst
James Safford, Management Analysis
Marcy Driggers, Sr. Assistant City Attorney
Renee Armijo, Office Assistant

Committee Members Absent
Frank D. Gomez, Committee Member

Others:
Susan Schmuguee, League of Women Votes
Suzanne Michaels, Public Outreach Consultant
Becky Baum, RC Creations, LLC
Gregory Schervanick

Chair Suttmiller called the regular meeting to order at approximately 3:31 p.m.

1. **Conflict of Interest:**
Chair Suttmiller: Conflict of Interest. Are there any members of the Committee or any member of the City staff that has any known conflict of interest with any item on the agenda?

There were none.

2. **Acceptance of Agenda:**
Chair Suttmiller: Acceptance of Agenda. Do I have a motion?

Clark: Move to approve the agenda.

Snyder: I'll second it.

The Agenda was Accepted Unanimously 3-0.

3. **Acceptance of Minutes:**
Chair Suttmiller: Acceptance of Minutes from the regular meeting of November 14, 2018.

Clark: Move to accept the minutes.

Snyder: I second.

The Minutes were Approved Unanimously 3-0.
4. **Public Participation:**
Chair Suttmiller: Public Participation. Do we have any of the public that wishes to say anything in the audience? There is no response.

Snyder: I don't think there's anybody here.

Chair Suttmiller: We will move on.

Clark: Yes there is. We have a couple of people here.

**There was none.**

5. **Customer Outreached for Approval:**
   a. **Public Outreach Plan for the Future**
Chair Suttmiller: Customer Outreach. Next item is number five, Ms. Rodriguez will bring us up to date on that. Thank you for your time and your patience.

Rodriguez: At the last UCAG meeting we had discussed the moving forward of public outreach and the UCAG wanted to talk about a plan moving forward. I spoke with Suzanne. Suzanne has some documents that we printed and are here for you. Then we can discuss it and then move forward with the plan that the UCAG would like to do in future Rate Reviews.

Michaels: Good afternoon. I'm Suzanne Michaels. Public Outreach person for Las Cruces Utilities. I thought it was important you know in case you all didn't see an article or whatever just to review this to let you know because this is quite extensive outreach. Actually the last page in the packet that you have, this was the public notice that we publish in both newspapers and in total there were three of these published in the Bulletin which is the weekly publication in Las Cruces, and nine of these notices were published in the Sun News. The notices changed over time as we went by a few days and there was no reason to repeat the first few meetings that had already happened, then we shorten them, but it started out with this full listing of 10 open houses that were held to reach the public to alert them to the Wastewater Rate Review. That's where we wanted to start. Let you know about that.

Then we send out this document in English and Spanish in 40,000 utility bills. Spanish is on the back but we wanted to be sure that we could reach all of our ratepayers, all of our citizens. That was another really important form of outreach.

The articles that were published are the next few pages here and you can see how extensive they are. The articles not only appear in the Bulletin and in the Sun News, but also KRWG radio publishes these same articles on their website. They appear as Google Alerts under the name Las Cruces Utilities, so there really is quite extensive access to the information. You can see that in one of the articles we did publish the expected residential bill impacts, just so we
could get more of that out. The boards that Dominique put together and were used at all of the meetings of course we don't have them here right now, but it's like you're very familiar with those, and so that pretty much looked at what we did.

I wanted to alert you to the Facebook, for the first time ever this is what we used to alert the public that the Water Rate was going up starting December 1st. That's why we have this in here. We could do something like this going forward, alerting people to the meetings, but it has to be very brief and it can only have one image in it on Facebook. It costs $500.00 a week which is very inexpensive to reach every zip code in the City of Las Cruces. Like anything else, if you do too much of this, people become sort of they're going "Oh, another Utilities notification." We want to be careful with what we're doing so that it's not too much. This is a possibility of what we could add going forward for the meetings.

Another possibility, you had asked about KTAL doing radio show. Yes that is very viable. KTAL is a growing radio station. It doesn't have a huge, I don't think it has a huge audience right now, but it grows over time. Also KRWG we could do the same thing there, doing some sort of an interview show with them about the proposed rate increases coming up.

Another thing was actually changing the name, instead of public meetings this last time we called them open houses in an attempt to be a little more friendly, make it sound not so dry. There are some other possibilities. We could call it a "Public Discussion." I also work for the South Central Solid Waste Authority and we did "Listening Sessions" regarding where do we go with recycling going forward with all the upheaval that's going in the recycling world. I'm not saying that calling it a "Listening Session" resulted in a huge outturn, but we did have two public meetings for South Central on a Tuesday and Thursday of the same week. On the first meeting we had 15 people, and the next meeting we had 30 people.

Chair Suttmiller: Beats anything we've done.

Michaels: Of all ranges. I am hearing the term "Listening Sessions" being used sort of more on a nationwide basis. The implication clearly is that you give basic information and then you want to hear from the public, you're taking notes to incorporate what it is that they have to say. Now it's the same thing that we were doing with the "Open Houses," but in that name maybe it just sort of tells the story a little more clearly to the public that the goal here is to take in the information that they offer, their response to different ideals. Did they want a phased-in plan? Did they want the full component all at one time? Those are some things that we could do that you all should consider. Of course the best way to reach people always is through word-of-mouth. You know of you're talking directly to somebody, but that's the goal of the public meetings is to be able to talk to and listen to members of the public in those public meetings. Another thing that we might be able to do, I know you all have outreach to
local congregations that you're involved with to see if they would be willing to have a 30-minute meeting to talk about this. You tell me, Mr. Suttmiller, wasn't there a church that you were?

Chair Suttmiller: Yes. I think there's one that. The pastor's a former member of a committee that we worked with on rate increases before and I met with him about this one.

Michaels: How many people were there?

Chair Suttmiller: I just met with him.

Michaels: Oh, okay, so it hasn't?

Chair Suttmiller: He called in a complaint and I fielded it. We spent about an hour talking.

Michaels: Okay. Would you presume that he would pass that information on to his congregation?

Chair Suttmiller: Yes. Very much so. Also I told him you know this was a poor way to do it. The way to do is invite me the next time I will do that.

Michaels: Okay, but nothing has. Okay. All right.

Chair Suttmiller: When this is finished, now when this is totally finished and we're in the work-up phase four and I will get with him and schedule dates and that.

Michaels: Okay.

Chair Suttmiller: Right now he probably couldn't answer. I couldn't tell them when we would be at the point where we would be going out, because we have enough to go out.

Michaels: All right. Well so this is a review of what we did to reach the public with the Wastewater rate increase. It was a little bit increased over what we did with Water and you know you need to tell us what you would like, what changes you would like to make going forward with the next Rate Review.

Chair Suttmiller: I like the idea of "Listening Sessions."

Michaels: Okay.

Chair Suttmiller: I think it says it a lot better than a meeting. A meeting to me is where somebody's come to tell me something.

Michaels: Right.
Chair Suttmiller: They want to meet with me so they can tell me there's a difference between me going out to listen to people, than me going to tell them something.

Michaels: Right. We can certainly, I mean that's absolutely.

Chair Suttmiller: Your sense on that.

Snyder: My sense is our biggest impact has been getting involved with the people like downtown.

Clark: Farmers Market.

Snyder: The Farmers Market, things like that, or over at Mesilla Valley Mall. Something like that.

Michaels: Okay.

Clark: Chamber of Commerce.

Chair Suttmiller: Where we can piggyback on a crowd.

Michaels: Okay.

Chair Suttmiller: Is what I'm looking at is, that was the second thing I think I've talked about was at the Railroad Museum when they had something going on where you got a large number of people, downtown at the Farmers Market, when we did the business.

Michaels: The Chamber of Commerce at the Mall.

Chair Suttmiller: Chamber of Commerce the one at the Mesilla Valley Mall. We talked to a lot of people or more than any one of the sessions we had in schools or that kind of thing.

Michaels: Okay.

Chair Suttmiller: Now it would be nice if they're having a major PTA meeting in the school and the kids are performing and a thousand people are coming in and we had a little sign on the said that said if you want to know what's going to happen to your bill come and see us.

Snyder: There was more genuine interest from people just going by and these two venues show that there was genuine interest.

Clark: Yes.

Chair Suttmiller: Yes.
Clark: I agree.

Michaels: Which makes sense. If people are already there, they don't have to make a special effort to come to a meeting.

Chair Suttmiller: The more we can piggyback on other events would be good. I don't know the problems inherent in some of them, but that's what I would like to look at. The more people that are coming by, the more we're going to talk to them, and the more we say we've talked to, and be more effective. This is a wonderful thing we did. You look at the amount of events, the amount of information that was put out and so on, it is wonderful, but it wasn't totally effective.

Michaels: Right.

Chair Suttmiller: I want to move from wonderful to wonderfully effective.

Michaels: Yes. Well then I would say that this time coming up Dr. Garcia I want to be sure that I'm in line with what your ideas are. I would suggest maybe limiting the number of "Listening Sessions." Instead of doing 10, maybe doing three, and then focusing more on existing meetings or existing locations where people already are, and they're willing to stop for just a few minutes and chat because that face-to-face connection in a friendly environment is a great way to reach people and just let them know and then they're like "Okay."

Clark: I think this was a very good idea.

Chair Suttmiller: Yes.

Clark: Notifying when the rate increase starts. I think to spend that kind of money to publicize meetings when we don't need to spend that kind of money for that is unnecessary expense. This is good for rate increase and when it goes into effect.

Chair Suttmiller: One of the things you might want to look at is on the meetings when the Utilities are going to tell us "This is the money needed." That might want to go out for that specific meeting, not the lead up to it because we're going to be talking to the experts, gathering information. When it finally comes up and says "Look the Utilities needs another $5 million and there are several ways we can do it, and you're reporting to us," that's a meeting people should be really set up. This is going to happen. You're going to see the data if you show up here kind of thing. Again I'm not the expert. If we can get them in there that's more important I think and more showing that we've reached out for the input.

Michaels: Right. I think the reason for going with the extensive 10 public "Open Houses" last time was to try to give everybody, you know I mean it was all over town, try to give everybody an opportunity. At the same time though when you've
got that many possibilities, people might go "Oh, I can go next week." It's kind of like then the days go past and in the end you never end up going.

Chair Suttmiller: There is that. Some of the locations just don't, Lynn Middle School, we moved around in there, a couple we've already done and you couldn't find us.

Michaels: Okay.

Chair Suttmiller: You had to have a scout to get you through.

Michaels: I have to say the Roadrunner Room at the library.

Chair Suttmiller: Was good.

Michaels: Everybody knows where the library is. It's well trafficked anyway and that upstairs room is very conducive. I think it can handle probably, I don't know 60 or 70 people.

Chair Suttmiller: One of the things, and I didn't go to that one so you may have done it, was a big sign in the lobby of the thing saying "The meeting discussing rate increases is upstairs in the Roadrunner Room." Because you'll pick up that traffic going in and out of the library and you'll get "Oh let me go up and see what's going on."


Chair Suttmiller: I don't know if that was there or wasn't there because I wasn't there.

Clark: I didn't do that one either.

Michaels: Well the one that was at the Roadrunner Room was actually one of the recycling meetings.

Chair Suttmiller: Okay.

Michaels: That's when I think it was a public meeting.

Chair Suttmiller: I'm sorry.

Michaels: That was a really good location. That was the one where we had ...

Chair Suttmiller: That one lends itself. I think if you, again you've got a flow of traffic in and out there, especially right around 6:00, 7:00.

Michaels: Right.

Chair Suttmiller: The people, "Well I've got my book and this looks interesting. I'll go up and do this."
Michaels: Yes.

Chair Suttmiller: This is something I want to know about.

Michaels: Okay. Then definitely that'll be one of our locations next time. We could do like a radio show leading into it, an article in the newspaper leading into it, the published notices in the newspaper. Again I don't, well you just said it's like for those meetings, I don't know maybe we should try one Facebook thing and see what happens. With listing all three meetings, that wouldn't be too much.

Clark: That wouldn't be too much. I mean to do one in front of every meeting might be, that's too much.

Michaels: Two on one.

Chair Suttmiller: There's just a couple where, one when the report is, is this is what the data says the Utilities need.

Michaels: Right.

Chair Suttmiller: Okay, that's a driver. People should know that. We're short so many funds if we're going to continue providing this level of service and we're going to look at it for that money because we have to in the rates. Come in and talk and you have a chance to talk back.

Michaels: Okay.

Chair Suttmiller: Then again when it's finally and here's the way we can collect it when you finally come back and we get the final one saying these are the three/four options where we can get this money, that one should be a real try to get people in. I don't know, and this is coming right off the top of my head so please, it might be worthwhile having the meeting in the evenings so people could come for something like that.

Michaels: Yes.

Chair Suttmiller: You see what I'm saying.

Michaels: Yes.

Chair Suttmiller: Instead of 3:00 in the afternoon when nobody's going to come, we do it at 6:00 and do that meeting, those two meetings at 6:00 and really go out and publicize those two meetings and see what we get.

Michaels: Did any of you go the Munson Center presentations during lunchtime?

Clark: I did.
Michaels:     Was that a useful? I mean that's, people are already gathered there. Did that work or no?
Chair Suttmiller:     Dinner.
Clark:     Well we got them at dinner but we didn't get a lot of conversation.
Michaels:     Okay. Would you?
Clark:     We got some, but it was very limited.
Michaels:     All right so you wouldn't maybe necessarily repeat that.
Clark:     No.
Michaels:     Okay. All right. Good to know. Do you have any other questions?
Chair Suttmiller:     No. Do you have any questions of us that we haven't answered? You know what we're trying to do and please feel free to call me or any Member of the Committee if you've got questions about that. We cannot do a rolling poll back and forth between ourselves on anything, but we're pretty concrete on what we want.
Michaels:     I think I've got good direction from this conversation on the Wastewater.
Chair Suttmiller:     Well that's I wanted. I want to make sure, and please feel free at anytime to call me and I will answer. Like I said, the one we did, you know if you look at it on a paper the view was magnificent, when you look at results it's not what we wanted.
Michaels:     Right. I agree.
Chair Suttmiller:     Now let's keep honing it down because this process is going to go on and on and on and if we can get it where it works and it gets people in and people know how it works, then we're getting the feedback we need to make good decisions.
Clark:     I misunderstood this. Add a Facebook notification of public meetings. You're talking about that's for the "Listening Sessions" not for our monthly meetings?
Michaels:     Correct.
Clark:     Okay. Because I don't think doing our monthly meetings would be beneficial at all. They're posted and published all the time.
Chair Suttmiller:     I think if you go, I sort of disagree with you.
Clark: The Chairman doesn't seem to read them, but that's okay.

Chair Suttmiller: Anyways, those two meetings like I say where we get the amount and then we get the breakdown on it I think should, on the meetings, my take is I think we might be a little more effective if we could do them later in the day, those two meetings and that they're well publicized and we may end up getting a bunch of people in. I don't know. The only way to find out is trying it.

Clark: We'll use that as this public meeting is going to discuss the amount of shortfall we've got in this Utility.

Michaels: Yes.

Clark: People know what we're going to be talking about instead of just wondering.

Chair Suttmiller: That meeting we make as much effort as we can that that's the only thing on the agenda for that meeting and we've got the time to do it.

Clark: The time to talk about it.

Michaels: All right. I think we're good. Thank you.

Chair Suttmiller: Sir you stood up so I assume you want to say something.

Dr. Garcia: Not much to say today Mr. Chairman. You may want to think about adding some participation on the meetings that City Councilors have with their districts. Now that doesn't always coincide with when we're getting things out, but we will let you know. It would be a good thing to, if we have the information now, staff can attend with one or two of you and make a short presentation or have the charts. Because some of those meetings have very good attendance.

Chair Suttmiller: Well myself I would be more than willing to.

Dr. Garcia: We'll let you know. They don't coincide exactly but if that's an opportunity we'll bring it up to you.

Clark: Do you have better participation in five and six, in Districts?

Dr. Garcia: Yes.

Clark: That's what I figured.

Dr. Garcia: We could take advantage of some of those. I have quite a few people.

Chair Suttmiller: That's good. Be more than happy to. Let me look at the agenda here. I have a question of the legal staff here in a few minutes.
Clark: She's got a 4:00 meeting downtown.

Chair Suttmiller: Okay, we'll get this done here. Committee Member Discussion, I guess it comes under that.

6. Other Items of Interest:

Chair Suttmiller: Other Items of Interest. Does anybody have any other Items of Interest they'd like to bring up? Dominique.

Rodriguez: I wanted to bring to your attention that Mr. Daly has resigned from the UCAG.

Chair Suttmiller: Okay, that was one of my questions.

Rodriguez: To let you know that. Also tomorrow the recommendation from the UCAG for the Wastewater Rate Review will go in front of the Utilities Board. I know Mr. Suttmiller you came to talk at the Work Session. If you are available maybe to attend tomorrow.

Chair Suttmiller: At what time?

Rodriguez: Three o'clock.

Chair Suttmiller: Three o'clock. I will be there. I promise I will be there. For some reason I had it in my head ... my computer collapsed three, four, five days ago and so I'm not getting e-mails. I'm going to wait until my daughter who's a computer expert shows up on the 16th before I buy a new one. Feel free to call me for anything please. Any of you that needs to talk to me or desires to talk to me whether you need to or not. Please feel free. I'm sort of out of communications and like if you get the minutes done call me, I'll come in and sign anything that needs to be signed that kind of thing. I should be back up by the 18th, 19th on that.

For whatever reason I had it in my mind it was next week, the meeting was next week. I will attend. I will be there. Do you want me to present or just listen and whatever they want?

Rodriguez: They may have questions so it would be nice to have you in the audience.

Chair Suttmiller: Okay. No problem. I'm more than willing to be there, more than willing, you have great cookies there. Great chocolate chip cookies. I will show up.

Rodriguez: Okay. Then the last thing I have is we are moving forward with the contract to Stantec for the Solid Waste Rate Review and then the Gas Rate Review. Right now we're working on contract and procurement documents, so I don't have any updates on that besides that we're moving forward with it.

Clark: Question. What is the process to replace Mr. Daly?
Rodriguez: I am not sure of that one.

Dr. Garcia: Mr. Chairman, Ms. Clark. We will follow the process of the advertising through the Clerk's office. Then we review the credentials that are required and then applicants get submitted for review of the Mayor, but still appointment through the Mayor's office.

Clark: Okay. It may take a while to get a replacement.

Dr. Garcia: Yes. We'll proceed right away. We will keep you informed as to whom the applicants are or you can review those. Ultimately the Mayor with advice and consent of the Council.

Clark: Yes. Okay. Good you had the right answer.

Chair Suttmiller: As an aside from me, it's pretty apparent that it's going to be us three that are going to have to be here because Mr. Gomez has some health problems and Mr. Daly is gone, so to have a quorum all three of us and that's me lecturing myself.

Dr. Garcia: We'll proceed with the advertisement right away.

Clark: Okay. Good.

7. Committee Member Discussion:
Chair Suttmiller: That'd be great. That bring up my question and I'll take less than five minutes, I promise. This is an ad hoc committee. When we finish the Gas do we go out of business and everybody has to be reappointed or reapply or what?

Driggers: I think the understanding was that even though it's scaled over time, you were appointed for all four Utility reviews, but after the four then ..

Chair Suttmiller: Yes, what's the process? It's coming fast. It surprised me how fast.

Dr. Garcia: Mr. Chairman. When we formulated the committee we make sure that the same people go through one full cycle and then we request the reappointment to look at the next cycle. We may request reappointment early so that you have time.

Chair Suttmiller: My thinking is that's a good thing to do. We go in, we get new members and then just sort of ease ourselves out, which means, are you guys willing to serve a second time? Though I'm almost a year.

Snyder: Well my understanding was I'm going to serve for five years.

Chair Suttmiller: Okay. Because we were looking at how long it took to do it, but we're moving through. My thing is we'll be working on Gas at this time next year or almost finishing up Gas, and again it comes at you like a freight train coming down
the tracks. I just want to get clear in my mind. At the end of the Gas I go and tell the Utility Board what our recommendation is, basically the Committee's done and should go out of business unless it's, and that discussion needs to take place early.

Dr. Garcia: Mr. Chairman. What we will do is submit the names of whoever's willing to stay, again to the Mayor for his appointment, and then advertise for any vacancies we may have.

Chair Suttmiller: Okay. That works for me. I just wanted to get it clear in my head. I was looking at it and I said "We're starting the third one out of four, and we've been moving faster than we thought which was where the five year came from."

Snyder: You can't leave.

Chair Suttmiller: Oh yes I can.

Snyder: You can't leave.

Clark: The first one took us a long time but it was a lot of setting process up. Wastewater was very, very quick and easy.

Chair Suttmiller: Also when you look at how do we train the new people coming in because we've got extensive training. I don't know whether it's worthwhile paying for two university professors coming in and training one person or how we can get them.

Dr. Garcia: We would offer the training again.

Chair Suttmiller: It's good training.

Dr. Garcia: Sometimes even my Board want's a refresher of the construct.

Chair Suttmiller: Those are just things that go through my mind 2:00 in the morning. Thank you very much. You are released to go to another meeting.

9. Next Meeting Date:
   a. February 13, 2019

Rodriguez: At this time we don't have updates for the next meeting. We can let you know, but we're still working through the procurement of it. I'm not sure what the ...

Clark: Have you rebid it or are you working off the old contract and renegotiating?
Rodriguez: Yes, so it was an amendment to the contract, because when we awarded it to Stantec they were awarded all four, but we're just revising the contrast for now, the Gas and Solid Waste.

Clark: Okay.

Rodriguez: If the UCAG would still to ...

Chair Suttmiller: You're going back to Stantec.

Rodriguez: Yes. If UCAG would like to hold a meeting next month, it's your decision.

Chair Suttmiller: My take is I think meetings are good if you've got something to do at a meeting. If you don't have something to do, just let us know that there's nothing. Because we've basically finished our part, other than me showing up tomorrow for that thing, it'll go to the Mayor, or not go to the Mayor tomorrow, we may back in business.

Dr. Garcia: If I may Mr. Chairman. I don't believe you will need a meeting in February, but we can always, you set the agenda, if we have to brief this Board we will let you know and advertise it. At this point I don't think you need to begin work with Stantec. Now I know it's mainly the three of you, two of you are on the working group and now Mr. Daly is gone, so volunteered to be on the working group. Once we stop getting information.

Snyder: When do we start talking about you know like natural gas? When's the next?

Dr. Garcia: The consultants we contracted to do both Solid Waste and Natural Gas. We've talked to our Board to see if we may want to see Solid Waste first and then Natural Gas. The reason for that is there are several projects that are in the pipeline in Natural Gas with large amounts of cash and if you would recall the discussion on prior Rate Reviews that on projects that are not completed or projects that are in the pipeline so to speak, skew your Rate Design because you look at the cash in the bank account and saying why do you need a raise. It skews the analysis. We went through that last time in the Gas Utility. We wanted to maybe flip and look at Solid Waste even though the consultant will work on both pretty much almost concurrently, having you address the Solid Waste first and then the Gas because we're getting various projects out from the street in the next few months.

To answer your question, Gas would be probably towards the end of the calendar year more so than Solid Waste maybe sometime this spring starting the working group.

Snyder: Okay. All right.

Chair Suttmiller: Right now we're not going to set a date for the next meeting. We can have a meeting based on discussion between yourselves.
Dr. Garcia: We will let the Chair know. Yes.

Chair Suttmiller: I'll set a date and let you know what the date is.

Snyder: We got e-mail. Just e-mail us so we'll know.

Chair Suttmiller: With the agenda. Want to be available. Anybody from the public that wants to speak to us? Or rant at us even?

10. **Adjournment:**

Clark: Move to adjourn.

Snyder: I second.

Chairperson