

Special City Council Meeting July 13, 2020

The Town Council of the Town of Pecos City met in a Special City Council Meeting in the City Council Chambers on July 13, 2020 at 5:30 P.M. with the following present:

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| David Flores | Mayor |
| Gerald Tellez | Mayor Pro-Tem |
| Valerie Trujillo | Councilmember |
| Conrado Saldana | Councilmember |
| Veronica Baca | Councilmember |
| Arthur Orona | Councilmember |
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| Seth Sorensen | City Manager |
| Rod Ponton | City Attorney |
| Howdy Lisenbee | Assistant City |
| Heather Ramirez | Assistant to CM |
| Syra Nichols | City Secretary |
| Lisa Tarango | Chief of Police |
| Oscar Ornelas | Community Engagement Specialist |
| Kristen Irely | Human Resources Director |
| Melanie Purcell | Finance Director |
| Jesus Gomez | IT Director |
| Holly Jarocki | Parks and Recreation Director |
| Donny McKinney | Chief Building Official |

Item A. Mayor Pro Tem Tellez called the July 13, 2020 meeting to order at 5:31 pm.
Mayor David Flores was present via phone conference.

A. Call to Order

B. Public Comments

Arthur Orona, Councilman, stated that it has been mentioned that he has a handler and he wanted to publicly announce that his handlers are the employees for the City of Pecos. Mr. Orona assured the Council that any decision he makes is in the best interest of the city employees that he represents.

Gerald Tellez, Mayor Pro-Tem, shared a brochure with the Council and attested that the disagreements between Mr. Orona and himself stem from the approval of the First Flight Contract.

Syra Nichols, City Secretary, read aloud a public comment from Mrs. LaDonna Olivier, Pecos Resident, who was in opposition of the proposed raising of taxes. Mrs. Olivier's Comment was as follows: With or without the probability of Property evaluations increasing, I am against any additional tax rate increases.

Syra Nichols, City Secretary, read aloud a public comment from Mr. Devan Bradfield, Pecos Resident, who was in opposition of the proposed raising of taxes. Mr. Bradfield's Comment was as follows: Taxes should not be raised, especially at this time when people have lost jobs and are having a hard time trying to make ends meet. I don't understand why the is wanting to raise taxes, especially since we have not seen very many improvements within the city. Where is the money going?

Syra Nichols, City Secretary, read aloud a public comment from Mr. Lucas Chavez, Pecos Resident, who was in opposition of the proposed termination of the current City Manager. Mr. Chavez's Comment was as follows: As a citizen of Pecos and from what I saw and heard from Thursday's meeting, I feel concerned and saddened by the actions of our councilmembers. The "want" of change for leadership during this pandemic and economic downturn is not what the city "needs" The issue of terminating the city manager's contract while we are in the midst of all this seems weak and unnecessary. When the community needs to be brought together and work for the common good of the collective, and what do we decide to do? Change? I moved back to Pecos in hope that I could see Pecos progress forward, but what I witnessed Thursday looked like we wanted to go back to the old ways where Pecos just stays the same and deflects people who think differently and removes them when they don't agree on personal preference. What bothers me is the manner that this agenda item was handled and brought up during the council meeting. I know within the Council by-laws there is no required reasoning for this action to be taken by a council person. I just know that my "prerogative" doesn't speak for all of "this community" that don't feel the need for change of our current Manager. Especially the fact that the people of Pecos's tax dollars would still have to pay for his contract through his term while he is no longer working for us.

C. Non-Consent

(Entered Executive Session before Item #1)

1. **DISCUSS/CONSIDER** Conrado Saldana Jr. Councilman, stated that he did not need further discussion and stated that the Council consider invoking section 6.3 of the City Manager Employment Agreement. Rod Ponton, City Attorney asked that the Council consider entering into executive session, Councilman Tellez agreed and motioned to enter into executive session at 5:38 PM. Councilman Tellez called the meeting back into open session at 6:25 PM. Councilman Saldana motioned to terminate the contract of the City Manager with the Town of Pecos City and was seconded by Councilman Orona to be effective August 13, 2020, Mayor Pro Tem Tellez asked that the Council allow City Staff to voice their opinions before the vote was finalized, the Councilmembers agreed to which the following staff made the following statements:

- Holly Jarocki, Parks and Recreation Director, asked the Council to keep in mind that when Seth Sorensen became the City Manager for the City of Pecos he brought along a positive impact and values his employees and the community will miss out on great things without his leadership.
- Jesus Gomez, IT Director, stated that he was born and raised in Pecos, has worked for multiple bosses in different capacities and Seth Sorensen is the best boss he has ever had and appreciates the support and opportunity that has been afforded to him. Mr.

Gomez went on to state that the moral of the staff will be hindered by the firing of Mr. Sorensen and attested to the positive impact Mr. Sorensen has had on the city and his staff.

- Lisa Tarango, Chief of Police, assured the Council that Mr. Sorensen truly cares about his employees and does everything he does out of the goodness of his heart. Chief Tarango also mentioned that he has stood next to her through the good and bad and has always been whatever level of support needed for the betterment of the community and has not once asked for recognition. Chief Tarango stressed that Mr. Sorensen has been a positive influence on the community and his staff.
- Howdy Lisenbee, Assistant City Manager, stated that the community would miss out on a great opportunity to progress if Mr. Sorensen is let go. Mr. Lisenbee asked the Council to consider the effects of firing a City Manager without justifiable cause and reiterated that the choice to move forward with firing Mr. Sorensen will make any professional City Manager hesitant to want to work for the City of Pecos.
- Heather Ramirez, Administrative Assistant to the City Manager, stated that she has worked for multiple city managers and agrees that Mr. Sorensen has been one of the best ones she has had the pleasure of working with. Mrs. Ramirez noted that Mr. Sorensen has always been supportive of whatever is needed to make the community a better place. Mrs. Ramirez also stated that it is evident that Mr. Sorensen genuinely cares for his employees and the community.
- Syra Nichols, City Secretary, stated that everything everyone has stated has truth in it and Mr. Sorensen has had a positive impact on the staff and community. Mrs. Nichols went on to state that the staff and community would be deeply affected by the loss of Mr. Sorensen.
- Jon Fulbright, Pecos Enterprise Reporter, asked the Council if they had spoken with anyone before the decision to propose to fire Mr. Sorensen had been made. Mr. Fulbright stated that from what he has heard it sounds like the Council would be firing the City Manager without just cause.
- Arthur Orona, Councilman, addressed the fact that he has never agreed with the City Manager's contract, but with the understanding that the City Manager's contract needs to be mutually revised he would like to recant his previous stance. Mr. Orona also stated that after hearing the testimonies of the city staff he has decided to retract his motion.

On motion by Councilmember Saldana and seconded by Councilmember Orona, with Councilmember Orona then retracting his motion, the motion died and no action was taken on the item.

2. **DISCUSS** Rod Ponton, City Attorney, informed the Council that based on the charter the Council is in charge of the appointment of the City Secretary position and the City Manager is in charge of their day to day supervision along with the termination if need be. No action taken.

(Entered Executive Session before Item #1)

Entered Executive Session: 5:38 PM

Executive Session under Tex. Gov't Code § 551.071, 551.072 551.074, 551.087

1. Consultation with Attorney
2. Personnel Matters
 - a. City Manager Contract
3. Real Estate Negotiations
4. Economic Development

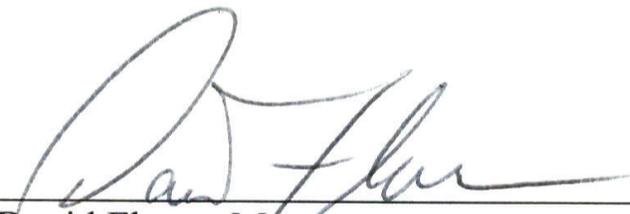
Exited Executive Session: 6:15 PM

Entered Open Session: 6:25 PM

Open Executive Session under Tex. Gov't Code § 551.071, 551.072 551.074, 551.087

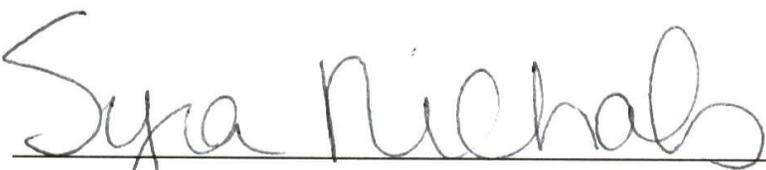
1. Consultation with Attorney
2. Personnel Matters
 - a. ***City Manager Contract - no action taken***
3. Real Estate Negotiations
4. Economic Development

D. Adjournment: 6:53 PM



David Flores, Mayor

Attest:



Syra Nichols, City Secretary

