

**10 Feb 2009 Monte Vista, Colorado**  
**Upper Rio Grande Economic Development Council**  
**Regular Meeting Minutes**  
**Monte Villa Inn Restaurant**

The meeting was called to order by president, Don Van Wormer.

On motion by Suzanne Benton and a second by Jim Clare, the previous regular meeting minutes were approved.

Suzanne walked everyone through the Treasurer's report and in conclusion reminded people that they have to pay their dues in order to be listed on the URGEDC Web Page.

The first item of business was a report from Don Shank of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad. He said they will be opening in late spring for the summer business and that they will run the "Silver Streak," which will carry 14 people. Due to climate conditions they have been able to work most of the winter on the rail lines. The track work they continue to do between South Fork and Creede will increase the strength in order to hold the weight of a full train. There will be new depot signs on the South Fork Depot that were made by Don's father. At his shop area in Monte Vista he is currently working on restoring a steam engine. He mentioned he has been encouraged to move one of his car projects by the City of Monte Vista and asked that all of us try to work together on economic development.

Jim Clare then took over the meeting to update everybody on the transmission line project that SLVREC is undertaking with Tri State and Xcel Energy. He mentioned it had been six years since the original concept for this project and the last two years have been focused on corridor siting. Their initial motivation was to enlarge load limits and prevent a voltage collapse in the existing lines coming over Poncha Pass. The closing of the mine and the lumber mill put pressure on REC since those were two major customers. With the new growth that has taken place and the addition of other business projects in the Valley, the excess they had was quickly absorbed.

Having taken on Xcel as a partner the transmission line is now a double circuit line providing larger capacity but will have different regulations. The sale of the Forbes Ranch slowed down communications. The new owner is a conservationist and they are working closely with him. Jim said additions at the new Comanche plant are almost complete and ready to come on line. The partnership's intention is to tie into Walsenburg, then north to Colorado Springs. At the end of February and the first part of March they will begin holding public siting meetings again. REC is looking at 2012 build-out for the transmission line.

Jim said that some of the current agriculture set-asides for conservation will help delay a voltage collapse in the near term. He pointed out that irrigation runs 24 hours a day and that solar electricity stops at sun down, which makes solar an augmentation for power, but the cost of storage to make power available during dark hours is very expensive. REC has met with the Governor's Energy Office and the counties in Alamosa recently. They had a very good exchange of information and communication is going to be the key among agencies and land owners. He mentioned that the Wolf Creek

power line is currently their highest maintenance line because of wind and snow moisture issues.

Someone asked about running underground from Walsenburg. Jim said the current estimated cost is \$62M to \$82M would be increased by six to ten times in order to go underground. When Colorado Springs decided to put some large services underground, they had to send their crews overseas to get the needed training. He pointed out that we are third from the bottom in per capita income out of over 700 Co-ops nationally. The partnership is currently working with San Isabel Electric to get access to an existing line and right of way going into Wet Valley from Walsenburg, which San Isabel intends to abandon.

**Monte Vista:** Don mentioned that Valley Wide Health Clinic is moving into the old Rominger Hardware building. Their plan is to be in by the first part of 2010. The gas station on the corner of US160 and US285 has closed, and a developer is already looking at the property. There have been more EDC contacts than ever recently, with a lot of interest on Adams Street. The city is going to replace the brick cross walks on Adams with stamped concrete. He estimated they have about \$19M in shovel ready projects, should monies become available.

**Del Norte:** Marty updated the progress of Del Norte Trails is having in their partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and the BLM on creating a single-track access from Cedar Springs on the south, through town, and all the way to Penitente Canyon on the north.

**County:** Suzanne spoke about the Super Shed Project and the efforts the county is providing to prepare for upwards of 200 trucks per day. The hope is to have this shed open by harvest of 2010. She reported that the Department of Aviation money in the stimulus package will be going to the FAA. Consequently the improvements at the Rominger Airport will have to be done through CDOT. She pointed out that while tourism revenues were down a bit in 2008, it was a very good year for agriculture.

Norm Clark said that the Rio Grande Home Show would be held April 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. They have 70 booths and are expecting a larger turn-out this year than ever.

Suzanne is submitting a request to Ken Salazar at the Interior Department for a possible donation of the 640 acre Little Wing Amphitheater site since several years ago it had been offered for sale with no bids.

Marty Asplin had gotten an update from Charlie Muerhoff of Rio Grande Silver in Creede who had done an URGEDC presentation months ago. He said that they had completed their test boring in the Bull Dog Mine area and are currently working on getting a long-term extension to their exploration permit, which was originally an annual permit.

That concluded business, and the meeting was adjourned.

Submitted, Marty Asplin, secretary.