

14 Oct 08 Del Norte
Upper Rio Grande Economic Development Council
Regular Meeting Minutes
Boogies Restaurant

The meeting was called to order by president, Don Van Wormer. There were no changes to the agenda.

On motion by Suzanne Benton and second by Barbara Musick, the previous meeting minutes were approved.

After Suzanne explained the three bills that had been paid, the Treasurer's Report was approved by a motion from Vern Rominger and a second by Bonnie Asplin.

Jim Clare of SLVREC then took over and spoke about the current transmission line project. The project is being spearheaded by Tri-State Electric, which is in the states of Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico and Nebraska. Currently all of the power lines in the Valley come over Poncha Pass from the north. It would not take much of a fire to create a brown-out or a black-out in the entire Valley. The transmission line project would create a radial feed, connecting east over LaVeta Pass to Walsenburg. This would also serve for renewable energy projects in the valley to be able to export the electricity produced. This line will carry 1,000 Megawatts vs. the Valley's current total usage of 140 Megawatts. Xcel has recently become a partner in the project, and the total capacity of the line is 230,000 KV. This line will tie into the line running down the Front Range, all the way from Ft. Collins. They are currently working on the siting and environmental permits. The addition of Xcel as a partner temporarily moved the project back, but it is now going forward at a good pace. The Walsenburg choice was made because another line to the north would put all our eggs in one basket. The prospects of going to the west or south were both deemed to be weak. Xcel came into the Valley in the early 1900s, but concentrated on towns, which provides them with a density of 50 customers per mile of line. REC was created to get electricity to the rural customers; their average is 3.8 customers per mile of line. Like all RECs the one in the Valley is a co-op. Jim requested that letters of support be sent from businesses, towns and counties. He also said he is available to speak to groups and can be contacted at 719-852-6645. It was agreed that URGEDC will write a letter of support.

The program then switched to Jenny Nehring and Elizabeth Quintana, representing the Monte Vista school system. They invited everyone to the grand opening of the Marsh Elementary School playground on Sunday. They acknowledged Rio Grande County for all of their help with fill and drainage. They explained that the school ballot initiative in Monte Vista, for a bond represents about \$8.4M. They would be providing at Metz Elementary a new roof, carpeting, heating, and windows. At the middle school would be a new science lab, restroom repairs, new practice gym, and re-surface the track. At Marsh Elementary it will add classroom space, library space, expand the cafeteria/gym, and up-grade technology. At the high school it will re-work science labs, improve security, put a new roof on the gym, replace the bleachers, up-grade the utilities, build a

new gym and concession area, and up-grade technology at all of the schools in the district. They pointed out that technology needs constant investment just like utilities and should be replaced every two years. The new gym at the high school would allow them to hold the state tournaments, which would bring in revenues to the community for lodging, gas and food. The \$8.4 million is a bond issue and a one-time only for construction and would be retired. They are asking for a mill levy override to move outside of Tabor for the purpose of paying operating expenses. The district has a good grant record, having secured \$4.8 million since 1998. The combination of the bond issue and the mill levy would represent a tax increase of \$8.24 per \$100,000 of home value per month. They warned of ballot fatigue because of the length of this year's ballot and suggested after the important first items on the ballot, that you skip to the end to vote on the school initiatives then back to the middle to finish. They pointed out that state-wide 80 school districts are asking for a total of \$2.1 billion this election cycle.

Next Cory Off from the Del Norte School District gave a presentation on the Del Norte school initiative, 3A. Del Norte is also looking for a mill levy override. Cory said grants are a form of survival and also a form of control. Before Tabor the mill levy was set by the districts each year. Since the Tabor freeze, a request for a mill levy override is the only way to increase their budget. As the budget gets thinner every year, maintenance is one of the first items to get cut. He explained that Del Norte's C Sap scores have gone up. ACT and SAT tests are to determine if a student can succeed in college. C Sap measures the accumulated knowledge of the student, and Del Norte is showing the 4th largest gain in the state. The mill levy override being asked for is \$375,000. 200,000 of those dollars were earmarked to retain and attract teachers. Federal funding continues to dwindle and will be less this year. Currently K-6 field trips have to be funded by the parents of the students. A portion of the remaining \$175,000 will be used for professional development, internet and creative curriculum. A large portion of the \$175,000 will go to transportation, which is up 222% in the last few years. When asked what gets cut first during the shortfalls, he said grade schools were always the easiest target. He added that in K-12 funding nationally, Colorado ranks 47th.

Our next meeting will be Tuesday, November 18th at 7am at the Monte Villa Inn in Monte Vista. The speaker will be Tom Pescatore.

The meeting was adjourned.

Submitted,
Marty Asplin, secretary