

**RIO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION (RGTC) MEETING  
July 20th, 2017**

**Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area  
2424 NM Hwy 47  
Belen, NM 87002**

**1:00-3:00 PM**

**Members Present:**

Ken McQueen, Chair	Secretary, EMNRD
Christy Tafoya, Vice-Chair	State Parks Division, EMNRD
David Griscom	Designee, Department of Tourism
Benjamin Cloutier	Designee, Economic Development
Shannon Glendenning	Designee, NMDOT
Suzette Shije	Acting Secretary, DIA
Dana Feldman	Public Member
Pete Mattox	Public Member
Laurie Wearne	Public Member

**Legislators**

Senator Steinborn

**Members Absent:**

Toner Mitchell	Public Member
Fernando Martinez	Designee, EMNRD

**Vacant:**

Toby Martinez (resigned)	Public Member
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**1. Call to Order**

The Rio Grande Trail Commission meeting was called to order by Chair McQueen at 1:07 PM.

**2. Introductions**

Chair McQueen introduced Ted Hodoba who welcomed the attendees and gave a brief summary about the background of the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area, which was a dairy prior to becoming a wildlife area in 2002. The area offers hiking and educational opportunities. It is popular with birders

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and schools. The area is operated by the Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District.

Chair McQueen then introduced Commissioner Shannon Glendenning, who is now representing NMDOT and Commissioner Suzette Shije, who is now representing DIA.

**3. Roll Call**

Commission Coordinator Busemeyer called the roll as reflected above.

**4. Approval of Agenda**

Chair McQueen asked the commissioners if there were any changes to the agenda. Seeing none, Chair McQueen asked for a motion to approve the agenda. A motion was made by Vice-Chair Tafoya and seconded by Commissioner Wearne. The motion passed unanimously.

**5. Approval of Minutes**

Chair McQueen asked the commissioners if there were any changes to minutes from the April 6<sup>th</sup> Rio Grande Trail Commission meeting. Seeing none, Chair McQueen asked for a motion to approve the minutes. A motion was made by Commissioner Mattox and seconded by Commissioner Wearne. The motion passed unanimously.

**6. Update from the Chair**

After the meeting attendees introduced themselves, Chair McQueen noted that there had been a number of meetings related to the RGT since the previous RGTC meeting. The Department of Indian Affairs held a Tribal Summit, which was attended by Vice-Chair Tafoya and Chair McQueen, who discussed the RGT with Tesuque Pueblo, Laguna Pueblo, and Taos Pueblo. Chair McQueen and Vice-Chair Tafoya met with the Bureau of Land Management on June 20<sup>th</sup>. Employees of the BLM indicated that designating portions of the RGT in the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument, and elsewhere, would be relatively easy and could take place soon. Chair McQueen and Vice-Chair Tafoya also met with employees of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, who stated that they had GIS data that they would be willing to provide to the Commission and Alta Planning and Design. On July 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Chair and Vice-Chair met with members of Taos Pueblo, and are planning to meet with employees of the International Boundary and Water

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Commission on July 21<sup>st</sup> and hope to meet with the City of Albuquerque soon. The Inter-Tribal Resource Advisory Committee will meet on July 31<sup>st</sup>, and Vice-Chair Tafoya, Rosemary Romero, of Alta Planning and Design, and Commissioner Shije plan to attend.

**7. Old Business**

**a. Rio Grande Trail Contractor Update**

Chair McQueen introduced Jean Crowther and Rosemary Romero, who attended to update the Commission on the progress of the Rio Grande Trail planning process. Ms. Crowther stated that the Alta Design and Planning Team had taken a tour of the state from south to north to meet with work groups and other stakeholders the week of June 12<sup>th</sup>. This was considered the listening and learning phase of the project. The next phase will focus on analysis and alignment, which will take place this summer into fall. By November the team will have draft materials that the commission has reviewed available to the public. By the spring the team hopes to have preferred alignments identified with input from the Commission and will develop recommendations for governance, management and maintenance. The draft plan will be available in late summer and the team hopes to have the final plan in place in September. The Alta Planning and Design team has collected GIS data and relevant planning documents and is continuing to review and collect this information.

Ms. Crowther then introduced Rosemary Romero to update the Commission on what took place during the state tour the week of June 12<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Romero stated that the common themes during the week were to build on what had already been done with trails and planning in the state, being sensitive to tribal issues, caring for natural resources, spirituality, being true to the RGT legislation, and economic development potential. The draft vision statement, which Alta came up with, reflects those themes. The team has met with, and will continue to meet with, stakeholders such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service National Park Service, Forest Service, NM Game and Fish, Counties, and Cities, especially those nine counties through the Rio Grande corridor. The governing bodies can help with supporting the trail planning process. The MRGCD also presents a mosaic of opportunities for the trail.

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Ms. Crowther added that the itinerary for the week of June 12<sup>th</sup> is included in the Commission's materials. The materials also include the draft vision statement, graphic identity for the planning process, and the planned approach for the outreach process. The vision statement came from what the team heard and experienced on their trip through New Mexico and the team is hoping to receive feedback. The statement should serve as a tool to help others understand what the trail should be and what the trail's goals and objectives are. Ms. Crowther read the vision statement:

"New Mexico's Rio Grande Trail is a continuous route paralleling the Rio Grande from Colorado to Texas. Trail users explore, learn about, and connect with a tapestry of diverse natural habitats, rich history, striking landscapes, and vibrant communities. Cultural and environmental sensitivity are hallmarks of the trail, which serves as a dynamic learning lab, facilitating education and awareness of New Mexico's heritage. The trail contributes to healthy lifestyles, spiritual growth, and economic prosperity for New Mexicans. From international visitors to local residents, from an evening walk to a month-long expedition, the Rio Grande Trail offers a window into the heart and soul of New Mexico and a portal into the past and future of the American Southwest."

Ms. Crowther asked the Commission and those present to provide feedback on the vision statement so that it could be solidified soon.

The Alta Team also provided three drafts of graphic identities to be used during the planning process and in a master plan document. An accompanying poster with a map, illustrative concepts, and user typology that will be part of the outreach materials. These drafts have been reviewed by the Communications Work Group, which provided feedback on the drafts. Ms. Crowther stated that the outreach process will be led by Ms. Romero and will include members of the public, stakeholders, and the working groups.

The Alta Team will use six long-distance trails as case studies to determine how other entities have addressed issues like alignments, agreements, promotion and marketing, and other details.

Chair McQueen asked if there were any comments from the Commission. Senator Steinborn stated that he would like to see New Mexico elevated a bit

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in the graphics. The graphic identities could also include cultural icons, rather than only plants. Senator Steinborn stated that he liked the vision statement and wondered how long the feedback period would last. Ms. Crowther stated that she hoped the Alta Team would have something final for the Commission to review in October. Senator Steinborn asked if the Commissioners had similar feedback, and Commissioner Griscom stated that the feedback the Communications Work Group provided was similar.

Vice-Chair Tafoya stated that sign in sheets for the work groups are available for any attendees that are interested in taking part in the planning process and asked Ms. Crowther if there was anything in terms of the process that she wanted to add. Ms. Crowther stated that currently the team is working through the work group chairs. She stated that it would be helpful to have a discussion about the different roles each group will take.

Commissioner Mattox asked how the team was able to put together a mission statement for a long-distance trail prior to knowing how the trail will eventually be pieced together. Ms. Crowther stated that the vision statement is created to help establish what the trail will be and what people should be working towards. Goal statements will come later and will establish more practical benchmarks and alignment criteria. The team will eventually address the full scale of what is possible in the long term.

Senator Steinborn asked if the poster included in the packet is only for the planning phase. Ms. Crowther stated the consensus early on was that the graphic identity would be only for the planning process at this point, and whether it would have a life beyond the planning phase would be at the Commission's discretion. Senator Steinborn stated that he agreed with that consensus and thought that there should be a more robust branding effort for the trail in the future. He also stated that the river in the poster should stand out a little more and the font could have a more southwestern feel to it.

**b. Rio Grande Trail Designation Criteria.**

Chair McQueen directed the commission to the third tab in the handbook, which contained the authorizing legislation for the Rio Grande Trail. Chair McQueen stated that 26 miles of Rio Grande Trail have been designated so far, but it was important for the Commission to have a clear pathway for

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designation. On the second page under section 1 E, item 2), the act states “the commission shall... define and recommend viable path routes of the Rio Grande Trail that shall be contiguous where possible and include only land that is expressly authorized by the owner, including Indian Nations, Tribes, or Pueblos, for inclusion in the Rio Grande Trail and not to be acquired by eminent domain” and in item 7) “ensure that any recommended designation, construction and use of the trail will minimize environmental impacts” and in item eight “ and in item 8) “endeavor to avoid areas of significant habitat value and ensure that any recommended designation, design, construction or use of the trail will minimize the impact on habitat” and in item 9) “consider the impacts on private and commercial interests” and in item 15) “prior to making any final decisions regarding trail designation, design, and construction , hold public meetings to solicit public input and allow for a written comment period” and 16) “make a final recommendation based on all factors, including public comments and environmental impacts. In implementation of the Rio Grande Trail, the Secretary of Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources shall describe and publish any variance from Commission recommendations on the Commission’s website.” Chair McQueen went on to say that the Commission is asked to make recommendations, but it is not clear to whom the Commission is making these recommendations and who makes the final approval of designation. Since it appears there may be more trail designated soon, it is important that we have a clear path forward on the trail designation process and asked for Senator Steinborn’s opinion.

Senator Steinborn informed the attendees that he authored the legislation and stated that New Mexico has a law called the Trails Act, which authorizes the Secretary of the Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department to designate trails. The existence of the New Mexico Trails Act is the reason why the Rio Grande Trail Act authorizes the Secretary of EMNRD to authorize Rio Grande Trail. The intent of the Rio Grande Trail Act was for the Commission to be transparent with the public with regards to recommendations and put them forward, but ultimately it is up to Chair McQueen to designate the trail. If there is any deviation from the recommendations there has to be stated reason for the deviation, which must be posted on the website and be followed by a public comment period in order for the public to provide feedback. Long-distance trails have historically been pieced together with segments filled in over time. It is not an all-or-nothing proposition where if one

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segment isn't present, there will not be a trail. There is always the opportunity to amend this act, if necessary.

Chair McQueen asked Vice-Chair Tafoya to share some of the designation criteria and the process she had been considering to bring before the Commission during the next RGTC meeting in October. Vice-Chair Tafoya stated that it is important for the Commission to have a process in place for designation so that both the Commission and agencies that are interested in having a trail designated, have a clear idea of what steps to take and what criteria are required. This should take place in conjunction with the planning process. One criterion that has been discussed is to make sure that the trail falls within the Rio Grande corridor. Vice-Chair Tafoya asked Ms. Crowther to speak about what the Alta Team was considering. Ms. Crowther stated that the team has been focusing on a corridor of around a mile on either side of the Rio Grande but there are areas where the team will look beyond that distance.

Vice-Chair Tafoya went on to say that other criteria for designation would be how the proposed segment supports the vision of the trail, evidence of public support, accessibility of the segment to the public and user groups, ease with which the trail can be incorporated into the system, evidence that environmental and cultural impact studies have been completed and negative impacts addressed, evidence that the land owner or management agency has the capacity to manage and maintain the segment, identification of how public safety concerns will be addressed, and whether the trail segment is designed to minimize damage to the environment, will require minimal maintenance, and ensure a safe and enjoyable experience.

Vice-Chair Tafoya stated that she would be sharing this information with the commission in a more formal way to gather feedback and would also share some process ideas that has been discussed among EMNRD staff in order for land owners and agencies to submit information in a way that can be easy to understand.

Senator Steinborn asked if those criteria would be the key foundational parameters but an exhaustive list of the criteria. Vice-Chair Tafoya responded that that was the case, and people could suggest other parameters that they thought were missing.

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Commissioner Mattox added that in the past, the City of Las Cruces had asked that a portion of the city trail system be designated and sent the Commission a letter of support without realizing that they needed permission from the International Boundary and Water Commission, which is the land owner. That experience underscored the need for a standardized process.

Senator Steinborn pointed out that this was a process that starts from the bottom up. The hope is that communities would come to the Commission with proposals for RGT segments.

**8. New Business**

**a) Report from Work Groups**

Chair McQueen introduced Dr. David Certain to report on the progress of the Alignment Work Group. Dr. Certain thanked Ms. Crowther and Ms. Rosemary for the opportunity for providing a chance for the work groups to share information with the contractor. The Alignment Work Group has provided the Alta Team with digital data, such as existing trails and amenities along the trails. Some of the data doesn't exist digitally and the group will continue to work on providing the contractor with more data. There have not been regular meetings but the group has been communicating regularly and knows what they should be doing.

Commissioner Mattox spoke on behalf of the User Work Group co-chairs, Bon Bagley and Dan Carter, and read a statement from them which stated that members of the group attended a meeting with Alta on June 12<sup>th</sup> in Las Cruces and provided input to Alta. They were impressed with the presentation and interaction with Alta and at Alta's request, Mr. Carter has asked the work group for input to provide points of interest along the trail and a more detailed list of users, user groups, and organizations that would like to participate in the process. The contact information for those users or organizations can be sent to [southernnmtrailalliance@gmail.com](mailto:southernnmtrailalliance@gmail.com).

Gina Dello Russo, Chair of the Resources Work Group, stated that the Resources Work Group was asked to look at environmentally and culturally sensitive areas; guidance related to wildlife conflicts; vegetation mapping along the Rio Grande including habitat restoration, sites of interest,



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educational and cultural opportunities, such as festivals, museums, historic areas, parks, visitor centers, places to meet and interact; recreational opportunities, such as parks, campgrounds, trails, and wildlife viewing; support services such as food, water, parking, books, trail guides, maps, and websites; and other local areas of interest. All information will be provided digitally. The group recently had a conference call and decided the first three items on the list will be organized by the Work Group Chair with assistance from others and the remaining items on the list will be addressed by working with the nine counties along the corridor with outreach to their local and regional contacts.

The work group hopes to have information from the counties submitted to the work group chair by September 1<sup>st</sup>. The information will be compiled and sent back to the counties for review by September 10<sup>th</sup>. All information will then be submitted to the Commission and Alta by September 15<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Dello Russo stated that she assumes the group will not get 100% of the resources along the trail, they will not be limited to right along the river but will direct attention to access points for opportunities outside the trail the corridor. They assume they will not be working alone and the list of facilities and amenities will not be comprehensive.

Senator Steinborn asked that opportunities for river recreation along the trail be included in the list, since river recreation opportunities were specifically mentioned in the legislation.

Commissioner Mattox, chair of the Design and Management Work Group, stated that it was important for trails to be designed with the end-users in mind in order to avoid long-term management problems and expenses. The group has been concerned that the trail has not explicitly been described in the legislation, request for proposal for trail planning, or the proposal submitted by Alta, as a multiuse trail. Commissioner Mattox hoped that the draft vision statement could mention that the Rio Grande Trail is a multiuse trail. The group is awaiting the alignment study and is interested how it diverges from the 2008 Anasazi report.

Senator Steinborn stated that when writing the legislation, the trail was intended to be multiuse. The planning team should take into consideration what uses would be appropriate in what places. If a new single-track trail is

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created, is it wide enough to accommodate all things? The Commission should be careful about giving the impression that all uses will be allowed on all parts of the trail. The landscape will ultimately dictate what is appropriate and whether parallel trails for separate uses are possible.

Ms. Crowther stated that Alta could add something about multiuse in the vision statement but did not want to get too specific that it would hamper the process. The user typology is important in that regard because it will let people know what segments are appropriate for what users. While there will be a preferred alignment there may be parallel alignments that can accommodate different users.

Judy Kowalski, the project manager for EMNRD's Rio Grande Trail Master Plan and Alignment Study, added that during the work group meetings that took place during Alta's June visit, there was broad agreement that parallel trails would likely occur along the alignment in order to accommodate different users and avoid user conflicts.

Commissioner Griscom, the Chair of the Communications Work Group stated that he was grateful that the process has started and the work groups are able to start working. He invited those interested to join his group, since there are only four members. The Communications Work Group is primarily providing feedback to the contractor concerning planning process, the graphic identity and vision statement. The New Mexico Tourism Department wants to ensure that the trail is branded appropriately. In meetings with Alta they made a decision that the graphic identity would be an iterative process. The logo would not happen immediately, but would develop over the course of the planning process as people learned more about the cultural and environmental elements of the trail. The hope is that the graphic identity will be in place by October. The Communications work group will most likely meet before then to review more marketing materials.

Senator Steinborn, the sole member of the Interagency Work Group, said that the group had not been active but as the outreach process takes place he expected that the group would take a more active role.

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Vice-Chair Tafoya stated that she and former Commissioner Kelly Zunie had met with tribes and pueblos concerning tribal consultation and she and Commissioner Shije will attend the Inter-Tribal Resource Advisory Committee meeting on July 31<sup>st</sup>. They will be working with Ms. Romero on the next steps and have had concerns for the Pueblos regarding the location of the alignment. It is important to continue to interface and exchange information with the Pueblos regarding alignments and cultural resources outside of the tribal boundaries in order to be aware of and avoid culturally sensitive areas. There has already been formal government-to-government consultation and a meeting at the Tribal Summit. The Commissioners and Ms. Romero will continue to reach out to the Tribes and Pueblos.

Commissioner Shije added that at the July 31<sup>st</sup> meeting they would only have a half-hour presentation but they would provide important information and it is important during the planning process to consult with the Tribes and Pueblos and listen.

**b) Work Group Consolidation**

Vice-Chair Tafoya informed the Commission that there had been discussions with Alta regarding the intersection of work group tasks, such as overlap between resources and interagency with regards to consultation, and alignment and design and management. The topic is being discussed now to give the commissioners an opportunity to think about whether there should be any changes to the work group structure at a future date.

Ms. Romero said that she viewed a distinction between the Resource Work Group and the Interagency Work Group because the Resources Work Group would be receiving more information such as maps and data, while the Interagency Work Group would be working at a higher level of decision making with regards to management and interagency discussions and consultation.

Senator Steinborn stated that he viewed his role as the Interagency Work Group Chair of being more of a liaison between different entities and jurisdictions and he could be used as a resource when needed by the Alta team.

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Ms. Crowther added that she had noticed that people across groups wanted to share the same kinds of information and that Alta had set up an online portal where information can be stored by any work group.

Commissioner Mattox said that the workgroups were established early on in the process before a contractor was onboard, so he would support rethinking the organization of the work groups so that they are more relevant and efficient. Rather than moving forward in a work-group-oriented way, the work groups function as a way to pass information from the public to the contractor and that could be done in a number of different ways. The groups could be organized geographically.

**9. Public Comments**

Chair McQueen asked for public comments and Eric Aune, from the Santa Fe Metropolitan Planning Organization informed the commission that Las Cruces, Mid Region and Santa Fe MPOS were gearing up for their metropolitan transportation plan update that could help to facilitate federal funding for the trail and connection to the trail.

Danny Naranjo of Santa Clara Pueblos asked if there was an FTP site where Tribes and the public could view GIS data for the alignment in order to check for cultural resources that might be in the area. Ms. Crowther responded that such data was not available yet. Members of the consulting team will be reviewing data and once something is in draft form, the best opportunity to review that information would likely be at one of Ms. Romero's stakeholder meetings. Senator Steinborn added that having data available on a website was a good idea, and was required by the act. There is a domain reserved for a website that has not been launched, but information is currently being posted on the Energy Minerals and Natural Resources website.

Yasmeen Najmi, with the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, asked if there had been any discussion concerning how to complete cultural and natural resource surveys. Ms. Crowther stated that it was not possible for the Alta team to complete these surveys for the length of the trail, but they were in the process of developing a methodology to identify what cultural and natural resources occur along the alignment and provide information on how to mitigate impacts or ways to avoid those areas. That process will guide the

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development of alternative and preferred alignments, and the Alta team is in the process of reviewing what cultural and natural resources surveys have already been completed. Ms. Najmi asked if there had been any guidance from the state regarding what is required if more analysis is needed. Ms. Crowther stated that the intent is to have a scoring process in place couple with guidance on next steps outside of the planning process. Vice-Chair Tafoya stated that the state does not have jurisdiction over much of the property through the corridor. The land management agencies or organizations that own the properties would use their own rules and regulations regarding cultural and natural resources.

Michelle Jacquez-Ortiz, from Senator Udall's office, offered assistance in reaching out to federal agencies, and if the resources group needs any help in reaching out counties, such as Sierra County, the office would be happy to provide help.

Terry Heslin, with the Bureau of Land Management, suggested that there be a formal acceptance of cooperating agency status for Rio Grande del Norte Land Use Plan. It is a formality that documents a willingness to cooperate with anything included in the plan. The same opportunity exists for the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument. Mr. Heslin encouraged the Commission to contact him if they were interested.

Ruben Lucero, from Isleta Pueblo, asked if the Alta Planning team had considered alternative routes from Cochiti Pueblo south to Isleta Pueblo where much of the land is Pueblo land. Ms. Crowther stated that they had not yet. There is such a wide range of stakeholders and partners that the process cannot be rushed, but the team was not intending to propose alignments where they are not wanted. As a first step they will review previously proposed alignments in the southern part of the state and move north from there.

Ms. Romero added that it was important that the tribes be informed. There are cultural resources that go beyond the boundaries of tribal lands and the team we will be letting the tribes now what is going on so there will be no negative impacts on cultural resources. Mr. Lucero responded that the tribes appreciate being informed but he felt that the effort to reach out to the

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Pueblos had been weak so far. Ms. Romero invited Mr. Lucero to contact her if he needed more information concerning the trail. Commissioner Mattox asked how Mr. Lucero had been finding out about the meetings. Mr. Lucero stated that he had been asked to attend the meetings, but was not sure how the office was informed of them. He added that he had previously met with Commissioner Zunie and Vice-Chair Tafoya at the Inter-Tribal Resource Advisory Committee meeting and would attend the next one on July 31<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Mattox said that law requires that the meetings be advertised and posted on the website. Vice-Chair Tafoya stated that she was happy Mr. Lucero could attend and was always open to suggestions on how to better communicate with the Pueblos. Ms. Romero said that she still needed to research how to get in touch with people such tribal liaisons, particularly in the south of the state and would appreciate any help in doing that.

Commissioner Shije stated that it was her understanding that Commissioner Zunie had been in touch with the tribal leaders and provided them with information at the beginning stages of the of the process and at the beginning of the year after leadership transitions. She wasn't sure if Commissioner Zunie had met with all of the leaders, but she was planning to follow up with them.

Tom Romero, with the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area, asked if there was a way to provide comments to the Commission with regard to the vision statement. Ms. Crowther suggested he contact the Commission Coordinator.

**10. Future Meeting Date**

Chair McQueen suggested that the next meeting be in Taos at the Kit Carson Electrical Co-op board room on October 17<sup>th</sup> and after not hearing any objections, asked for a motion to approve. A motion was made by Vice-Chair Tafoya and was seconded by Commissioner Feldman. The motion approved unanimously.

**11. Adjournment** – A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Feldman and seconded by Vice-Chair Tafoya. The motion was approved unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 2:57 pm.