

**STAFF REPORT**



**SUBJECT:** Atmos Settlement of 2022 Rate Case

**DEPARTMENT:** City Administration

**STAFF CONTACT:** Jason King, City Manager

**RECOMMENDATION:**

ACSC has reached a settlement agreement with Atmos resolving the 2023 RRM filing. In its filing, the Company requested a rate increase of \$165.9 million on a system-wide basis. This was reduced to \$156.1 million due to limitations in the RRM tariff. Our consultants conducted discovery and prepared a report detailing adjustments totaling \$25.2 million. This translates into a \$130.9 million increase (i.e. \$156.1 - \$25.2 = \$130.9). The Company has agreed to settle the case for \$142 million. This is a reduction of \$23.9 million to the Company’s initial request. This includes payment of ACSC’s expenses. Based upon *all* of the factors, we believe this is a very good outcome and recommend approval.

**BACKGROUND:**

The City, along with 181 other Mid-Texas cities served by Atmos Energy Corporation, Mid-Tex Division (“Atmos Mid-Tex” or “Company”), is a member of the Atmos Cities Steering Committee (“ACSC”). In 2007, ACSC and Atmos Mid-Tex settled a rate application filed by the Company pursuant to Section 104.301 of the Texas Utilities Code for an interim rate adjustment commonly referred to as a GRIP filing (arising out of the Gas Reliability Infrastructure Program legislation). That settlement created a substitute rate review process, referred to as Rate Review Mechanism (“RRM”), as a substitute for future filings under the GRIP statute.

Since 2007, there have been several modifications to the original RRM Tariff. The most recent iteration of an RRM Tariff was reflected in an ordinance adopted by ACSC members in 2018. On or about March 31, 2023, the Company filed a rate request pursuant to the RRM Tariff adopted by ACSC members. The Company claimed that its cost-of-service in a test year ending December 31, 2022, entitled it to additional system-wide revenues of \$165.9 million.

Application of the standards set forth in ACSC's RRM Tariff reduces the Company's request to \$156.1 million, \$113.8 million of which would be applicable to ACSC members. After reviewing the filing and conducting discovery, ACSC's consultants concluded that the system-wide deficiency under the RRM regime should be \$130.9 million instead of the claimed \$156.1 million.

After several settlement meetings, the parties have agreed to settle the case for \$142 million. This is a reduction of \$23.9 million to the Company's initial request. This includes payment of ACSC's expenses. The settlement also includes an additional \$19.5 million for the securitization regulatory asset expenses related to Winter Storm Uri. This was previously approved by the Texas Legislature and Railroad Commission. The Effective Date for new rates is October 1, 2023. ACSC members should take action approving the Resolution/Ordinance before September 30, 2023.

#### **EXPLANATION OF "BE IT RESOLVED" PARAGRAPHS:**

1. This section approves all findings in the Resolution/Ordinance.
2. This section adopts the RRM rate tariffs and finds the adoption of the new rates to be just, reasonable, and in the public interest.
3. This section makes it clear that Cities may challenge future costs associated with gas leaks.
4. This section finds that existing rates are unreasonable. Such finding is a necessary predicate to establishment of new rates. The new tariffs will permit Atmos Mid-Tex to recover an additional \$142 million on a system-wide basis.
5. This section approves an exhibit that establishes a benchmark for pensions and retiree medical benefits to be used in future rate cases or RRM filings.
6. This section requires the Company to reimburse the City for expenses associated with review of the RRM filing, settlement discussions, and adoption of the Resolution/Ordinance approving new rate tariffs.

7. This section repeals any resolution or ordinance that is inconsistent with the Resolution/Ordinance.
8. This section finds that the meeting was conducted in compliance with the Texas Open Meetings Act, Texas Government Code, Chapter 551.
9. This section is a savings clause, which provides that if any section is later found to be unconstitutional or invalid, that finding shall not affect, impair, or invalidate the remaining provisions of this Resolution/Ordinance. This section further directs that the remaining provisions of the Resolution/Ordinance are to be interpreted as if the offending section or clause never existed.
10. This section provides for an effective date upon passage.
11. This section directs that a copy of the signed Resolution/Ordinance be sent to a representative of the Company and legal counsel for ACSC.

## **FISCAL IMPACT SUMMARY:**

### **RATE TARIFFS**

Atmos generated rate tariffs attached to the Resolution/Ordinance will generate \$142 million in additional revenues. Atmos also prepared a Proof of Revenues supporting the settlement figures. ACSC consultants have agreed that Atmos' Proof of Revenues is accurate.

### **BILL IMPACT**

The impact of the settlement on average residential rates is an increase of \$6.47 on a monthly basis, or 7.31%. The increase for average commercial usage will be \$24.72 or 5.19%. Atmos provided bill impact comparisons containing these figures.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The Legislature's GRIP process allowed gas utilities to receive annual rate increases associated with capital investments. The RRM process has proven to result in a more efficient and less costly (both from a consumer rate impact perspective and from a ratemaking perspective) than the GRIP process. Given Atmos Mid-Tex's claim that its historic cost of service should entitle it to recover \$165.9 million in additional system-wide revenues, the RRM settlement at \$142 million for ACSC members reflects substantial savings to ACSC cities. Settlement at \$142 million is fair and reasonable. The ACSC Executive Committee consisting of city employees of 18 ACSC members urges all ACSC members to pass the Resolution/Ordinance before September 30, 2023. New rates become effective October 1, 2023.