

Squabble over Lodgers Tax monies severs ties, for now

Written by By Jonathan Gregg Sun Correspondent
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Gallup Film Festival awarded 16K

The request and approval for Lodgers Tax money for the Gallup Film Festival was a bit more charged than these types of meeting usually are when the City Council met Aug. 8.

After the city's Tourism and Marketing Manager Jennifer Lazarz finished presenting some marketing metrics, she then ceded the floor to Knifewing Segura to present his request for \$50,000 in Lodgers Tax funds from the City Council for next month's Gallup Film Festival.

Mayor Jackie McKinney said "this is highly irregular," prior to Segura's presentation.

The tension between Lazarz and Segura was evident immediately when instead of starting to present a proposal, Segura started off by saying he "didn't trust" Lazarz, and that she "had no business background."

He continued in a heated voice, saying that he "trusted the Council because of their business backgrounds" and reiterated that in contrast "Lazarz did not have that, and I don't trust her opinion."

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Next, McKinney told Segura to “watch how he addressed Lazarz, a city employee.” The mayor went on to say that it was “absolutely unacceptable, and I will not allow it.”

From there, the overall tension in the room remained and Segura was visibly frustrated. The discussion turned towards what Segura was specifically requesting – \$50,000 in Lodgers Tax monies. In particular, McKinney said that “an ask of \$50,000 when the entire Lodgers Tax (third quarter) budget is \$90,000 is excessive.”

It was also mentioned that there was a new rule in place that limits Lodgers Tax awards to \$25,000.

When pressed on where the \$50,000 number came from, Segura said, “We put a number out there and we get what we get and adjust.” He then said, “that was how things were done last year, and I expected things to be the same way this year.”

McKinney responded that the Council “had approved new rules since last year” and that “just throwing a number against the wall to see if it sticks is not good budgeting.”

As the meeting went on and there wasn’t a recommendation from the Lodgers Tax Committee, discussion continued on what exactly the appropriate number would be. The reason there was no recommendation from the committee, City Councilor Yogash Kumar said that “a lesser number was not what you (Knifewing) wanted.”

Eventually at a seeming impasse, Councilor Allan Landavazo recommended they mull over the matter, but there are legal constraints on doing that outside of the meeting.

As a way to move forward, McKinney asked Kumar for a recommendation, and after struggling for minute Kumar recommended that they go with last year’s number of \$16,000, which the Council approved.

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During the meeting there were several admonishments from the council on the need for folks to put personal feelings aside, and while funds were approved for the festival, it was clear that tensions between Lazarz and Segura were still high.

When contacted after the meeting, Segura said that he “realized that he could have handled things better,” and going forward he would work to improve his relationship with Lazarz. However, that may be challenging because Lazarz and Segura can no longer meet one-on-one, per the city manager’s office.

The Gallup Film Festival takes place Sept. 14 -16. Organizations request Lodgers Tax funds annually to help offset the cost of advertising and promoting their event.

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