

Marcos Marrero appointed to Holyoke Gas & Electric Commission

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HOLYOKE — The city council on Tuesday appointed former planning director Marcos Marrero to a six-year term on the Holyoke Gas and Electric Commission.

The appointment followed a contentious hearing last week before the council's public service committee, where an interview with Marrero led to a shouting match between Councilors Kevin Jourdain and Juan Anderson-Burgos.

The interview focused on energy issues, green alternatives, and the ongoing residential and commercial natural gas moratorium imposed by HG&E, as Jourdain led the questioning.

On Tuesday, Jourdain said Marrero did a "fantastic job" during the two-hour interview. While disagreements may arise on the city's energy future, he said, ratepayers cannot "bear the costs."

"If we're going to have major changes to take away gas service or to make major policy changes, we have to consider the impact on the individual," Jourdain said. He added that 10,000 Holyoke and 2,000 Southampton customers rely on natural gas.

Jourdain added that Marrero felt shifting the economic burden on a poor community like Holyoke was unfair or equitable. "He was not in an itching way to take away natural gas service and was supportive of a number of opportunities that we have to expand capacities," he said.

He agreed with Marrero on expanding energy efficiency opportunities and freeing up facilities that use natural gas.

Ward 4 Councilor Kocayne Givner said councilors should be careful when using terms like "taking away people's services," as no entity can remove or impose a new energy service.

"It's dangerous when we talk about our communities and create this fear factor as though someone is going to come in and take away things from them," Givner said. "I don't think anyone is going to come to my home and force me to buy electric and put solar panels on it."

Givner said Marrero provided options for Holyoke's energy future and advocated for "great" systems already in place.

Ward 5 Councilor Linda Vacon said while Marrero is an articulate and intelligent person, she was "taken aback" when Mayor Joshua Garcia did not reappoint Robert Griffin, a member of the commission for 20 years. She added that Garcia kept most boards and commissions intact.

"If something is working really well, and they are the best thing you have in the city, why would you want to change that?" Vacon said. "However, that has nothing to do with whether Mr. Marrero would be an effective commissioner."

Anderson-Burgos apologized for his actions during Marrero's interview. "I haven't been myself for personal reasons, and that's no excuse regardless," he said. However, he would not apologize for what was said.

"I meant every word that I said. I also want to mention that I respect parliamentary procedures, and there are times when other councilors are speaking. No matter what my burning desire may be or how much I want to talk when they're talking, I would never interrupt their message no matter how much I disagree with the person."

Anderson-Burgos said he felt he let Marrero down given how he conducted himself. He promised to behave more appropriately and hoped other "councilors followed suit."

Marrero's appointment passed on a voice vote.