

STATE OF VERMONT
PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

Case No. 20-0203-INV

Investigation into the potential implementation of best practices for providing discounted rates to low-income residential ratepayers of Vermont retail electric utilities	
--	--

Order entered: 02/03/2020

ORDER OPENING INVESTIGATION

This Order opens an investigation by the Vermont Public Utility Commission (“Commission”), pursuant to Vermont Statutes Annotated Chapter 30, Section 218(e), into the potential implementation of best practices for providing discounted rates to low-income residential ratepayers of Vermont retail electric utilities (the “Utilities”).¹

As the Commission noted when we last looked in detail at this matter in 2011, “electricity is a necessity for a safe and healthy household.”² This continues to be the case nearly a decade later; in some ways, the affordability of electricity for low-income ratepayers is even more urgent today. Further, we now have significantly more information than we did in 2011 because, as a result of our 2011 investigation into this matter, Vermont’s largest retail electric utility, Green Mountain Power Corporation (“GMP”), established the Energy Assistance Program (“EAP”), which provides reduced rates and arrearage forgiveness to GMP’s low-income customers.³ A report on that program was recently completed.⁴

For these reasons, we open this investigation.

¹ Section 218(e) of Title 30 provides: “Notwithstanding any other provisions of this section, the Commission, on its own motion or upon petition of any person, may issue an order approving a rate schedule, tariff, agreement, contract, or settlement that provides reduced rates for low-income electric utility consumers better to assure affordability. For the purposes of this subsection, ‘low-income electric utility consumer’ means a customer who has a household income at or below 150 percent of the current federal poverty level. When considering whether to approve a rate schedule, tariff, agreement, contract, or settlement for low-income electric utility consumers, the Commission shall take into account the potential impact on, and cost-shifting to, other utility customers.”

² *Investigation into (1) petition of AARP, for the establishment of reduced rates for low-income consumers of Green Mountain Power Corporation and Central Vermont Public Service Corporation; and (2) as expanded to possibly include general applicability to all Vermont retail electric utilities (In Re: Phase 2)*, Docket 7535, Order issued on 7/22/11 at 1.

³ *See Investigation into: (1) petition of AARP*, Docket 7535, Orders issued on 7/22/11 and 9/6/12.

⁴ *See Petition of Green Mountain Power Corporation to refund Electric Assistance Program funds to GMP customers via a one-time bill credit during April 2018 (“Petition of GMP”)*, Case No. 18-0126-PET, Report filed on 11/15/19.

I. BACKGROUND

In the spring of 2009, following the passage of Section 218(e) and in response to a petition from AARP, the Commission opened a proceeding to determine whether it was appropriate for the Utilities, including Central Vermont Public Service Corporation (“CVPS”) and GMP, to design and implement low-income rates in their respective service territories.

On September 6, 2012, after significant process, including several rounds of comments and workshops, the Commission directed GMP and CVPS to implement a low-income program, known as the EAP.⁵

Since its inception, the EAP has undergone several modifications designed to align program benefits with program revenue, to improve ratepayer participation, and to fine-tune certain program details and benefits. Most recently, after nearly eight years of operation, the Commission approved the Vermont Department of Public Service’s request to hire a consultant to review the EAP, focusing on increasing program enrollment levels.⁶ This report was filed with the Commission on November 15, 2019.⁷

II. DISCUSSION & ORDER

The Commission has been concerned for many years about the impact of increasing electricity rates on low-income ratepayers. This concern is heightened by recent reports that make clear that, to reduce carbon emissions in order to meet the State of Vermont’s greenhouse gas reduction goals, more and more Vermonters will need to switch from fossil-fuel-based transportation and heating to cleaner methods that rely on renewable electricity. These changes include replacing a significant number of gas-powered vehicles with electric vehicles. While these changes would save many Vermonters money on their overall energy bills, they could significantly increase their electric bills. In the face of this transition, in an effort to protect the most vulnerable Vermonters and pursuant to Section 218(e), we open this investigation into whether to extend the potential implementation of best practices for providing discounted rates to low-income residential ratepayers of all Vermont retail electric utilities.

⁵ GMP has acquired CVPS so the remainder of this Order will only refer to GMP when discussing the EAP.

⁶ *Petition of GMP*, Case No. 18-0126-PET, Order issued on 2/12/18.

⁷ *Petition of GMP*, Case No. 18-0126-PET, Report filed on 11/15/19.

We recognize that certain utilities are in different positions regarding a low-income program. For example, GMP already operates the EAP, while others have no such program. Also, recently we directed WEC to work with the Department of Public Service on developing a program to support low-income members and report to us on their effort by no later than December 20, 2020.⁸ These differences in position may affect the way some entities choose to approach this process. As such, we appoint John C. Gerhard, Staff Attorney, as hearing officer and direct him to address these procedural considerations with the participants.

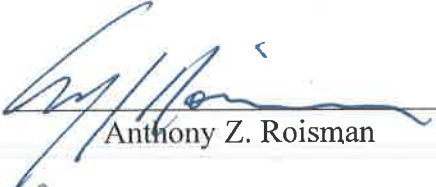
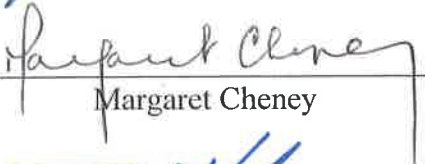

The Commission will establish a service list for this proceeding, which is not a contested case. Anyone interested in participating should contact the Clerk of the Commission.

This case is being processed in the Commission's online document management system, known as ePUC, which can be accessed at <http://epuc.vermont.gov>. Information about how to use ePUC, including how to make a filing and how to search for documents, is available on the Commission's website at <http://puc.vermont.gov/epuc-information>.

SO ORDERED.


⁸ See *Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc. 's, tariff filing for rate design changes and a change in rate schedules to be effective on services rendered beginning June 17, 2019*, Case No. 19-1270-TF, Order issued 12/19/2019.

Dated at Montpelier, Vermont this 3rd day of February, 2020.

)	
Anthony Z. Roisman)	PUBLIC UTILITY
)	
)	
Margaret Cheney)	COMMISSION
)	
)	
Sarah Hofmann)	OF VERMONT

OFFICE OF THE CLERK

Filed: February 3, 2020

Attest: 
Clerk of the Commission

Notice to Readers: This decision is subject to revision of technical errors. Readers are requested to notify the Clerk of the Commission (by e-mail, telephone, or in writing) of any apparent errors, in order that any necessary corrections may be made. (E-mail address: puc.clerk@vermont.gov.)

Appeal of this decision to the Supreme Court of Vermont must be filed with the Clerk of the Commission within 30 days. Appeal will not stay the effect of this Order, absent further order by this Commission or appropriate action by the Supreme Court of Vermont. Motions for reconsideration or stay, if any, must be filed with the Clerk of the Commission within 28 days of the date of this decision and Order.

PUC Case No. 20-0203-INV - SERVICE LIST

Carolyn Browne Anderson, Esq.
Green Mountain Power Corporation
2152 Post Road
Rutland, VT 05702
carolyn.anderson@greenmountainpower.com

(for Green Mountain
Power Corporation)

Melissa Bailey
Vermont Public Power Supply Authority
P.O. Box 126
5195 Waterbury-Stowe Road
Waterbury Center, VT 05677
mbailey@vppsa.com

(for Vermont Public
Power Supply Authority)

Reginald Beliveau, Jr.
Swanton Village, Inc. Electric Department
P.O. Box 279
120 First Street
Swanton, VT 05488
rbeliveau@swanton.net

(for Swanton Village,
Inc. Electric Department)

Sue Bernier
Vermont Electric Cooperative, Inc.
42 Wecom Road
Johnson, VT 05656
sbernier@vermontelectric.coop

(for Vermont Electric
Cooperative Inc.)

Meredith Birkett
Village of Johnson Water & Light Department
P.O. Box 603
Johnson, VT 05656
vojmanager@townofjohnson.com

(for Village of Johnson
Water & Light
Department)

Ellen Burt
Town of Stowe Electric Department
P.O.Box 190
Stowe, VT 05672
eburt@stoweelectric.com

(for Town of Stowe
Electric Department)

Andrea Cohen
Vermont Electric Cooperative, Inc.
42 Wescom Road
Johnson, VT 05656
acohen@vermontelectric.coop

(for Vermont Electric
Cooperative Inc.)

William F. Ellis
McNeil, Leddy & Sheahan
271 South Union Street
Burlington, VT 05401
wellis@mcneilvt.com

(for City of Burlington
Electric Department)

Jonathan Elwell
Village of Enosburg Falls Water & Light
42 Village Drive
Enosburg Falls, VT 05450
jelwell@enosburg.net

(for Village of Enosburg
Falls Water & Light
Department Inc.)

Elijah D Emerson, Esq.
Primmer Piper Eggleston & Cramer PC
PO Box 1309
Montpelier, VT 05601
eemerson@primmer.com

(for Town of Northfield
Electric Department)
(for Town of Hardwick
Electric Department)
(for Village of Johnson
Water & Light
Department) (for Village
of Enosburg Falls Water
& Light Department
Inc.)
(for Vermont Public
Power Supply Authority)

Steven R Farman
Vermont Public Power Supply Authority
5195 Waterbury-Stowe rd
Waterbury Center, VT 05766
sfarman@vppsa.com

James Gibbons
City of Burlington Electric Department
585 Pine Street
Burlington, VT 05401
jgibbons@burlingtonelectric.com

(for City of Burlington
Electric Department)

Lauren Hammer
Vermont Gas Systems, Inc.
85 Swift Street
South Burlington, VT 05403
lhammer@vermontgas.com

(for Vermont Gas
Systems, Inc.)

Jeremy D. Hoff
Stackpole & French
Stackpole & French
P.O. Box 819
Stowe, VT 05672
jhoff@stackpolefrench.com

(for Town of Stowe
Electric Department)

Karen Horne
Vermont Gas Systems, Inc.
85 Swift Street
South Burlington, VT 05403
khorne@vermontgas.com

(for Vermont Gas
Systems, Inc.)

Bill Humphrey
Village of Lyndonville Electric Department
P.O. Box 167
20 Park Avenue
Lyndonville, VT 05851
bhumphrey@lyndonvilleelectric.com

(for Village of
Lyndonville Electric
Department)

Mari McClure
Green Mountain Power Corporation
163 Acorn Lane
Colchester, VT 05446
ceo@greenmountainpower.com

(for Green Mountain
Power Corporation)

Pamela Moore
Village of Jacksonville Electric Company
P.O. Box 169
Jacksonville, VT 05342
pmoore@jacksonvilleelectric.net

(for Village of
Jacksonville Electric
Company)

John Morley
Village of Orleans Electric Department
Municipal Building
One Memorial Square
Orleans, VT 05860
orloffice@villageoforleansvt.org

(for Village of Orleans
Electric Department)

Craig Myotte
Village of Morrisville Water & Light Department
857 Elmore Street
Morrisville, VT 05661
cmyotte@mwlvt.com

(for Village of
Morrisville Water &
Light Department)

Ken Nolan
Vermont Public Power Supply Authority
P.O. Box 126
Waterbury Center, VT 05677
knolan@vppsa.com

(for Vermont Public
Power Supply Authority)

Jessica Patterson
Town of Hardwick Electric Department
PO Box 516
Hardwick, VT 05843
jess@hardwickelectric.com

(for Town of Hardwick
Electric Department)

Thomas Petraska
Village of Ludlow Electric Light Department
9 Pond Street
Ludlow, VT 05149
tpeutraska@tds.net

(for Village of Ludlow
Electric Light
Department)

James Porter, Director of Public Advocacy
Vermont Department of Public Service
DPS-PA@vermont.gov

(for Vermont
Department of Public
Service)

Patricia Richards
Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc.
P.O. Box 8
East Montpelier, VT 05651
patty.richards@wec.coop

(for Washington Electric
Cooperative Inc.)

Evan Riordan
Barton Village, Inc. Electric Department
P.O. Box 519
Barton, VT 05822
electricmanager@bartonvt.com

(for Barton Village Inc.
Electric Department)

Carol Robertson
Village of Hyde Park Electric Department
P.O. Box 400
Hyde Park, VT 05655
carol.robertson@hydeparkvt.com

(for Village of Hyde
Park Electric
Department)

Matt Rutherford
Town of Stowe Electric Department
P.O. Box 190
56 Old Farm Road
Stowe, VT 05672
mrutherford@stoweelectric.com

(for Town of Stowe
Electric Department)

Jeffrey Schulz
Town of Northfield Electric Department
51 South Main Street
Northfield, VT 05663
jschulz@northfield.vt.us

(for Town of Northfield
Electric Department)

Ronald A. Shems, Esq.
Tarrant Gillies & Richardson
P.O. Box 1440
Montpelier, VT 05601-1440
rshems@tgrvt.com

(for Washington Electric
Cooperative Inc.)

Eileen Simollardes
Vermont Gas Systems, Inc.
85 Swift Street
South Burlington, VT 05403
esimollardes@vermontgas.com

(for Vermont Gas
Systems, Inc.)

Darren Springer
City of Burlington Electric Department
585 Pine Street
Burlington, VT 05401
dspringer@burlingtonelectric.com

(for City of Burlington
Electric Department)

Emily Stebbins-Wheelock
City of Burlington Electric Department
585 Pine Street
Burlington, VT 05401
estebbins-wheelock@burlingtonelectric.com

(for City of Burlington
Electric Department)

Melissa Stevens, Esq.
Green Mountain Power Corporation
2152 Post Road
Rutland, VT 05701
melissa.stevens@greenmountainpower.com

(for Green Mountain
Power Corporation)

Michael Sullivan
Town of Hardwick Electric Department
P.O. Box 516
Hardwick, VT 05843
msullivan@hardwickelectric.com

(for Town of Hardwick
Electric Department)

Rebecca Towne
Vermont Electric Cooperative, Inc.
42 Wescom Road
Johnson, VT 05656
rtowne@vermontelectric.coop

(for Vermont Electric
Cooperative Inc.)

Others Receiving Copies of Notice:

Agency of Human Services Field Service Directors

Vermont Public Water Companies Regulated by PUC

Cable Companies Regulated by PUC

Efficiency Vermont – Vermont Energy Investment Corporation

128 Lakeside Avenue, Suite 401

Burlington, VT 05401

mjwalker@veic.org

dwestman@veic.org

Karen Vastine

Vermont Department for Children and Families

Karen.vastine@vermont.gov

W. David Koeninger

Vermont Legal Aid

264 North Winooski Ave.

Burlington, VT 05401

DKoeninger@vtlegalaid.org

Sarah Phillips

Vermont Office of Economic Opportunity

280 State Drive

Waterbury, VT 05671-1050

Sarah.phillips@vermont.gov

Vermont Agency of Human Services

280 State Drive - Center Building

Waterbury, VT 05671

Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council Inc

ATTN: Karen Lafayette

109 Caroline Street

Burlington, VT 05401

Vermont Public Interest Research Group (VPIRG)

141 Main St., Ste. 6

Montpelier, VT 05602

Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity
Jan Demers, Executive Director
PO Box 1603
Burlington, VT 05402

BROC-Community Action in Southwestern Vermont
45 Union Street
Rutland, VT 05701

Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA)
91 Buck Drive
Westminster, VT 05158

Northeast Kingdom Community Action (NEKCA)
70 Main Street
Newport, VT 058555110

AARP Vermont State Office
199 Main Street, Suite 225
Burlington, VT 05401

Community of Vermont Elders (COVE)
641 Comstock Road, Suite 4
Berlin, VT 05602

Central Vermont Council on Aging
59 N. Main Street, Suite 200
Barre, VT 05641

Age Well Vermont
76 Pearl Street, Suite 201
Essex Junction, VT 05452

Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging
143 Maple Street
Rutland, VT 05701

Council On Aging For Southeastern Vermont
56 Main Street, Suite 202
Springfield, VT 05156-2945

Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging
481 Summer St., Suite 101
St. Johnsbury, VT 05819

Champlain Valley Weatherization Service
136 Jimmo Drive, Suite 3
Colchester, VT 05446

SEVCA Weatherization Office
91 Buck Drive
Westminster, VT 05158

BROC Community Action in Southwestern Vermont
45 Union Street
Rutland, VT 05701

NETO Weatherization Office - Newport
PO Box 584
Newport, VT 05855

NETO Weatherization Office - St. Johnsbury
PO Box 186
St. Johnsbury, VT 05819

Capstone Community Action
20 Gable Place
Barre, VT 05641

Capstone Community Action
197 Harrel Street
Morrisville, VT 05661

Capstone Community Action
PO Box 500
Bradford, VT 05033

Capstone Community Action
PO Box 284
Randolph, VT 05060

Capstone Community Action
Evergreen Senior Center
5308 Main Street
Waitsfield, VT 05763