

From: Edward Esmond <ed_esmond@yahoo.com>

Sent: Tuesday, April 23, 2024 8:48 PM

To: PUC - Clerk <PUC.Clerk@vermont.gov>

Subject: Case Number 24-0969-TF, Woodstock Aqueduct Company (WAC) Request for Rate Increase

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To Whom It May Concern,

RE: Case Number 24-0969-TF, Woodstock Aqueduct Company (WAC) Request for Rate Increase

I oppose the proposed rate increase requested by the WAC for a number of reasons. While I am sympathetic to the current financial difficulties of the WAC, many of them are result of mis-steps and mis-management by the Company.

For example, after the main water pipe, which runs under the Ottauquechee River was washed out by Tropical Storm Irene in 2011, the replacement pipe was put in the same place. In July of 2023, there was a heavy rain (not a hurricane, or a tropical storm, just a heavy summer deluge...) which washed the replacement pipe away.

Apparently, after Irene, the WAC was advised that there was a real probability of this happening again, but they chose the cheapest, easiest, least thoughtful solution.

The WAC's "fix" this time was to connect hydrants on either side of the river with hoses obtained from local Fire Departments. Admittedly, a clever solution, but in total violation of State regulations on drinking water resulting in a "Do Not Drink" order. This, in a town that depends on tourism. Weeks later, the fire hoses were again replaced with more suitable temporary piping.

In a public meeting, when asked about a permanent fix, Mr. Billings said (paraphrasing him) "I have someone lined up to take care of it..." When pressed on the time frame, he said something vague about "during Foliage season...". These were disingenuous statements. In reality, he had someone "lined up" to look at it and give an estimate on the cost. The estimate was over \$600,000, The temporary piping was insulated and covered and remained through the winter. In April, it's in the same condition. It's now beginning to look like the WAC's permanent fix.

Mr. Billings is attempting to sell the WAC to the Town of Woodstock and this extreme rate increase is a scare tactic to force the Town to pay what he wants for a broken-down, worn-out, out-dated system. He has stated that one solution to his current problem, since the WAC is not legally required to provide water for firefighting, would be to blank off the hydrants and "paint them black..." Again, it's scare tactic.

The WAC has done the minimum required to keep this system limping along with minimum investment on their part.

Perhaps a rate increase is in order, but not the outlandish one asked for. Doing so would be rewarding them for poor performance.

Respectfully,

Edward Esmond
66 Eaton Place
Woodstock, VT 05091