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STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE



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June 19, 2020

Debra A. Howland  
Executive Director  
New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission  
21 South Fruit Street, Suite 10  
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

Re: Docket No. DE 19-064; Liberty Utilities (Granite State Electric) Corp. d/b/a Liberty Utilities; Filing of Staff Exhibits

Dear Ms. Howland:

Enclosed for filing in the above-captioned docket please find Staff Exhibits 60, 61 and 62. These Exhibits are being filed after the deadline set in the Remote Hearing Guidelines because they are data responses Staff received just today. Liberty has indicated that it does not object to Staff filing these exhibits today.

In accordance with the Secretarial letter issued March 17, 2020, this letter will be filed electronically only at this time.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Paul B. Dexter*

Paul B. Dexter  
Staff Attorney

cc: Service List

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Liberty Utilities (Granite State Electric) Corp. d/b/a Liberty Utilities

DE 19-064  
Distribution Service Rate Case  
2019 Step Adjustment

Staff Data Requests - Set 3

Date Request Received: 6/12/20  
Request No. Staff 3-1

Date of Response: 6/19/20  
Respondent: Christine Downing

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**REQUEST:**

- a. What year did the walk in-center at 9 Lowell Rd. in Salem open under Liberty's operation (that is, not counting any years operated by a corporate predecessor)?
- b. Please provide the number of customers that visited this walk-in center, by year, since it opened under Liberty's operation.
- c. Please provide any other readily available data that Liberty used or uses to gauge the level of activity and service provided at this walk-in center.
- d. Please provide any analyses or studies that Liberty performed when deciding to re-locate this walk-in center from 9 Lowell Rd. to Main St. Salem, including any analysis of the benefits versus the costs of the re-location. If no analyses were performed, please so indicate.

**RESPONSE:**

- a. Liberty Utilities used a phased approach to opening the walk-in center locations beginning in August 2014, with completion in January 2015. The 9 Lowell Rd. office in Salem opened during Q4 2014.
- b. The Salem walk-in center was closed on March 23, 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Had we not closed, we were trending to have approximately 11,000 customer visits at the Salem location for 2020.

2015 = 5,739

2016 = 8,542

2017 = 11,139

2018 = 11,104

2019 = 10,042

2020 (thru April) = 2,664

- c. **Annual walk-in volume (\$)**

2015 = \$1,392,830

2016 = \$1,836,133

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2017 = \$1,986,102  
2018 = \$2,235,679  
2019 = \$2,012,477  
2020 (thru April) = \$484,345

Outside of the number of customer visits and dollar amounts collected at our walk-in centers, we intentionally built our infrastructure to have CSRs in the walk-in centers handle incoming calls, perform outbound calls, and respond to digital requests.

Liberty's model has always been to provide local support to our customers and having a physical presence within the communities we serve, as opposed to having a centralized contact center.

This model also provides redundancy within our own state for emergencies and business continuity.

- d. Liberty Utilities did not perform a cost analysis for relocating the walk-in center. The decision was made based on safety, security, and space considerations. We needed to get the customers away from the operations locations as there were far too many interactions with our trucks and customers. This is especially true during storms when we have extra crews and equipment in place moving in and around the property and customers coming in and creating further safety hazards. As provided in the response to Staff 1-6.a, the setup of the driveway and parking area at 9 Lowell Road allowed for too many customers to drive in and around the operations center where large vehicles are often moving about. Second, we needed more office space at 9 Lowell Road for growth of the business. Electric Engineering was relocated to Salem from Londonderry in 2017 to accommodate more employees hired in the Londonderry office. Since that move, five new engineering positions were created and there was insufficient space for employees in Salem. In addition to the Engineering Department, a new group, Operation Resource Planning, was created and this department was also located at 9 Lowell Road. Moving the walk-in center to a new location increased safety for both customers and employees, and also provided additional office space to the Salem operations center.

Liberty Utilities (Granite State Electric) Corp. d/b/a Liberty Utilities

DE 19-064  
Distribution Service Rate Case  
2019 Step Adjustment

Staff Data Requests - Set 3

Date Request Received: 6/12/20  
Request No. Staff 3-2

Date of Response: 6/19/20  
Respondent: Christine Downing

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**REQUEST:**

- a. What year did the walk in-center in Londonderry open under Liberty's operation (that is, not counting any years operated by a corporate predecessor)?
- b. Please provide the number of customers that visited this walk-in center, by year, since it opened under Liberty's operation.
- c. Please provide any other readily available data that Liberty used or uses to gauge the level of activity and service provided at this walk-in center.
- d. Please indicate if Liberty considered consolidating its walk-in center operations in Londonderry as an alternative to relocating its center from 9 Lowell Rd., to Main St. In Salem. Please provide any written analyses that were done concerning this question.

**RESPONSE:**

- a. Liberty Utilities used a phased approach to opening the walk-in center locations beginning in August 2014, with completion in January 2015. The 15 Buttrick Rd. office in Londonderry opened in Q3 2014.
- b. The Londonderry walk-in center was closed on March 23, 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Had we not closed, we were trending to have approximately 5,200 customer visits for 2020.

2015 = 3,129

2016 = 3,792

2017 = 5,391

2018 = 4,954

2019 = 4,593

2020 (thru April) = 969

- c. **Annual walk-in volume (\$)**

2015 = \$1,275,476

2016 = \$1,218,178

2017 = \$1,260,727

2018 = \$1,151,800

2019 = \$1,367,744

2020 (thru April) = \$282,065

Outside of the number of customer visits and dollar amounts collected at our walk-in centers, we intentionally built our infrastructure to have CSRs in the walk-in centers handle incoming calls, perform outbound calls, and respond to digital requests.

Liberty's model has always been to provide local support to our customers and having a physical presence within the communities we serve, as opposed to having a centralized contact center.

This model provides redundancy within our own state for emergencies and business continuity.

- d. Liberty Utilities did not consider consolidating the Salem and Londonderry walk-in centers into the Londonderry location. If you compare the customer visits at each location, you will find that customer visits are double in the Salem office as compared to the Londonderry office. As noted in the response to Staff 3-1.d, there is no space to accommodate more employees in the Londonderry office, therefore moving walk-in center employees to Londonderry to consolidate walk-in centers is not a solution.

Liberty Utilities (Granite State Electric) Corp. d/b/a Liberty Utilities

DE 19-064  
Distribution Service Rate Case  
2019 Step Adjustment

Staff Data Requests - Set 3

Date Request Received: 6/12/20  
Request No. Staff 3-3

Date of Response: 6/19/20  
Respondent: Christine Downing

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**REQUEST:**

Is Liberty aware of any industry data or best practice standard concerning an appropriate number of customer walk-in centers per 10,000 customers, or similar data? If, so, please indicate where Liberty's walk-in center operations stand in relation to this industry data.

**RESPONSE:**

Liberty Utilities is not aware of any industry data concerning an appropriate number of customer walk-in centers per 10,000 customers.

However, we are aware of trends for utility companies operating walk-in centers through our membership with E-Source. The 2019 E-Source Contact Center Performance Study included Walk-in Center insights.

***From the report:***

*Though the overall number of walk-in centers may be shrinking, customer reliance on these centers for payment isn't. Some of the customer segments that report using walk-in centers almost twice as frequently as the general US population include Spanish speakers, customers with less than a high school education, low income households, and customers under 34—these rates have held steady over the past four years.*