

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

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.