

**STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE  
BEFORE THE  
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION**

**DOCKET NO. DG 19-\_\_\_**

**Northern Utilities, Inc.**

**2019-2024 Integrated Resource Plan**

**Motion for Protective Order and Confidential Treatment**

NOW COMES Northern Utilities, Inc. ("Northern" or "the Company") and, pursuant to RSA 91-A:5, IV and N.H. Admin. Rule Puc 203.08, respectfully moves the New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission (the "Commission") to issue a protective order according confidential treatment to certain information described below and submitted in the Company's 2019 – 2024 Integrated Resource Plan (the "IRP") and Appendix 5 to the IRP. Specifically, Northern requests that the Commission issue an order requiring that certain limited confidential, proprietary, and competitively sensitive gas supply pricing information filed in the IRP and Appendix 5 be treated as confidential commercial information. In support of this Petition, Northern states as follows:

1. Northern is filing contemporaneously with this Motion its 2019 – 2024 IRP for the Commission's consideration. Certain limited information contained within the IRP, as well as Appendix 5 to the IRP, constitutes confidential and proprietary commercial information, including confidential gas supply costs and confidential prices for pipeline expansion capacity that has not yet gone into service. This information is subject to a suppliers' request for confidential treatment or is generally commercially sensitive information, the disclosure of which would impair the Company's ability to competitively negotiate favorable commercial

terms with suppliers in the future. This in turn would disadvantage the Company's customers.

2. In determining whether confidential, commercial or financial information within the meaning of RSA 91-A:5, IV is exempt from public disclosure, the Commission employs the analysis articulated in *Lambert v. Belknap County Convention*, 157 N.H. 375 (2008) and *Lamy v. N.H Public Utilities Commission*, 152 N.H. 106 (2005). Under this analysis the Commission first determines "whether the information is confidential, commercial or financial information, 'and whether disclosure would constitute an invasion of privacy.'" *Unitil Energy Systems, Inc.*, DE 10-055, Order No. 25,214 at 35 (April 26, 2011)(citing *Union Leader Corp. v. New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority*, 142 N.H. 540, 552 (1997) (emphasis in original); see also *Re Northern Utilities, Inc.* DG 12-031, Order No. 25,330 at 5 (February 6, 2012) ("In determining whether confidential, commercial, or financial information should be deemed confidential, we first consider whether there is privacy interest that would be invaded by the disclosure."). When a privacy interest is at stake, the public's interest in disclosure is assessed. *Id.* (citing *Unitil Corp. and Northern Utilities, Inc.*, Order No. 25,014, 94 NH PUC 484, 486 (2009)). Disclosure should inform the public of the conduct and activities of its government; if the information does not serve that purpose, disclosure is not warranted. *Id.* Finally, when there is a public interest in disclosure, that interest is balanced against any privacy interests in non-disclosure. *Id.*

3. Applying this three part test, the first inquiry is whether there is a privacy interest in the competitively sensitive commercial information in the IRP and Appendix 5 for which the Company seeks protective treatment. The Company has an expectation of privacy in key terms such as pricing and related commercial provisions in supply agreements based on existing Commission practice. For example, in *Liberty Utilities*, Docket DG 14-380, in which the Commission considered a precedent agreement between Liberty Utilities and the Tennessee Gas

Pipeline Company, L.L.C., the Commission held that the Company had a reasonable expectation of privacy in similar terms contained in that agreement. *See* February 19, 2015 Secretarial Letter in DG 14-380. Commission rules also recognize the need to protect gas supply contracts through their explicit acknowledgment that “pricing and delivery-related special terms of supply agreements” provided in cost of gas proceedings are accorded confidential treatment. *See* Puc 201.06(a)(26)(b). Based on the Commission’s established treatment of pricing and delivery-related special terms in similar dockets as well as cost of gas proceedings, the Company has a reasonable expectation of privacy that the same type of information will be accorded confidential treatment here.

4. The next step in the analysis is to consider whether there is a public interest in disclosure of the information, including whether release of the information lends any insight into the workings of government as it relates to this case. Here, public disclosure of the supply pricing and pricing for pipeline expansion capacity that has not yet gone into service would not materially advance the public’s understanding of the Commission’s analysis in this proceeding. The Company negotiates pricing and delivery-related terms, release of such information does not shed any light on the Commission’s work but rather the Company’s negotiating power. The public’s interest is in understanding the Commission’s review of the proposed contract and why the contract is in the public interest. The Company’s expectation is that the work that the Commission undertakes to review this IRP will be publicly available and as a result, the Commission’s work will be available for public scrutiny. Even if one were to conclude that there is a public interest in disclosure of the confidential and competitively sensitive information described herein, the harm that could occur as a result of that disclosure is well outweighed by the privacy interests at stake. It would be highly disadvantageous to the Company’s negotiating

position if any future suppliers were aware of the pricing or other key terms upon which the Company is prepared to conduct business. Similarly, disclosure would impair the respective bargaining positions of Northern's counterparties, who entered agreements with the Company with an expectation of privacy and confidentiality relative to certain commercial terms. As a result, Northern's ability to negotiate favorable terms with such counterparties, or similarly situated entities, may be harmed. The harm caused by disclosure would ultimately affect the Company's customers, since the cost associated with any capacity arrangement are charged to customers through the Company's cost of gas charge. Thus, the Company submits that there is no public interest in disclosing these key contract terms.

5. The confidential information described above will be made available to the Commission Staff and the Office of the Consumer Advocate notwithstanding any Commission order granting confidential treatment. Moreover, the Company has only redacted so much information as is necessary to protect its privacy interests.

6. Northern requests that the Commission issue an order protecting the above-described information from disclosure and prohibiting copying, duplication, dissemination or disclosure of it in any form. Northern requests that the protective order also extend to any discovery, testimony, argument or briefing relative to the confidential information.

WHEREFORE, Northern respectfully requests that the Commission:

- A. Issue an appropriate order that exempts from public disclosure and otherwise protects the confidentiality of the information designated confidential in the documents submitted herewith; and
- B. Grant such additional relief as is just and appropriate.

Dated at Hampton, NH on this 19<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2019.

Respectfully submitted,

NORTHERN UTILITIES, INC.

By Its Attorney,



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Patrick H. Taylor (NH Bar # 17171)  
Senior Counsel  
Unitil Service Corp  
6 Liberty Lane  
Hampton, NH 03842-1720  
Telephone: (603) 773-6544  
Email: [taylorp@unitil.com](mailto:taylorp@unitil.com)