

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

June 14, 2022 - 9:02 a.m.
Concord, New Hampshire

RE: DW 22-005
PENNICHUCK EAST UTILITY, INC.
Petition for 2022 Qualified Capital
Project Adjustment Change
(Prehearing Conference)

PRESENT: Cmsr. Pradip K. Chattopadhyay, Presiding
Commissioner Carleton B. Simpson

Tracey Russo, Clerk

APPEARANCES: Reptg. Pennichuck East Utility, Inc.
James J. Steinkrauss, Esq.

Representing N.H. Department of Energy:
Regulatory Division
Suzanne G. Amidon, Esq.

Court Reporter: Susan J. Robidas, NH LCR No. 44

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P R O C E E D I N G S

PRES. OFFICER CHATTOPADHYAY: So let's go on the record. Good morning, everyone. I'm Commissioner Chattopadhyay, and I will be conducting today's proceeding, as Chairman Goldner is not available. I'm joined today by my esteemed colleague, Commissioner Simpson.

We are here this morning in Docket DW 22-005 for a hearing regarding a petition by Pennichuck East Utility to approve proposed 2022 Qualified Capital Project Adjustment Charge. Following an order on April 12th, 2022, the Commission commences this adjudicative proceeding and holds this prehearing conference in this docket. The filing raises issues, like whether the planned additions constructed in 2021 were prudent, used and useful, and whether the proposed QCPAC results in just and reasonable rates, as required by RSA 374:2 and RSA 378:5 and 7.

The Commission also acknowledges the DOE's request to approve an assented procedural schedule per motion dated April 6th, 2022. The

1 Commission, per its order dated April 25th,
2 will address that motion today.

3 Let's take appearances. Let's start
4 with the Company.

5 MR. STEINKRAUSS: Good morning,
6 Commissioners and Staff. My name is James
7 Steinkrauss, representing Pennichuck East
8 Utility in the 2022 QCPAC petition. I'm joined
9 today by Mr. Larry Goodhue, chief executive
10 officer and chief financial officer; Mr. Donald
11 Ware, chief operating officer; Mr. John
12 Boisvert, chief engineer. Mr. Ware and Mr.
13 Boisvert have both filed written testimony with
14 the Company's petition. I'm also joined by
15 Ms. Carol Ann Howe, assistant treasurer and
16 director of regulatory and business services;
17 Mr. George Torres, corporate comptroller and
18 treasurer; and Mr. Jay Kerrigan, senior
19 financial analyst, also attending but will not
20 be participating. All these individuals are
21 employees of Pennichuck Water Works, but hold
22 the exact same roles with all the subsidiary
23 corporations, including Pennichuck East Utility
24 and the parent corp. itself.

1 PRES. OFFICER CHATTOPADHYAY: Thank
2 you. I don't think we have OCA participating,
3 so I'll directly go to DOE.

4 MS. AMIDON: Suzanne Amidon, on
5 behalf of the Department of Energy, Regulatory
6 Division. With me today I have Jayson
7 Laflamme, who's the director of the Water
8 group, and Robin Descoteaux, who is a member --
9 an analyst in that group.

10 PRES. OFFICER CHATTOPADHYAY: Thank
11 you. I don't think we have received any
12 petitions to intervene; right?

13 MR. STEINKRAUSS: No, we haven't.

14 PRES. OFFICER CHATTOPADHYAY: Okay.
15 So let's talk about the Motion to Approve an
16 Assented-to Procedural Schedule. Given that it
17 has been a while, are there any alterations to
18 the schedule that you have considered?

19 [Court Reporter interrupts.]

20 MS. AMIDON: No, we have no changes.

21 MR. STEINKRAUSS: No. No changes.
22 Thank you.

23 PRES. OFFICER CHATTOPADHYAY: So we
24 approve the assented-to procedural schedule.

1 And just to make sure that the scheduling
2 doesn't slip through the cracks, we will have a
3 procedural order so that the folks can, working
4 with the PUC, will make sure that it's in the
5 calendar.

6 MR. STEINKRAUSS: Thank you.

7 PRES. OFFICER CHATTOPADHYAY: Are
8 there any other preliminary matters we need
9 to --

10 MR. STEINKRAUSS: Commissioner, one
11 preliminary matter. There is a pending docket,
12 22-013, which is related to Pennichuck East
13 Utility's request or petition for approval for
14 financing through the Drinking Water and
15 Groundwater Trust Fund for a loan and grant.
16 We had filed back in March of this year and
17 asked for a ruling by the end of April. I know
18 Staff had submitted a recommendation on
19 April 21st in that docket. And we are awaiting
20 a decision from the Commission. I just want to
21 raise that because it does -- the financing for
22 the construction of that project does impact
23 the QCPAC proceeding going forward for PEU. So
24 I just want to raise that issue.

1 PRES. OFFICER CHATTOPADHYAY: Thank
2 you. We'll be mindful of that, yeah.

3 Anything else for preliminary
4 matters? No. All right.

5 So let's go to the preliminary matter
6 positions here. Let's start with the Company.

7 MR. STEINKRAUSS: Thank you,
8 Commissioner. So the Commission -- the
9 Company's petition requests three things:
10 First, a final approval of the QCPAC surcharge
11 based upon eligible capital projects that were
12 completed, used and useful by the end of
13 December 2021; second, preliminary approval of
14 the capital budget for 2022; third, provide
15 information to the Commission regarding the
16 Commission -- the Company's forecasted capital
17 budget expenditures for 2023 and 2024. The
18 Company states that the capital projects
19 described in the petition were eligible,
20 meaning they were completed, used and useful by
21 the end of December 2021; financed by debt
22 previously authorized by the Commission, and
23 projects associated with budgets previously
24 submitted and preliminarily approved by the

1 Commission by Order No. 26,608, dated
2 April 8th, 2022, in Docket 21-022, approving
3 the settlement agreement in that 2021 QCPAC
4 matter.

5 The Company estimates a QCPAC
6 surcharge of .84 percent, or 71 cents, that
7 when added to the rates granted in the rate
8 case docket, DW 20-156, granted in Order No.
9 26,586 on February 18, 2022, with an average
10 monthly single-family bill of \$84.31, the
11 projected .084 [sic] percent QCPAC, when added
12 to the 2021 QCPAC of 4.02 percent, or \$3.39
13 increase granted by Order 26,608, will result
14 in a cumulative increase of approximately \$4.10
15 per month, or a projected average monthly bill
16 of \$88.41 cents. The Company requests that the
17 .084 percent QCPAC will be recouped on a
18 service-rendered basis back to July 31st, 2022,
19 or when the Company closes the proposed CoBank
20 loan submitted in Docket DW 22-025. The
21 Company asks that the Commission find that the
22 2022 surcharge is prudent, used -- excuse me --
23 is prudent based upon the used and useful
24 projects, for those projects completed in 2021.

1 The Company further asks the Commission approve
2 the current capital year budget as appropriate
3 and reasonable, and provides preliminary
4 approval for the forecasted project budgets for
5 2023 and 2024.

6 Excuse me. It's not .084 percent,
7 it's .84 percent. Sorry. My fault.

8 That's all I have.

9 PRES. OFFICER CHATTOPADHYAY: Is that
10 it?

11 MR. STEINKRAUSS: That's it. Thank
12 you.

13 PRES. OFFICER CHATTOPADHYAY: DOE.

14 MS. AMIDON: The Department of
15 Energy, Regulatory Division, has started doing
16 some preliminary review of the filing in line
17 with the procedural schedule. The Department
18 has to wait until the financings are closed and
19 determine the amounts borrowed and the interest
20 rate prior to being able to conduct a complete
21 review and assessment of the filing. And we
22 expect to proceed with that in accordance with
23 the proposed procedural schedule we've laid out
24 before you.

1 PRES. OFFICER CHATTOPADHYAY: Thank
2 you.

3 So let's go to the Commissioners'
4 questions. Commissioner Simpson.

5 COMMISSIONER SIMPSON: Thank you,
6 Commissioner Chattopadhyay.

7 INTERROGATORIES BY COMMISSIONER SIMPSON:

8 Q. Just a couple of questions for Mr. Boisvert.
9 Looking to have you speak to some of the
10 projects that are planned, starting with the
11 Londonderry Core project. It seems as if
12 you've run into some difficulties with
13 permitting of the tank. Can you provide any
14 update?

15 A. (Boisvert) I certainly can --

16 (Court Reporter interrupts.)

17 A. (Boisvert) I certainly can answer that. The
18 permitting is a lengthy process. It's not like
19 it's unusual. As a private company, we have to
20 go before local planning boards and other land
21 use boards, like zoning boards of appeal and
22 things like that. So those processes at the
23 local level take some time. One of the
24 projects that we are working on in Londonderry,

1 of course, started a few, a couple years ago
2 with a project that was denied by the zoning
3 board of appeals. It was for an elevated
4 storage tank. We've since reformulated those
5 plans, working with a private developer as a
6 partner under a special agreement that was
7 approved by the Commission, and came up with an
8 alternate plan which actually proved to be more
9 beneficial in the long run with their help and
10 their contributions. So we are proceeding
11 right now with that project. We've made
12 filings with the planning board for technical
13 review as of, it would have been this past
14 Friday. So that is moving forward. We hope to
15 be able to get that approval sometime this
16 summer and be able to begin construction this
17 year. Due to materials and other things like
18 that, it's probably going to be a two-part
19 project, starting -- hopefully start this year
20 and be completed sometime around the second
21 quarter of next year, probably at this point in
22 time. Just the reality of the situation at
23 this time.

24 Q. And I note as well that in your testimony with

1 respect to the W&E community water system
2 interconnection to the Salem Water System, you
3 had noted you were facing some supply-chain
4 concerns with respect to that project as well.

5 A. (Boisvert) We are. And those have actually
6 been resolved. We've been able to -- we're
7 making the final connection points and start-up
8 of that system probably within the next two
9 weeks or three weeks. So that is actually good
10 news. It's better than what we expected. And
11 our hope is to be able to start purchasing
12 water from the Salem -- through the Southern
13 New Hampshire Regional Water Connection
14 sometime in July at this point.

15 Q. Okay. That's good. And generally speaking,
16 are you seeing any improvement with
17 supply-chain issues?

18 A. (Boisvert) It's very spotty. I think the
19 contractors that we are working with, they have
20 to be ready to take delivery when pipe is
21 available for them.

22 We do have one project in our Pennichuck
23 Water Works utility. The contractor has been
24 waiting about three months for pipe. And it

1 looks like it will be there, and they'll be
2 able to start sometime in July, which is good
3 news. It could have been September or October
4 based on their initial. So it's very spotty.
5 It is improving a little bit I think.

6 But what we have to do is be flexible on
7 times of completion. So if we issue a
8 contract, we need to give plenty of time for
9 the supply-chain issues to be worked through.
10 Normally materials are three to six weeks, and
11 so now we have to factor in an extra, you know,
12 probably 10 weeks to 20 weeks on delivery of
13 materials in our construction schedules. So
14 it's really important that we bid projects
15 early. Bid projects maybe in -- you know, if
16 we're doing projects in 2022, we want -- in
17 2023, we would want to bid those in 2022 and
18 get them ready to start as soon as we can the
19 following year; otherwise, you're delaying and
20 pushing the start dates further and further
21 into the construction season, which then has a
22 domino effect.

23 Q. Okay. And then with any of the other projects,
24 like Atkinson, is there any update that you

1 think is relevant for the Commission at this
2 time, since you submitted your testimony?

3 A. (Boisvert) The Atkinson project is scheduled to
4 go to design. We're still evaluating the
5 potential, now that Hampstead Area Water
6 Company is part of the regional system. We're
7 still evaluating right now rebuilding of that
8 pump station. It's certainly in need. It's
9 beyond its useful life, meaning that we can
10 still repair it and keep it running so it's not
11 going to crash, you know, today. But I think
12 what we're doing in similar cases is we're
13 evaluating the interconnections with more
14 regional systems, more reliable sources of
15 supply. So we'll be undergoing a little bit
16 more detailed analysis on that, now that that
17 option of that additional capacity is available
18 to us.

19 COMMISSIONER SIMPSON: Okay. Thank
20 you. And then just a general question both for
21 Attorney Steinkrauss and Attorney Amidon. Any
22 support or objection to moving forward in
23 future proceedings similar to this one with
24 respect to a nisi order from the Commission?

1 MS. AMIDON: As far as the Department
2 goes, that is the way that the Commission has
3 proceeded in the past. And I think that's a
4 good question. And I would recommend that in
5 this case. I know that there's a lot going on.
6 But these proceedings are annual proceedings,
7 and they have to work through the process, as
8 you understand, before we can make a final
9 recommendation. But I would suggest that that
10 is the way to go, the best use of everyone's
11 time.

12 COMMISSIONER SIMPSON: Thank you. I
13 appreciate that.

14 MR. STEINKRAUSS: I support the
15 Department of Energy's position as well. The
16 Company supports that and would support a nisi
17 order for resolution of this docket. Thank
18 you.

19 COMMISSIONER SIMPSON: Okay. And
20 final question, just to ensure I recognize the
21 separate proceeding that you had mentioned.
22 That was DW 22-13?

23 MR. STEINKRAUSS: Yes.

24 COMMISSIONER SIMPSON: Okay. Thank

1 you.

2 I don't have any further questions,
3 Commissioner. Thank you.

4 PRES. OFFICER CHATTOPADHYAY: Thank
5 you.

6 BY PRESIDING OFFICER CHATTOPADHYAY:

7 Q. Just a general question. When you hire
8 contractors, you probably sign contracts,
9 right, with them? And so I'm sort of curious,
10 because you're talking about the supply-chain
11 issues. Is that being addressed in the
12 contract somehow these days? If you can speak
13 to that.

14 A. (Boisvert) Sure thing, Commissioner. What I'd
15 mention right now is we're adapting to the kind
16 of changed conditions. And what we're allowing
17 for is -- let's say a project with normal
18 delivery times would have maybe taken, you
19 know, 200 calendar days to complete. What
20 we're saying now is we're extending that
21 construction schedule or that time of
22 completion by maybe one third and extending
23 that to maybe 300 calendar days, knowing that
24 it's very difficult once you sign a contract,

1 for the contractor to be able to even get the
2 materials to start the project. And that's
3 really where it can be adjusted. We don't
4 really have control over, you know,
5 manufacturers of materials and other equipment
6 that go into projects. But we do have control
7 over the time frame. And what we're finding is
8 if we compress the time frame, not many
9 contractors will bid it, nor are they
10 physically able to even complete the job in a
11 compressed time frame because it's just not
12 available. We've waited, you know, a few weeks
13 because, you know, a contractor was short a few
14 lengths of pipe, and they had to scramble all
15 over New England just to try to find that pipe
16 at this point in time because there's such a
17 demand for it.

18 So our way of adjusting this is by
19 extending those contract completion times. So
20 if we can bid them early, let's say we can
21 award them earlier in the year, in the
22 wintertime when they aren't going to construct,
23 it gets them into that supply-chain delivery
24 time when they wouldn't be digging in the

1 earth, so that it gets there sooner.

2 So those are our goals and objectives is
3 to try to give more flexibility in that
4 schedule, so that ordering materials that are
5 being manufactured are ordered and delivered in
6 times of the year when there wouldn't be
7 construction going on, and that way they're
8 there when they start in April, you know, when
9 our season begins.

10 Q. So the first project that Commissioner Simpson
11 talked about, the Londonderry project, you
12 mentioned it's possibly going to be completed
13 end of -- sorry -- sometime next year. Is that
14 assuming all of the supply-chain issues, you
15 know, or do you think it can go beyond next
16 year?

17 A. (Boisvert) At this point, the project is broken
18 into three parts: It's a storage tank, a
19 transmission main, and a booster station. And
20 they're all kind of three different types of
21 schedules, if you think about it. The
22 transmission main, the one saving grace for
23 that is it's not in a paved road. It's not in
24 a town street. It's in an apple orchard that's

1 being redeveloped. So in theory, that work can
2 be done in the wintertime, as long as the pipe
3 is available.

4 So we looked at that part of the schedule,
5 and if we could award that in the fall, it
6 gives that contractor some time to get their
7 materials. And they can do that work in the
8 wintertime very quite -- you know, when they
9 may be not as busy as they are, they may be
10 looking forward to that.

11 I think the bigger concern will be the
12 booster station itself, because we're seeing
13 specialty valves and things like that that have
14 longer manufacturing times. So, again, if we
15 can bid that this fall and secure a contractor,
16 and if it's a three- or four-month delivery
17 period for that contractor, they can get that
18 material ordered and those things ordered
19 sooner. So that's our hope and objective. If
20 we were to wait to bid until next year before
21 the -- you know, we normally bid in February
22 and March. We would probably lose the entire
23 construction season for 2023. So our goal is
24 to bid that this year and be able to get those

1 materials moving.

2 Now, something may change. We don't know.

3 But I think we would certainly be updating in

4 our QCPAC filings. It would be noticeable if

5 we were to make some changes and see those

6 numbers being extended out a little bit more.

7 But we're definitely keeping an eye. There's a

8 lot of moving parts. But I think if we give

9 more time and we're diligent in getting these

10 things out to bid, we're in much better shape

11 than we normally would be.

12 Q. Based on your experience with operations and
13 all of that, you know, projects, are you seeing
14 any change in the supply-chain issue? Like is
15 it -- are things getting better?

16 A. (Boisvert) I think they -- I'm not -- I can't
17 say that they are getting better, meaning
18 that -- but I think people and the industry is
19 adapting to the new reality that we have right
20 now, and people have adjusted their approaches
21 to projects and things. I do know -- and we
22 are fortunate that we don't really have too
23 many vertical construction stations, you know,
24 that have intricate controls and things like

1 that that require a lot of electrical equipment
2 at this point in time. But there are long --
3 in the industry, we've been hearing of long,
4 extremely long lead times on certain electrical
5 equipment and other specialty stuff like that
6 that we want to be cognizant of. So there
7 are -- at certain places it looks like it's
8 getting better. But other parts of this, it
9 doesn't look like it's getting better soon and
10 probably be in that new normal.

11 Q. Thank you.

12 PRES. OFFICER CHATTOPADHYAY: I think
13 if there's anything else, we can talk about it.
14 Otherwise we are ready to adjourn, and we'll
15 let you guys proceed to the tech session.

16 COMMISSIONER SIMPSON: Thank you,
17 everybody, for being here today. Appreciate
18 it.

19 PRES. OFFICER CHATTOPADHYAY: Pre-
20 hearing conference is adjourned.

21 (Hearing concluded at 9:29 a.m.)
22
23
24

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Susan J. Robidas, a Licensed
Shorthand Court Reporter and Notary Public
of the State of New Hampshire, do hereby
certify that the foregoing is a true and
accurate transcript of my stenographic
notes of these proceedings taken at the
place and on the date hereinbefore set
forth, to the best of my skill and ability
under the conditions present at the time.

I further certify that I am neither
attorney or counsel for, nor related to or
employed by any of the parties to the
action; and further, that I am not a
relative or employee of any attorney or
counsel employed in this case, nor am I
financially interested in this action.

(ORIGINAL CERTIFICATION FILED WITH
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION)

Susan J. Robidas, LCR/RPR
Licensed Shorthand Court Reporter
Registered Professional Reporter
N.H. LCR No. 44 (RSA 310-A:173)

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