



Agenda Date: 6/18/14
Agenda Item: 7B

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
Board of Public Utilities
44 South Clinton Avenue, 9th Floor
Post Office Box 350
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0350
www.nj.gov/bpu/

CUSTOMER ASSISTANCE

IN THE MATTER OF THE PETITION OF PUBLIC)	ORDER OF APPROVAL
SERVICE ELECTRIC AND GAS COMPANY)	
PURSUANT TO <u>N.J.A.C.</u> 14:3-5.1(e) FOR APPROVAL)	
OF THE TEMPORARY FIVE - MONTH CLOSURE OF)	
ITS BAYONNE CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTER AT)	
606-608 BROADWAY, BAYONNE, NEW JERSEY TO)	
PERFORM NECESSARY RENOVATIONS)	BPU DOCKET NO. EO14030272

Parties of Record:

Alexander C. Stern, Esq., PSEG Services Corporation, on behalf of Petitioner, Public Service Electric and Gas Company
Stefanie A. Brand, Esq., Director, Division of Rate Counsel

BY THE BOARD:

On March 21, 2014, Public Service Electric and Gas Company, ("PSE&G" or "Petitioner") filed a petition with supporting affidavit with the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities ("Board") pursuant to N.J.A.C. 14:3-5.1 for approval of the temporary five-month closure of its Bayonne Customer Service Center ("BCSC") to perform what PSE&G describes as necessary renovations. In the petition, PSE&G stated the following reasons for this request:

1. In December 2013, PSE&G successfully finalized the acquisition from its landlord of the property it had been renting for its existing BCSC.
2. The plumbing, electrical, Heating, ventilation and air conditioning ("HVAC") and interior structure of the building are old and in need of renovation and upgrade in the interests of long-term functionality and Petitioner believes that safety issues could be raised if the facility was to be used as a Customer Service Center while renovations were being made. It is anticipated that the renovation would begin in August 2014 and take five months or less depending on the acquisition of all necessary permits.
3. Petitioner has three other customer service centers ("CSCs") in Hudson County, all within thirteen miles of the BCSC (Jersey City, Hoboken and Union City) that will be able to provide the same services now available in Bayonne. Depending on traffic conditions,

the Company believes that it will take approximately fifteen minutes to go from the BCSC to the Jersey City CSC and notes there is also public transportation available.

4. The Company does not anticipate any employee reductions as a result of the temporary closure and noted that the renovations at the BCSC will be in strict compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements for first floor access.
5. The Company, in compliance with N.J.A.C. 14:3-5.1(c) and (e), shall provide customers and other interested parties with notification of the proposed temporary closing, by posting a Notice at the BCSC as well as by publication of the proposed Notice attached to the petition in The Star Ledger and The Jersey Journal. According to Petitioner, the Notice will also inform customers that they could call the Company's CSC toll-free for information and/or billing inquiries. All Company inquiry and collection telephone personnel were provided with relocation information in order that they could direct customers to the BCSC location.

In a letter dated May 20, 2014, the Division of Rate Counsel ("Rate Counsel") advised the Board that it objected to the proposed temporary closing based on the travel time to the other CSCs as well as the expense of that travel, unless PSE&G provides a nearby temporary CSC for the duration of the closure. Rate Counsel requested that any Board Order granting the petition contain the following provisions:

1. PSE&G shall provide a temporary CSC in Bayonne during the closure for renovation of its Bayonne CSC.
2. PSE&G shall maintain, at a minimum, the same hours of operation, staffing levels, level of service at the Bayonne CSC after its renovation as set forth in the Petition.
3. PSE&G shall maintain, at a minimum, the same level of accessibility for persons with disabilities at the Bayonne CSC after its renovation as set forth in the Petition.
4. PSE&G shall notify the Board and Rate Counsel if it anticipates any change in the hours of operation, staffing levels, or level of service at the Bayonne CSC after its renovation.
5. This Order shall not affect nor in any way limit the exercise of the authority of the Board or of this State, in any future Petition or in any proceeding with respect to rates, franchises, service, financing, accounting, capitalization, depreciation, or any other matter affecting the Petitioner.

By letter dated May 22, 2014, PSE&G responded to Rate Counsel's objections. PSE&G stated that as a regulated public utility with the personal information of millions of customers, which provides a critical public service, it cannot merely buy or lease any open storefront. The facility itself must be American Disabilities Act ("ADA") compliant and handicapped accessible. There needs to be an investment in IT and security inside the facility and outside to protect customer information as well as ensure customer and employee safety. Without an investment in IT infrastructure, customer service representatives would be in the difficult position of being present to hear customer concerns with little to no means of addressing those concerns. Additionally, PSE&G has to obtain the necessary property and liability insurance, which in many respects is dependent on the facility and limits facility options. Petitioner maintains it is unrealistic to believe that it would be able to find a suitable facility available for a month-to-

month occupancy and certainly not within the timeframe to allow for the existing BCSC renovation to take place this summer as planned. PSE&G commits to making every attempt to minimize the closure to three months or less.

PSE&G further stated that during the five-month duration of the closure it would assist customers not only by providing services at all its other CSCs, but also by working with third party retailers to absorb the \$1.50 transaction fee that a customer would normally be charged when paying a PSE&G bill at Western Union or other third party retail locations. PSE&G estimated there are over eleven such retail payment locations on Broadway in Bayonne, thus adding significantly to customer convenience in bill paying without any additional cost.

Board Staff does not oppose the Company's petition for temporary closure for the purpose of making necessary renovations. In addition, Staff has determined that the Board has received no letters from interested parties or customers in opposition to the proposed temporary closure. The only letter of objection received was from Rate Counsel. Staff agrees with the position of the Company that there is no need for a temporary CSC to be opened during renovations of the current BCSC. Staff believes the availability of other alternative payment centers, including the CSC's in Jersey City, Hoboken and Union City, along with waiving the fee to make payments at alternative third party retail locations, will be sufficient for the five-month closure.

After review of the entire record in this matter, the Board **HEREBY FINDS**:

1. On March 21, 2014, PSE&G submitted a request pursuant to N.J.A.C. 14:3-5.1 (c) and (e) to temporarily close its Bayonne Customer Service Center for approximately five months to allow necessary renovations to be made;
2. Petitioner will provide customers and other interested parties with notification of the proposed relocation by causing newspaper publication of a copy of a Notice in The Star Ledger and The Jersey Journal respectively and by posting Notice at the BCSC, as required by N.J.A.C. 14:3-5.1(e)2;
3. In light of the alternative payment arrangements that Petitioner will provide, the temporary closure of the BCSC is not unreasonable and will neither unduly prejudice or inconvenience the public nor adversely affect the public interest.

Based on the foregoing, the Board **APPROVES** the temporary closure of Petitioner's BCSC located at 606-608 Broadway, Bayonne, New Jersey, subject to the following conditions:


1. Petitioner, at its other Hudson County CSCs, shall maintain the same hours of operation, staffing levels and level of service as are presently provided at the Bayonne CSC;
2. Petitioner shall work with third party retailers and PSE&G shall absorb the \$1.50 fee that a customer would normally be charged when paying a PSE&G bill at the alternative retail payment locations in Bayonne. Petitioner will pay the \$1.50 fee as long as the Bayonne CSC is closed;
3. This Order shall not be construed as directly or indirectly fixing for any purposes whatsoever the value of any tangible or intangible assets now owned or hereafter to be owned by Petitioner; and

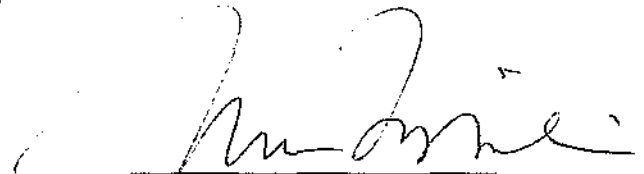
4. This Order shall not affect nor in any way limit the exercise of the authority of this Board or of this State, in any future petition or in any proceedings with respect to rates, franchises, service, financing, accounting, capitalization, depreciation or any other matter affecting Petitioner, including any request that may be made to recover costs associated with this move.

DATED: 6/18/14

BOARD OF PUBLIC UTILITIES
BY:



DIANNE SOLOMON
PRESIDENT


JEANNE M. FOX
COMMISSIONER


JOSEPH L. FIORDALISO
COMMISSIONER


MARY-ANNA HOLDEN
COMMISSIONER

ATTEST: 
KRISTI IZZO
SECRETARY

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the within document is a true copy of the original in the files of the Board of Public Utilities.


**IN THE MATTER OF THE PETITION OF PUBLIC SERVICE ELECTRIC AND GAS COMPANY
PURSUANT TO N.J.A.C. 14:3-5.1(e) FOR APPROVAL OF THE TEMPORARY FIVE - MONTH
CLOSURE OF ITS BAYONNE CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTER AT 606-608 BROADWAY,
BAYONNE, NEW JERSEY TO PERFORM NECESSARY RENOVATIONS
DOCKET NO. EO14030272**

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