

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

DE 08-120

2009 CORE ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROGRAMS

Proposed Fuel Blind Home Energy Solutions Pilot Program

Order *Nisi* Approving Modified Fuel Blind Program

ORDER NO. 24,974

June 4, 2009

I. BACKGROUND

In Order No. 24,930 (January 5, 2009) in the instant docket, the Commission decided against approving a fuel-blind pilot program to the Home Energy Solutions (HES) program as proposed by Public Service Company of New Hampshire (PSNH) and Unitil Energy Systems, Inc. (UES) (collectively, Joint Petitioners) for the 2009 CORE Energy Efficiency Programs (CORE Programs). The Commission concluded that it was not precluded as a matter of law from using the SBC funds for energy efficiency programs such as a fuel neutral pilot, however, the Commission noted the pilot program presented in the 2009 CORE filing was not fully developed. Order No. 24,930 at 19. The Commission identified twelve issues needing further work before the Commission would consider approving the program. The Commission also stated: “Notwithstanding these concerns, we believe the concept of a fuel-blind pilot has some potential. . . . We encourage the Utilities and the parties to continue to consider these issues. . . and note that PSNH and UES may petition at any time to modify their Home Energy Solutions program when they have a more fully developed proposal.” *Id.* at 22

On April 9, 2009, PSNH and UES filed a joint petition for approval of amended design in the Home Energy Solutions Program and a description of a Fuel Neutral Home Energy Solutions

Program Proposal to be operated by PSNH and UES. The filing included a (1) new applicant screening tool, (2) revisions to the 2009 CORE Program Filing Appendices F, G and H, (3) changes to budgets, benefit/cost ratios, and goals associated with the HES Pilot and (4) responses to each of the twelve issues noted by the Commission in Order No. 24,930.

As filed, the HES Pilot proposal would use the entire 2009 HES budget for PSNH and UES of approximately \$1.8 million for the fuel-blind pilot project. The Joint Petition noted that the following parties to the 2009 CORE Program proceeding supported the HES Pilot proposal: the Office of Energy and Planning; the Department of Environmental Services; the Home Builders & Remodelers Association; LighTec, Inc.; Granite State Electric Company d/b/a National Grid (National Grid) and the New Hampshire Electric Cooperative, Inc. (NHEC). The Petition further noted that no parties expressed opposition to the HES Pilot proposal, and that Staff, the Office of Consumer Advocate and the Jordan Institute took no position at the time of the filing.

On April 30, 2009, Staff filed a letter with the Commission recommending that the Commission not approve the HES Pilot or, in the alternative, the Commission make certain modifications to the pilot program.

II. POSTITIONS OF THE PARTIES

A. Public Service Company of New Hampshire and Unitil Energy Systems, Inc.

According to the petition, National Grid and NHEC collaborated with PSNH and UES in the development of the HES Pilot program. The primary objectives of the program as described in the petition are “to weatherize residential homes regardless of heating fuel type, capture cost effective opportunities for energy saving, and collaborate with other programs such as the gas

utilities' programs to improve program effectiveness." Petition at 2. As designed, the 2009 HES Pilot would serve 617 PSNH customers and 97 UES customers. The Joint Petitioners anticipate that PSNH will experience a lifetime electric savings of 2,843,135 kilowatt hours (kWh) and UES will have a lifetime electric savings of 812,283 kWh as a result of the HES Pilot. With respect to lifetime energy savings measured in MMBTU, PSNH estimates a savings of 144,401 MMBtu, and UES expects a savings of 21,307 MMBtu. According to the petition, the benefit/cost ratio for PSNH's program will be 1.09 and, for UES, the benefit/cost ratio will be 1.2.

Regarding program design, the Joint Petitioners stated that the HES Pilot will be based on the standards established for the Home Performance with Energy Star (HPwES) program, a national effort sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Energy.¹ The HES Pilot program will screen customers to determine if they qualify for the HES Pilot program services. Qualified participants will receive a comprehensive whole house audit that will identify energy savings opportunities and educate customers on weatherization needs and benefits. During the audit, customers may receive free energy efficient compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) for high use fixtures, low flow faucet aerators and showerheads, as well as educational material. Following the audit, customers would receive a report that identifies energy savings opportunities, prioritizes improvements based on a payback analysis, identifies carbon reduction effects and informs customers of health and safety needs. A customer identified as needing comprehensive improvements such as air sealing, insulation and weather

¹ HPwES has a primary mission of improving the energy performance and comfort of existing homes. The program design offers a "whole house" approach to improve energy efficiency.

stripping will be offered a 75 percent incentive, up to \$4,000, for the installation of the cost effective measures identified by the auditor.

PSNH and UES plan to offer the program to all single and multi-family homes, and will refer income-eligible customers to the Home Energy Assistance Program. PSNH and UES said that they will not offer full weatherization services to multi-family dwellings with greater than four units.. Regarding measurement and verification, the Petition states that PSNH and UES will work with Staff to develop an impact evaluation plan for the HES Pilot.

B. Commission Staff

In its April 30, 2009 letter, Staff recommends that the Commission not approve the use of SBC funds for the HES Pilot because the SBC has historically been used for purposes of benefiting electric customers and the electric system. Staff notes that the HES Pilot proposal estimates that only 6.3 percent of the total energy savings in PSNH's program, and 11.5 percent of the savings in UES' program, would be electric savings. Staff also questions whether the benefit/cost ratios calculated by the Joint Petitioners are valid. Staff asserts that PSNH and UES do not provide sufficient details for the HES Pilot evaluation plan. Staff states that, should the Commission approve the HES Pilot, the performance incentive formula should be revised to ensure that the performance incentive is based on the budget for electric-related benefits. In support of this position, Staff notes that, if performance incentives are calculated on both the electric and non-electric energy savings of the HES Pilot, the result would be a significant wealth transfer from ratepayers to shareholders. Staff also points out that, because the use of SBC funds for the HES Pilot would not, except for a small portion, benefit the electric system, this would be a diversion from the historic use of the SBC funds for the benefit of both electric customers and

the electric system. In addition, Staff estimates that the reduced electric savings would decrease the amount of payments made to the CORE programs from the Forward Capacity Market.

Staff also recommends that a survey be incorporated into the HES Pilot to ascertain income data from those customers who choose to participate to help determine if there is a “middle income” barrier because of the inability of customers to afford the up-front 25 percent payment required for participation in the program. Staff letter at 7. Staff said that if a middle income barrier exists, an on-bill financing program could overcome this barrier.

III. COMMISSION ANALYSIS

At the outset, we note that in Order No. 24,930 we said that a fuel-blind proposal had some potential and we encouraged PSNH and UES to file a more fully developed program as a pilot for the fuel-blind HES. While we acknowledge the utilities’ further refinement of this HES Pilot, we will approve the HES Pilot subject to certain additional modifications set out below.

We note that the Joint Petitioners entitle their filing as “Joint Petition for Approval of Amended Design in the Home Energy Solutions Program” and the request for relief is for the Commission “to approve the design and budget changes in the Home Energy Solutions program operated by Unitil and PSNH proposed herein.” Petition at 2. PSNH and UES are proposing to amend the HES program by converting the entire program to a fuel-blind program with no further services to be targeted to homes heated primarily by electricity.

We find it appropriate to reduce the size of the HES Pilot program by limiting the number of participants to 100 UES customers and 200 PSNH customers. Limiting the size of the pilot will assist in allowing the completion of the pilot in 2009 and permit more timely evaluation of the cost and electric and non-electric energy savings, and related cost-effectiveness of the pilot

program. PSNH and UES shall file a revised budget for the HES Pilot program based on this change. With respect to the remaining funds in the 2009 HES Program, we direct the participants in the CORE quarterly meetings to determine an appropriate use of the money in the 2009 CORE residential programs. We urge that primary consideration be given to the cost-effectiveness of any proposed alternative use(s).

We agree with Staff that, based on the information provided by PSNH and UES, it may be difficult to determine whether the HES Pilot is a cost effective program that merits continuation beyond 2009. Therefore, when PSNH and UES file their revised budgets, they shall also file a complete description of the methodology and measures by which they will evaluate the performance of the HES Pilot. We also agree that it is inappropriate to give PSNH and UES the standard performance incentive for a pilot program. Therefore, we will accept Staff's recommendation that PSNH and UES receive a performance incentive based on the electric-related portions of the fuel neutral HES Pilot budget. The cost of the performance incentive should be included as a cost for benefit/cost analysis.

Finally, one of the questions raised in Order No. 24,930 was "[w]hether the 25% up-front customer co-payment might prove to be a market barrier for moderate income customers in light of economic conditions." Order No. 24, 930 at 22. The response by PSNH and UES noted the benefit associated with a \$100 energy audit and concluded by saying that the "[u]tilities will monitor the impact of the co-payment on this objective and make adjustments as appropriate." Petition at 11. The response does not address the question of whether customers will have to pre-pay the cost of installed measures and seek reimbursement of the utility incentive or whether the lack of a financing mechanism for the measures co-payment, which could be as much as

\$1,333, may prove to be a barrier to households on a tight budget, even if future energy savings would more than recoup the up-front investment over time. This question deserves further attention because it directly impacts the level of participation in the HES Pilot program. We will not require PSNH and UES to provide us further detailed response at this point; however, the Companies are on notice that we will expect them to address this issue, including whether to provide alternative financing to assure adequate participation, in any proposal to implement the HES Pilot beyond the 2009 pilot program.

Based upon the foregoing, it is hereby

ORDERED *NISI*, that subject to the effective date below, and to the modifications herein, the Joint Proposal by Public Service Company of New Hampshire and Unitil Energy Systems, Inc. to conduct a 2009 Home Energy Solutions Pilot Program on a fuel-blind basis is hereby APPROVED; and it is

FURTHER ORDERED, that PSNH and UES file revised budgets and an evaluation program for the HES Pilot program consistent with the terms of this Order by June 30, 2009; and it is

FURTHER ORDERED, that the Petitioner shall cause a copy of this Order *Nisi* to be published once in a statewide newspaper of general circulation or of circulation in those portions of the state where operations are conducted, such publication to be no later than June 8, 2009 and to be documented by affidavit filed with this office on or before June 15, 2009; and it is

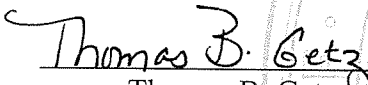
FURTHER ORDERED, that all persons interested in responding to this Order *Nisi* be notified that they may submit their comments or file a written request for a hearing which states


the reason and basis for a hearing no later than June 10, 2009 for the Commission's consideration; and it is


FURTHER ORDERED, that any party interested in responding to such comments or request for hearing shall do so no later than June 12, 2009; and it is

FURTHER ORDERED, that this Order *Nisi* shall be effective June 15, 2009, unless the Petitioner fails to satisfy the publication obligation set forth above or the Commission provides otherwise in a supplemental order issued prior to the effective date.

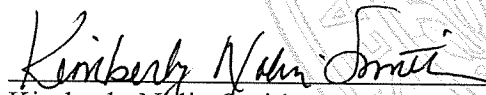
By order of the Public Utilities Commission of New Hampshire this fourth day of June, 2009.

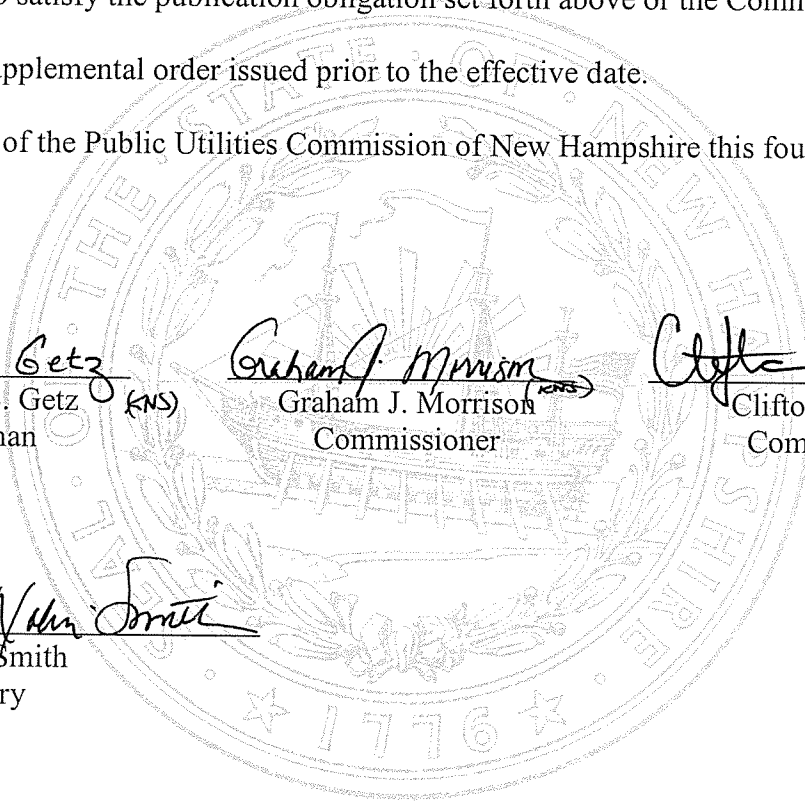

Thomas B. Getz (KNS)
Chairman


Graham J. Morrison
Commissioner


Clifton C. Below
Commissioner

Attested by:


Kimberly Nolin Smith
Assistant Secretary



KAREN ASBURY
UNITIL SVC CORP
6 LIBERTY LANE WEST
HAMPTON NH 03842-1720

DAN FELTES
NEW HAMPSHIRE LEGAL ASSISTANCE
117 N STATE ST
CONCORD NH 03301-4407

HEATHER KAUFMAN
NEW HAMPSHIRE ELECTRIC COOPER
579 TENNEY MT HIGHWAY
PLYMOUTH NH 03264

TOM BELAIR
PUBLIC SVC OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
PO BOX 330
MANCHESTER NH 03105-0330

KEITH FREISCHLAG
UNITIL ENERGY SYSTEMS INC
6 LIBERTY LANE WEST
HAMPTON NH 03842

SARAH KNOWLTON
MCLANE GRAF RAULERSON & MIDD
PO BOX 459
PORTSMOUTH NH 03802-0459

ALEXANDRA E BLACKMORE
NATIONAL GRID
201 JONES RD
WALTHAM MA 02451

GILBERT E GELINEAU JR
PUBLIC SVC CO OF NH
780 N COMMERCIAL ST
PO BOX 330
MANCHESTER NH 03105-0330

ALAN LINDER
NH LEGAL ASSISTANCE
117 N STATE ST
CONCORD NH 03301-4407

KENDALL BUCK
HOME BUILDERS & REMODELERS AS
119 AIRPORT RD
CONCORD NH 03301

LISA GLOVER
UNITIL ENERGY SYSTEMS INC
6 LIBERTY LANE WEST
HAMPTON NH 03842

DANIELLE MARTINEAU
PUBLIC SERVICE COMPANY OF NEW H
780 N COMMERCIAL ST
MANCHESTER NH 03101

MARK W DEAN
ATTORNEY-AT-LAW
344 MORAN RD
HOPKINTON NH 03229

MEREDITH A HATFIELD
OFFICE OF CONSUMER ADVOCATE
21 SOUTH FRUIT ST STE 18
CONCORD NH 03301

LAURA MCNAUGHTON
GRANITE STATE ELEC
9 LOWELL RD
SALEM NH 03079

GERALD M EATON
PUBLIC SERVICE COMPANY OF NEW H
780 N COMMERCIAL ST
PO BOX 330
MANCHESTER NH 03105-0330

D DICKINSON HENRY JR
THE JORDAN INSTITUTE
11 STICKNEY AVE 2ND FLR
CONCORD NH 03301-5064

JOANNE MORIN
NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF E
PO BOX 95
29 HAZEN DR
CONCORD NH 03302-0095

STEPHEN R ECKBERG
OFFICE OF CONSUMER ADVOCATE
21 SOUTH FRUIT ST STE 18
CONCORD NH 03301

AMY IGNATIUS
OFFICE OF ENERGY AND PLANNING
4 CHENELL DR
CONCORD NH 03301

DANA NUTE
NEW HAMPSHIRE COMMUNITY ACTI
PO BOX 1016
CONCORD NH 03302-1016

GARY EPLER
UNITIL ENERGY SYSTEMS INC
6 LIBERTY LANE WEST
HAMPTON NH 03842-1720

DEBORAH JARVIS
UNITIL SVC CORP
325 WEST RD
PORTSMOUTH NH 03801

DIANNE PITTS
THE WAY HOME
214 SPRUCE ST
MANCHESTER NH 03104

06/04/09 Order No. 24,974 issued and forwarded to all parties.
Copies given to PUC Staff.

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FILING INSTRUCTIONS: PURSUANT TO N.H. ADMIN RULE PUC 203.02(a),

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DEBRA A HOWLAND
EXEC DIRECTOR & SECRETARY
NHPUC
21 SOUTH FRUIT STREET, SUITE 10
CONCORD NH 03301-2429

ROBERT R SCOTT
AIR RESOURCES DIVISION
6 HAZEN DR
PO BOX 95
CONCORD NH 03302-0095

ROBERT D SHAPIRO
RUBIN AND RUDMAN LLP
50 ROWES WHARF
BOSTON MA 02110-3319

ERIC STELTZER
OFFICE OF ENERGY AND PLANNING
4 CHENELL DRIVE
CONCORD NH 03301

REBECCA L TEPPER
RUBIN AND RUDMAN LLP
50 ROWES WHARF
BOSTON MA 02110

KEN E TRAUM
OFFICE OF CONSUMER ADVOCATE
21 SOUTH FRUIT ST STE 18
CONCORD NH 03301-2429

CAROL WOODS
NEW HAMPSHIRE ELECTRIC COOPER
579 TENNEY MTN HWY
PLYMOUTH NH 03264

DEBBIE ALBRECHT
185 ASYLUM ST
HARTFORD CT 06103-3469

MICHELLE GELLER
201 JONES RD
WALTHAM MA 02451

MEABH PURCELL
260 FRANKLIN ST
BOSTON MA 02110-3173

PATRICK J ARNOLD
PO BOX 563
CONCORD NH 03302

JAMES M GRADY
35 DEPOT ST
MERRIMACK NH 03054

ROBERT BACKUS
PO BOX 516
MANCHESTER NH 03105-0516

PHIL GUISER
30 EXCHANGE ST
BERLIN NH 03570

BRUCE BOUCHER
PO BOX 603
KEENE NH 03431

MELISSA HOFFER
27 N MAIN ST
CONCORD NH 03302

RYAN CLOUTHIER
PO BOX 5040
MANCHESTER NH 03108

THOMAS F IRWIN
27 NORTH MAIN ST
CONCORD NH 03301-4930

DOUGLAS DENNY-BROWN
5 MILITIA DR
LEXINGTON MA 02421-4713

KRISTINE E KRAUSHAAR
27 N MAIN ST
CONCORD NH 03301-4930

ALLEN DESBIENS
780 N COMMERCIAL ST
PO BOX 330
MANCHESTER NH 03105-0330

HEIDI KROLL
PO BOX 1415
CONCORD NH 03302-1415

ROBERT E DUNN JR
43 NORTH MAIN ST
CONCORD NH 03301

SCOTT MUELLER
260 FRANKLIN ST
BOSTON MA 02110-3173

SUSAN GEIGER
ONE EAGLE SQUARE
PO BOX 3550
CONCORD NH 03302-3550

DONALD PFUNDSTEIN
214 N MAIN ST
P O BOX 1415
CONCORD NH 03302

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INTERESTED PARTIES

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