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STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

September 24, 2021 - 9:03 a.m.

[Hearing also conducted via Webex]

RE: DG 21-104
NORTHERN UTILITIES, INC.
Request for Temporary Rates
(Hearing)

PRESENT: Chairwoman Dianne H. Martin, Presiding
Commissioner Daniel C. Goldner

Doreen Borden, Clerk
Corrine Lemay, PUC Remote Hearing Host

APPEARANCES: Reptg. Northern Utilities, Inc.:
Patrick H. Taylor, Esq.
Gary Epler, Esq.

Reptg. Residential Ratepayers:
Donald M. Kreis, Esq. - NOT PRESENT

Reptg. N.H. Dept. of Energy:
Paul B. Dexter, Esq.

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

1 I N D E X

2 WITNESS: DANIEL NAWAZELSKI

3

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18 EXHIBITS PAGE

19 1 Stipulation and Settlement and Attachments 1-5 PREMARKED

20

21 2 Testimony of Christopher J. Goulding and Daniel T. Nawazelski PREMARKED

22

23

24

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: We're here this
3 morning in DG 21-104 for a hearing regarding
4 the Northern Utilities, Incorporated Request
5 for Temporary Rates. A settlement has been
6 filed. Let's take appearances, starting with
7 Mr. Taylor.

8 MR. TAYLOR: Good morning,
9 Commissioners. My name is Patrick Taylor,
10 representing Northern Utilities, Inc.

11 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Thank you.

12 And Mr. Dexter.

13 MR. DEXTER: Good morning,
14 Commissioners. Paul Dexter. I'm appearing
15 on behalf of the Department of Energy.

16 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: All right.
17 Good morning. For preliminary matters, I
18 have Exhibits 1 and 2 prefiled and premarked
19 for identification. Anything else we need to
20 cover?

21 MR. TAYLOR: Not for the Company,
22 no. Thank you.

23 MR. EPLER: Well, Gary Epler,
24 appearing on behalf of Northern Utilities,

1 Inc. Thank you.

2 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Thank you, Mr.
3 Epler.

4 Okay. Mr. Dexter, anything for
5 preliminary matters?

6 MR. DEXTER: No, I have no
7 preliminary matters.

8 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. All
9 right. Then let's move on to the witness.
10 And Ms. Robidas, if you could swear him in.

11 (WHEREUPON, DANIEL NAWAZELSKI was duly
12 sworn and cautioned by the Court
13 Reporter.)

14 DANIEL NAWAZELSKI, SWORN

15 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: All right. Mr.
16 Taylor, your witness.

17 DIRECT EXAMINATION

18 BY MR. TAYLOR:

19 Q. Good morning, Mr. Nawazelski. Can you please
20 state your name, employer and the position
21 that you hold at the Company?

22 A. Good morning. My name is Daniel Nawazelski.
23 I'm the manager of Revenue Requirements at
24 Unutil Service Corp., representing Northern

1 Utilities today.

2 Q. And have you testified before the Commission
3 in prior proceedings?

4 A. Yes, I have.

5 Q. The Chairwoman referenced two exhibits that
6 were filed in this case, Exhibit 1 and
7 Exhibit 2. I'm going to ask you to first
8 reference Exhibit 2, which are excerpts of
9 testimony submitted by you and Christopher
10 Goulding, as well as attachments -- or
11 Schedules CGDN-3 and CGDN-4. Was this
12 exhibit -- or was the excerpted testimony, as
13 well as the schedules included with that
14 testimony, prepared by you?

15 A. Yes, they were.

16 Q. And do you have any corrections to your
17 testimony or to the schedules that you'd like
18 to make at this time?

19 A. No, I do not.

20 Q. Now I'm going to ask you to refer to
21 Exhibit 1. And this is the stipulation and
22 settlement, as well as the five attachments
23 that were included with the stipulation and
24 settlement.

1 As manager of Revenue Requirements for
2 the Company, did you participate in the
3 negotiation of this stipulation and
4 settlement?

5 A. Yes, I did.

6 Q. And what I'm going to ask you to do now for
7 the Commission's benefit is to provide a
8 brief overview of the settlement.

9 A. Sure. So if you have the Settlement
10 Agreement up in front of you, Section A
11 describes the procedural history of how the
12 parties arrived at the settlement. The
13 Company responded within a few days to a set
14 of data requests issued by the Department of
15 Energy on September 10th. As noted, there
16 was a technical session on September 16th,
17 2021, after a prehearing conference. The
18 parties discussed settlement at that
19 conference, resulting in this temporary rate
20 settlement before you.

21 Section B explains that the parties
22 agreed that the Company will implement a
23 temporary revenue increase of \$2,599,083,
24 effective October 1, 2021. As described in

1 Settlement Attachment 3, this resulted in an
2 average increase of 2.9 percent over current
3 revenues. The proposed temporary rate
4 increase will be collected by applying a per
5 therm surcharge of 0.0683 to Unitil's
6 residential rate schedules, and 0.0225 to the
7 Company's commercial and industrial rate
8 schedules. Overall, the proposed temporary
9 rate increase will increase residential
10 monthly bills by approximately 3.8 percent.

11 Finally, pursuant to RSA 378:29, the
12 difference between temporary rates and
13 permanent rates will be reconciled.

14 Q. Thank you. Please refer to Attachment 1 to
15 the settlement, and please explain -- well,
16 please explain the attachment for the
17 Commission.

18 A. Sure. Attachment 1 provides the calculation
19 of the temporary rate revenue requirement
20 increase. This attachment is very similar to
21 the Company's initially filed Schedule
22 CGDN-3, but it has been updated to remove the
23 property tax expense pro forma adjustment.

24 Q. And we'll actually get to this in a bit. But

1 when you talk about the property tax pro
2 forma adjustment being removed, that is what
3 the parties agreed to in settlement to arrive
4 at the temporary rates revenue requirement;
5 is that correct?

6 A. That is correct.

7 Q. Okay. Now please refer to Attachment 2.
8 What does this show?

9 A. Attachment 2 provides the calculation of the
10 temporary rate surcharge for both the
11 residential and C&I rate classes.

12 Q. Referring to Attachment 3, again, can you
13 please explain this for the Commission?

14 A. Yes. Attachment 3 provides the report of
15 proposed rate changes that shows the annual
16 impact of the temporary rate increase by
17 customer class. Column H shows the
18 percentage increase for residential and C&I
19 customers by rate class, as well as the
20 overall increase of 2.9 percent.

21 Q. Thank you. And referring to Attachment 4,
22 what is the purpose of this attachment?

23 A. Attachment 4 provides the winter and summer
24 delivery and supply, and delivery-only bill

1 impacts at different average monthly usage
2 levels. This calculation is provided for
3 every rate class for the Company.

4 Q. Thank you. And finally referring to
5 Attachment 5, what does this illustrate?

6 A. Attachment 5 illustrates the monthly and
7 annual bill impacts for average residential
8 customers for all three of the Company's
9 residential rate classes using
10 weather-normalized sales. An average
11 residential customer using 749 therms
12 annually would see the distribution portion
13 of their total bill increase by \$51, or
14 3.8 percent.

15 Q. Thank you. So now moving on from the
16 settlement and the attachments, can you
17 please explain how the Company developed its
18 initial temporary rates revenue requirements
19 as submitted to the Commission?

20 A. Sure. The Company's initial revenue
21 requirement for temporary rates was based
22 primarily on a per books 2020 test year-end
23 rate base. The cost of capital used in the
24 calculation is based on the rate case filing

1 capital structure and debt costs. The cost
2 of equity used reflects the Company's last
3 authorized rate of return -- or sorry -- last
4 authorized return of 9.5 percent, which was
5 approved in Docket DG 17-070. This results
6 in an overall cost of capital of
7 7.33 percent. The test year net operating
8 income was largely based on test year per
9 book amounts. There were a handful of pro
10 forma revenue and expense adjustments to
11 provide a more representative level for rate
12 setting purposes. For example, revenues were
13 weather-normalized; a depreciation annual
14 adjustment was made to bring depreciation
15 levels up to year-end balances; and an
16 adjustment was made to property taxes to
17 reflect the most recent annualized 2020
18 property tax bills.

19 Q. Thank you. And now could you please explain
20 how the temporary rates revenue requirement
21 that's set forth in the settlement differs
22 from the Company's originally proposed
23 temporary rates revenue requirement?

24 A. Yes. The settling parties agreed to remove

1 the pro forma adjustment for property taxes,
2 again, annualized for 2020 property tax
3 bills. The amount of property tax recovery
4 in temporary rates is readily identifiable
5 and can be incorporated and used when
6 determining the mechanism proposed by
7 Northern in Docket DG 21-123, when required
8 in that proceeding.

9 Q. Thank you. And can you maybe explain a bit
10 about the derivation of the property tax
11 adjustment?

12 A. Yes. So in terms of the initial filing or
13 what is currently proposed in temporary
14 rates?

15 Q. What was -- yes, what was removed to arrive
16 at the current settlement amount?

17 A. Sure. So what is currently in the
18 temporary -- the Company's temporary rate
19 increase is the amount that was approved in
20 the Company's last base rate case in 17-070
21 plus the amount that was recovered in the
22 subsequent two step adjustments, as well as
23 the 2020 state property tax bill.

24 Q. Thank you, Mr. Nawazelski.

1 And finally, do you believe that the
2 settled-upon temporary rate increase results
3 in rates that are just and reasonable?

4 A. Yes, I do.

5 MR. TAYLOR: I have no further
6 questions.

7 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Thank you.

8 Mr. Dexter.

9 MR. DEXTER: Thank you. I would
10 like to ask the witness a little bit more
11 about the property taxes because I'm not sure
12 I understood the explanation.

13 CROSS-EXAMINATION

14 BY MR. DEXTER:

15 Q. Could you explain again what is included for
16 property taxes in the settled-upon revenue
17 requirement which has the increase of
18 2,599,000.

19 A. Sure. So the total amount that is a property
20 tax recovery as part of temporary rates is
21 \$4,728,947. And this was arrived at by
22 taking the amount of property tax recovery
23 from the Company's last rate base, as well as
24 the two subsequent step adjustments that

1 provided some recovery of property taxes. So
2 you have that portion plus the state-only
3 portion of property tax bills for 2020.

4 Q. And what was in the pro forma adjustment that
5 the parties agreed to remove that took us
6 from the \$3.2 million request back down to
7 the \$2.6 million settlement amount?

8 A. That adjustment reflected the final 2020
9 property tax bills annualized.

10 Q. And isn't it correct that the 2020 final
11 property tax bills actually reflect a tax
12 year that goes into 2021, which is beyond the
13 test year in this case?

14 A. Correct. The property tax year is from
15 April 1st, 2020, through March 31st, 2021.

16 Q. So would it be correct to say that the
17 settled amount -- the settled revenue
18 requirement includes a number that's more
19 reflective of test year taxes as opposed to
20 taxes that were incurred beyond the test
21 year?

22 A. I would say that is partly true. And I think
23 it was something that was agreed upon by the
24 Settling Parties as a part of coming to the

1 Settlement Agreement itself.

2 Q. Okay. I wanted to ask you a question about
3 the weather-normalization adjustment. And I
4 believe to do that I would look at -- I'm
5 just going to look at the summary of
6 adjustments. So I'm on Exhibit 1, Bates 7 of
7 29, which is Bates No. 12 in that exhibit.
8 Can you see that?

9 A. Give me one second, please. Okay. I'm there
10 now.

11 Q. And would you agree that the
12 weather-normalization adjustment that's built
13 into the temporary rate request is for
14 \$1,994,000?

15 A. Yes, I agree.

16 Q. Now, I had pointed out at the prehearing
17 conference that there was a change in the
18 weather data that was used to make this
19 weather adjustment; is that right? Do you
20 remember that?

21 A. Can you refresh my memory on that, Paul?

22 Q. Well, sure. I'm not sure if it's important
23 that you remember that I said it. But what
24 I'm trying to get at is my understanding from

1 the Company's presentation is that this case
2 includes a weather-normalization adjustment
3 that's based on 20 years of historical data
4 as opposed to recent cases that use 30 years
5 of historical weather data. Is that true?

6 A. Yes, that is true. In this proceeding, the
7 Company has used weather-normalized sales
8 based on historical weather over the past 20
9 years, whereas in the Company's previous rate
10 case, in Docket DG 17-070, the Company used a
11 30-year period.

12 Q. Right. And this adjustment which is built
13 into the temporary rates also uses that newer
14 weather database, the 20 years; is that
15 right?

16 A. That's correct.

17 Q. Now, I had pointed out in the prehearing
18 conference that the weather adjustment in the
19 last case was closer to about \$900,000,
20 whereas this weather adjustment is almost
21 \$2 million. Is that true?

22 A. Yes, that is correct.

23 Q. And for purposes of calculating revenue
24 requirements, does a larger

1 weather-normalization adjustment, such as we
2 have in this, have the effect of increasing
3 or decreasing the Company's revenue
4 requirement request?

5 A. In this instance it is decreasing the
6 Company's request.

7 Q. Okay.

8 MR. DEXTER: Okay. That's all the
9 questions I had, Chairwoman Martin.

10 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Thank you, Mr.
11 Dexter.

12 Commissioner Goldner, do you have
13 questions?

14 COMMISSIONER GOLDNER: I do.

15 QUESTIONS BY COMMISSIONERS:

16 BY COMMISSIONER GOLDNER:

17 Q. So my understanding is that in the previous
18 rate cases, DG 17-070 and 13-086, the Company
19 applied a uniform rate factor by therms. Why
20 did the Company change methodologies in this
21 filing?

22 A. You are correct. In the two previous rate
23 cases, we did use a uniform per therm
24 surcharge for all classes. In the current

1 proceeding, based off of our proposed rate
2 design, the temporary rates would actually be
3 higher for the C&I class for rate setting
4 purposes than they are so you'd have a
5 reduction. So the Company made a decision to
6 split the temporary rate surcharge between
7 residential and C&I classes separately.

8 Q. Okay. Because that delta is quite large;
9 right? It's like .0683 to .0225. So that's
10 a significant spread; right? So...

11 A. Correct. And again, that was -- the decision
12 was based on the Company's proposed permanent
13 rate design and looking at how those rates
14 were calculated compared to the resulting
15 rates for temporary rate surcharge purposes.

16 Q. So just to make sure I understand, when
17 you -- your proposal in the permanent rate
18 design will have a difference between the
19 residential and the C&I rate classes?

20 A. That is correct.

21 Q. Okay. Thank you.

22 COMMISSIONER GOLDNER: That's all,
23 Chairwoman Martin.

24 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank

1 you, Commissioner. I don't have any
2 questions.

3 Do you have any redirect?

4 MR. TAYLOR: I have no redirect.
5 Thank you.

6 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Then we
7 will strike ID on Exhibits 1 and 2 and admit
8 those as full exhibits and take closing
9 arguments, starting with Mr. Dexter.

10 MR. DEXTER: Thank you, Chairwoman
11 Martin. The Department of Energy supports
12 the proposed temporary rate increase of the
13 \$2.6 million as explained by the Company
14 today. We understand that this amount was
15 derived at using substantially per books test
16 year numbers, which we believe is the correct
17 interpretation of the temporary rate statute.
18 We recognize that a few adjustments were made
19 to make the test year results usable for rate
20 setting, such as the weather-normalization
21 adjustment that I referenced that has been
22 made in utility rate cases for decades.

23 We appreciate the Company's
24 willingness to remove the pro forma tax

1 adjustment they had described so that the
2 temporary rates reflect the property taxes
3 from 2020 and not property taxes that applied
4 to 2021, which was beyond the test year.

5 In terms of the relationship
6 percentage-wise of this temporary rate
7 increase as opposed to the Company's
8 permanent rate request, we believe it's in a
9 reasonable range. Of course, we don't know
10 where the permanent rates will end up, which
11 is the important question in the case. But
12 tied to that is the question of recoupment.
13 So it is generally the Department of Energy's
14 position that the temporary rates be set
15 somewhere in the neighborhood of where the
16 permanent rates will end up so as to avoid a
17 large recoupment which gets collected usually
18 over a one- or two-year period. As I said,
19 of course we don't know where the case is
20 going to end up, so we don't know that
21 number. But we believe the \$2.6 million
22 increase should put us in a range that
23 doesn't leave us with a huge recoupment at
24 the end of the case.

1 So for these reasons, the
2 Department of Energy supports approval of the
3 settlement as filed.

4 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Thank you, Mr.
5 Dexter.

6 Mr. Taylor.

7 MR. TAYLOR: Thank you. Well, I
8 think Mr. Dexter has summed it up nicely, and
9 I'll try not to be repetitive of what he
10 said.

11 The stipulation and settlement now
12 before the Commission is the result of a
13 collaborative process among the Settling
14 Parties who engaged in good faith
15 negotiation. We very much appreciate the
16 efforts of the Department of Energy and the
17 Consumer Advocate to work with us in the
18 settlement, and we also appreciate the
19 opportunity to present it to you here today.

20 Northern submits that the
21 stipulation and settlement results in a
22 temporary rate increase that is just and
23 reasonable and in the public interest, and
24 the Company requests that the Commission

1 approve the increase to take effect
2 October 1st.

3 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: All right.
4 Thank you everyone. We will take the matter
5 under advisement. And we're adjourned. Have
6 a good day.

7 MR. DEXTER: Thank you.

8 MR. TAYLOR: Thank you.

9 (Whereupon the hearing was concluded at
10 9:24 a.m.)

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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.

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