

Residential Ratepayers' Advisory Board
Minutes of the July 24, 2023 Meeting

<i>Present for the Board</i>	<i>Present for the OCA</i>
Thomas Moses, Chair	Donald Kreis, Consumer Advocate
Dana Nute, Vice Chair	Lesley LaPerle, Legal Assistant
Yolanda Baumgartner	Michael Crouse, Staff Attorney
James Garrity	
Matthew Kfoury	
Kenneth Mailloux	
Claira Monier	

Guest Speakers: Sean Downey, Hilltop Public Solutions; Orlando Martinez, Project Manager for National Grid

Mr. Moses called the meeting to order at 2:03 p.m. No members of the public were present. Mr. Moses announced that Senate President Bradley had approved the reappointment of three board members -- Yolanda Baumgartner, Kenneth Mailloux and Claira Monier -- for an additional term of three years.

1. Minutes of April 24th Meeting

Mr. Mailloux moved to approve the minutes; the motion was approved by unanimous consent.

2. Presentation from Sean Downey of Hilltop Public Solutions and Orlando Martinez of National Grid regarding Twin States Clean Energy Link

Mr. Downey and Mr. Martinez provided an overview of the project, which is a transmission line connecting New England with Quebec that would run underground through part of Vermont, cross the Connecticut River at Dalton, N.H., and then run south through an existing transmission right-of-way owned by National Grid. Mr. Downey noted that the U.S. Department of Energy would be a key part of the process because the DOE would fulfil the role of being an “anchor tenant” in the initial years of the project. He noted that the primary focus at this stage of the project was on the application to the federal energy department because Twin States must compete with other projects for federal funding. The application was submitted approximately on July 3, 2023, and went in with both bi-partisan and regional support, including from the Office of the Consumer Advocate. He said he anticipated that the project would be in service by the end of 2030.

Mr. Martinez discussed the project having both an underground component (HVDC or High-Voltage Direct Current) and an overhead component (HVAC or High-Voltage Alternating Current), along with a facility to convert the power to alternating current and be fed into the transmission grid in Londonderry.

According to the guests, the Twin State Clean Energy link will provide a bi-directional transmission line where power can be exported to, or from, Canada; is not meant to replace natural gas and serves to firm up renewable energy supply; would provide billions of dollars in regional cost savings over the first 12-years of the project, while also yielding hundreds of millions in property tax revenues and other benefits that target community-identified needs. It is estimated that construction of the project will take 5-6 years because 75 miles of underground earth needs to be excavated for the underground component while 108 miles above ground needs inspection, maintenance, or installation for the above-ground component.

3. Consumer Advocate Reappointment

Pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, Mr. Moses moved that the Board conduct a non-public session for the purpose of discussing a personnel matter. Mr. Garrity seconded the motion, which was adopted unanimously. The members of the OCA Staff left the room for the non-public session.

During the non-public session, the Board received and unanimously adopted the recommendation of the Board's Performance Evaluation Committee to recommend the reappointment of Consumer Advocate Kreis to the Governor and Executive Council pursuant to RSA 363:28-a, V(c) for another four-year term, his current term expiring on November 5, 2023.

Mr. Kfoury moved that the Board conclude its non-public session. Ms. Baumgartner seconded the motion, which was adopted unanimously. Members of the OCA Staff were invited to return.

Following the non-public session, Mr. Moses indicated that he would be addressing a letter to Governor Sununu and the Executive Council to communicate the Board's decision. Mr. Moses expressed his gratitude to Mark Dell'Orfano, assistant Attorney General, for his help with this process. Mr. Kreis thanked the Board for his vote of confidence and stated that he has a variety of initiatives that he hoped to pursue during a third term.

4. Case Update

The Board discussed the case updates provided by the Consumer Advocate in advance of the meeting. Mr. Nute brought up Eversource and the announcement of August rates. Mr. Kreis confirmed that all the utilities had signed contracts resulting in default energy rates approximately \$0.10 lower than the current rates, effective on August 1, 2023. Mr. Kreis noted that the community power aggregation communities were apparently able to continue to offer rates that are lower than the default energy service rates offered by the investor-owned utilities. He noted that, even if community power aggregation becomes widespread around the state, there will always be customers taking default energy service and, thus, it will always be necessary for the OCA, the state Department of Energy, and the Public Utilities Commission to be vigilant about not allowing default energy service rates to become excessive.

Ms. Baumgartner, who serves on the energy committee of the Town of Hanover, noted that in Hanover only 13 customers decided to opt out of community power (as authorized by statute). She also noted that the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire, of which Hanover is a member, projected \$11 million in savings over six months. Mr. Moses noted that Keene, of which he is a citizen, is part of a community power aggregation plan, managed by Standard Power. He reported overwhelmingly positive feedback from his city's residents and businesses.

Mr. Kreis discussed the brief he was finalizing in Docket No. DG 22-041, in which Liberty is seeking to recover \$4 million from customers for service provided in 2018, 2019, and 2020. He noted that the OCA opposes the Liberty petition, which concerns a flaw in the tariff language concerning revenue decoupling, on the ground that the request amounts to retroactive ratemaking in violation of the state constitution. He mentioned that the PUC's net metering docket was about to kick into high gear and that the OCA would be participating actively. He also discussed the upcoming prehearing conference in the docket the PUC has opened to consider the proposed 2024-2026 triennial energy efficiency plan, indicating that he was concerned by certain language in the Commission's procedural order scheduling the pre-hearing conference. Mr. Kreis also briefed the Board about how the office is gearing up for a series of recently filed and soon-to-be filed rate cases.

5. Legislative Update: OCA Priorities and Concerns for 2023 session

Mr. Kreis discussed what had been whittled down to a one-page legislative report describing bills that were on their way to the Governor for his signature or retained in committee for further consideration later this year. Mr. Garrity inquired about potential legislation that could change how utilities currently procure default energy service (by issuing RFPs for all-requirements service every six months). Mr. Kreis noted that one of the retained bills, HB 159, deals with default energy service. He also said that the PUC has the authority to change default energy service procurement approaches on its own motion and, indeed, had asked the utilities to look into supplying default service load in part via spot purchases. He added that this would raise concerns for the OCA about leaving default service customers too vulnerable to wholesale price fluctuations.

6. Adjournment

Mr. Nute moved to adjourn. Mr. Garrity seconded the motion, which was adopted unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 4:04 p.m. The next meeting of the Board will be October 23rd at 2:00 p.m.

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