

**BEFORE THE WASHINGTON
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND
TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION,

Complainant,

v.

NORTHWEST NATURAL GAS
COMPANY

Respondent.

DOCKET UG-181053

ORDER 07

GRANTING PETITION AND
APPROVING EXTENSION FOR
LOW-INCOME RATE ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM COMPLIANCE FILING

BACKGROUND

- 1 On October 21, 2019, the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) entered its final order in Northwest Natural Gas Company's (NW Natural or Company) 2018 general rate case, Docket UG-181053 (Order 06). Among other things, Order 06 required NW Natural to make changes to the Company's Gas Residential Energy Assistance Tariff (GREAT) Program, including establishing an Advisory Group for the GREAT program. Order 06 instructed the Advisory Group to present an action plan to improve the GREAT Program by July 1, 2020 (Action Plan).¹
- 2 On June 12, 2020, in Docket UG-181053, NW Natural filed an Unopposed Motion to Extend Compliance Deadline, requesting to extend the due date for submitting the Action Plan to the Commission from July 1, 2020, to April 1, 2021. In its motion, the NW Natural cites challenges associated with COVID-19 as well as the physical move of its corporate office in Portland, Oregon.
- 3 NW Natural personnel have reprioritized work to elevate COVID-19 related customer service issues while deploying the Company's work-from-home strategy. Combined with the relocation of NW Natural's corporate office, this has left the Company unable to compile the data necessary to evaluate its GREAT program.

¹ *WUTC v. NW Natural*, Docket UG-181053, Order 06, ¶ 85 (Oct. 21, 2019).

4 Commission staff (Staff) has reviewed the petition and believes the requested extension is reasonable. NW Natural thus far has complied with all provisions of Order 06 regarding the GREAT program. NW Natural established the GREAT Advisory Group in August 2019,² and has held three Action Plan development meetings and one COVID-19 emergency program meeting between October 25, 2019, and May 27, 2020. NW Natural also has committed to increasing the number of Advisory Group meetings from the minimum-ordered amount of one meeting per quarter to two meetings per quarter. Staff believes that the Company has demonstrated commitment to meeting its obligations under Order 06.

5 Additionally, NW Natural has consulted with its GREAT Advisory Group, and the Advisory Group members agree that an extension is appropriate, recognizing that modifications to the GREAT program should be based on careful collection and analysis of data, consistent with the goals adopted to guide the GREAT program design.³ Staff remains supportive of these goals and agrees that an extension is warranted. Therefore, Staff recommends the Commission grant the Company's request for an extension.

DISCUSSION

6 We agree with Staff's recommendation. In Order 06, the Commission recognized the need to improve the effectiveness for GREAT.⁴ We appreciate the Parties' work on improving this valuable program and recognize the importance of data-driven program design. Given challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, we find that good cause exists to extend the GREAT Program Action Plan compliance deadline to April 1, 2021. NW Natural's commitments to data delivery and increased frequency of Advisory Group meetings provide assurance that the Company is participating in the collaborative process to develop an appropriate action plan.

7 We find the extension of the compliance deadline is appropriate and in the public interest, and that the Motion to Extend Compliance Deadline should be granted.

² The NW Natural Low Income Advisory Group members include the Commission's regulatory staff, NW Natural, the Public Counsel Section of the Office of the Attorney General, The Energy Project, the Department of Commerce, Clark Public Utilities, and the Washington Gorge Action Program.

³ *WUTC v. NW Natural*, Docket UG-181053, Order 06, ¶ 87 (Oct. 21, 2019).

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 8 (1) The Commission is an agency of the State of Washington vested by statute with the authority to regulate the rates, rules, regulations, practices, and accounts of public service companies, including natural gas companies.
- 9 (2) NW Natural is a public service company and a gas company subject to Commission jurisdiction.
- 10 (3) On October 21, 2019, the Commission entered Order 06 in Docket UG-181053, accepting with conditions a full settlement stipulation and requiring compliance filings.
- 11 (4) The Commission required NW Natural to form an Advisory Group, and through that Advisory Group develop an Action Plan to improve the Company's GREAT program and file the Action Plan with the Commission by July 1, 2020.
- 12 (5) On June 12, 2020, NW Natural filed a Motion to Extend Compliance Deadline petitioning to extend the due date for submitting the Action Plan to the Commission until April 1, 2021.
- 13 (6) NW Natural's Motion to Extend Compliance Deadline is reasonable given the circumstances, including those created by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 14 (7) The Motion to Extend Compliance Deadline should be approved and the deadline for filing the Company's GREAT Action Plan should be extended to April 1, 2021.

ORDER

THE COMMISSION ORDERS THAT:

- 15 (1) The Petition filed by Northwest Natural Gas Company on June 12, 2020, is granted, and the deadline for filing the Action Plan is extended to April 1, 2021.
- 16 (2) The Commission retains jurisdiction over the subject matters and parties to this proceeding to effectuate the terms of this Order.

17 The Commissioners, having determined this Order to be consistent with the public interest, directed the Secretary to enter this Order.

DATED at Lacey, Washington, and effective June 25, 2020.

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

MARK L. JOHNSON
Executive Director and Secretary