

April 1, 2021

**VIA ELECTRONIC FILING**

Mark L. Johnson, Executive Director and Secretary  
Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission  
621 Woodland Square Loop SE  
Lacey, Washington 98503

**Re: UG-181053—Gas Residential Energy Assistance Tariff Advisory Group Action Plan**

Northwest Natural Gas Company, dba NW Natural (NW Natural or Company), files herewith the Gas Residential Energy Assistance Tariff Advisory Group (GREAT) Action Plan in compliance with Order 06 and Order 07 in docket UG-181053.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this filing is to comply with Order 06, Section K, in docket UG-181053, which required NW Natural to present an action plan to improve the GREAT Program by July 1, 2020. On June 12, 2020, the Company requested to extend the compliance deadline from July 1, 2020 to April 1, 2021. Order 07 granted the petition and approved the extension.

**Background**

In NW Natural's rate case docket UG-181053, the Commission issued Order 06 on October 21, 2019, adopting a Joint Settlement Agreement that all parties to the proceeding supported. Section K of the agreement instructed NW Natural to establish an Advisory Group for the low-income bill assistance program by September 1, 2019. It further stated that the Advisory Group should comprise key stakeholders and was to meet for the first time by November 1, 2019. In compliance with the Settlement Agreement, the GREAT Advisory Group was established in August 2019 and met for the first time on October 25, 2019.

The Settlement Agreement set out goals for the advisory group including:

1. Keeping customers connected to natural gas service;
2. Providing energy assistance to more customers than are currently served;
3. Lowering the energy burden of GREAT Program participants;
4. Collecting data necessary to assess the GREAT Program effectiveness; and
5. Informing ongoing policy discussions.

The Advisory Group met 12 times since October 25, 2019, with the goal to develop an action plan that would improve NW Natural's GREAT Program.

Currently, the GREAT Program is offered to qualifying low-income customers in Washington through tariff Schedule J. The GREAT program was first established in 2009. The Program is delivered through designated agencies that screen applicants for income eligibility and approve bill payment assistance grants. NW Natural works primarily with Clark Public Utility District and

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Washington Gorge Action Program to grant GREAT funds. The Program distributes up to \$500,000 per year for low-income bill assistance. NW Natural recovers the funds through an update to tariff Schedule 230 coincident with its annual Purchased Gas Adjustment filing.

### **Proposed Action Plan**

The GREAT Advisory Group agreed to the following Action Plan:

1. Increase low-income eligibility for the GREAT Program from 150% to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).
2. Design a Communications and Outreach Plan to increase communications in 2021 and to inform and notify customers about available energy assistance programs.
3. Establish a COVID-19 Program (CAP) to provide eligible residential customers earning up to 200 percent of the FPL with annual maximum award amounts of \$2,500 per household.
4. Continue to evaluate for potential future development an Arrearage Management Program.
5. Complete a Low-income Evaluation Study.

Further details are provided in the attached GREAT Advisory Action Plan.

### **Conclusion**

NW Natural respectfully submits this GREAT Action Plan in compliance with Order 06 and Order 07 in docket UG-181053.

Please address correspondence on this matter to me with copies to the following:

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Respectfully submitted,

*/s/ Rebecca T. Brown*

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### Attachments:

181053-NWN-GREAT-Action-Plan-04-01-2021  
181053-NWN-GREAT-Action-Plan-Exh-A-04-01-2021  
181053-NWN-GREAT-Action-Plan-Exh-B-04-01-2021