

**BEFORE THE
WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND
TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION,

Complainant,

v.

CASCADE NATURAL GAS
CORPORATION,

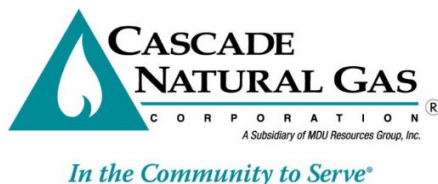
Respondent.

DOCKET UG-240008

CASCADE NATURAL GAS CORPORATION

**SIXTH EXHIBIT TO THE
DIRECT TESTIMONY OF DANIEL L. TILLIS**

March 29, 2024



**CARES Advisory Group Agenda, Recap and Next Steps
February 21, 2024 2:00 – 3:30pm Pacific**

Advisory Group Member	
Blue Mountain Action Council	Sylvia Schaefer
Community Action Connections	Dalia Ochoa
Community Action of Lewis, Mason, & Thurston Counties	Ester Castro, Stephenie Arnold
Coastal Community Action Program	Debbie Gregg
Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council	Vern Gurnard, Kristi Hills
Kitsap Community Resources	Kandi Balandran
Lower Columbia Community Action Center	Kathy Bates
NW Community Action Center	Jose Alvarez
OIC of Washington	Heidi Silva, Casandra Ochoa, Candi Jaeger
Opportunity Council	Marie Stangeland, Melissa Gong
Community Action of Skagit County	Misty Velasquez
Snohomish County Human Services Dept	Constance Hockett, Traci Baugh
WUTC Staff	Andrew Roberts, Andy Sellards, Corey Cook, Jacque Hawkins-Jones, Keith Quinata
The Energy Project	Shaylee Stokes
Public Counsel	Corey Dahl
NW Energy Coalition	Charlee Thompson
Department of Commerce	Michelle DeBell
Cascade Natural Gas	
Mark Chiles, VP of Regulatory Affairs & Customer Service	Lori Blattner, Dir Regulatory Affairs
Dan Tillis, Dir Customer Experience	Noemi Ortiz, Mgr OR Conservation & Weatherization
Teri Sovak, Mgr Customer Service, Credit & Collections	Jennifer Gross, Regulatory Analyst
Shannon Steed, Consumer Specialist	

AGENDA

1. Company Update
 - a. The following Next Steps from the January meeting have been completed by CNG:
 - i. Language requests for the paper CARES application have been sent to agencies.
 1. A new Spanish application has been added to cngc.com.
 - ii. Arrearage data comparison information was provided in the January meeting minutes.
 - iii. A request has been submitted to collect the name of the person completing a web CARES application.
 - iv. CNG staff have met to determine the timeline required to make changes to CARES for the next program year.
2. Income Verification Update
 - a. The completed spreadsheet for November 2023 is due from agencies on March 9
 - i. KCR, OIC, and OPPCO have unresolved customers, NCAC is complete
 - b. The January Income Verification list has been distributed to the appropriate agencies.
3. LIHEAP First Alternatives

- a. Agencies, The Energy Project, and NW Energy Coalition will present alternatives to the current LIHEAP first approach.
4. Open discussion

RECAP

1. Company Update

The downloadable paper CARES application from cngc.com hasn't been translating well into additional languages so CNG will explore options for translation services. This is in process and CNG will notify the group as languages are completed and available on the website.

The translation application for the entire website has been upgraded to a business-level application. CNG's equity advisory group provided feedback that the translation accuracy has greatly improved. The application cannot translate PDFs and CNG is seeking a solution.

Additional improvements have been completed for the website application

- Headings have been updated to say Information instead of Info
- An amount no longer needs to be entered when No Income is selected
- The application will not be available for customers who already had assistance or for individuals without an active account

CNG proposed creating a small group of members to meet every week or two weeks in May to discuss CARES program design changes for the next program year. The small group outcomes will be presented to the full advisory group during monthly meetings. Changes must be finalized by early August to be implemented by October 1, 2024. NW Energy Coalition and The Energy Project agreed. This will be on the March agenda for discussion to allow members time to consider the proposal.

2. Income Verification Update – no comments or questions

3. LIHEAP First Alternatives

Members did not have alternatives prepared to present.

Shaylee Stokes commented an order of operations doesn't allow for the complexities agencies have due to their LIHEAP funding situation.

Opportunity Council has been issuing a CARES grant before LIHEAP when a customer doesn't have a LIHEAP appointment and is at risk for disconnection. CNG supports this approach and when LIHEAP funding or appointments aren't available, or if a customer doesn't qualify for LIHEAP due to citizenship.

Shaylee Stokes will meet with the agencies to discuss their concerns related to LIHEAP first and possible adjustments for the March meeting so the issue can be resolved in time for the start of the next program year. The Energy Project supports Opportunity Council's approach.

4. Open Discussion

Assist doesn't show the amount required to be paid to eliminate the risk of disconnection which prevents the agencies knowing the correct amount of Winter Help to pledge after LIHEAP and CARES. Agencies would like to use Winter Help at their discretion.

CNG will have internal discussions to determine how to display the amount required to cancel a scheduled disconnection for nonpayment so agencies will know the required Winter Help grant amount after LIHEAP and CARES have been applied. CNG will also discuss alternative uses for Winter Help.

NEXT STEPS

1. CNG will continue to translate the CARES application and PDFs on the company website into additional languages.
2. The small group meeting proposal will be open for discussion during the March advisory group meeting.
3. LIHEAP First alternatives will be presented by The Energy Project during the March advisory group meeting.
4. CNG proposes the following alternative for LIHEAP First:
 - a. If LIHEAP isn't available for a customer for any reason and the customer has a past due balance, a CARES arrearage grant should be issued with the bill discount. If the customer also has a scheduled disconnection for nonpayment at that time, Winter Help should be used up to \$300.

- b. If LIHEAP will be available, the agency will submit the bill discount, notify CNG of the scheduled appointment through the portal and submit a CARES arrearage grant if needed after the LIHEAP grant is determined. If a customer has received LIHEAP and CARES but not Winter Help, Winter Help will be applied by CNG for the amount required up to \$300 if the customer has a scheduled disconnection for nonpayment later in the same program year.
- c. Currently, an internal email is generated when a pledge is submitted for a customer with a scheduled disconnection for nonpayment so the account can be reviewed immediately to prevent the disconnection. A new internal email will be created to notify staff if a customer with a scheduled disconnection for nonpayment submits a CARES application before the order has been completed. A hold will be placed on the account until the application outcome has been determined.
- d. Winter Help cannot be used at agency discretion because it is a small donation fund shared with Oregon customers. Funding isn't guaranteed and we would like to have funds available for as many customers as possible.
- e. Each day, CNG will review the accounts that have submitted a CARES application and, if applicable, send the agency the active Urgent Notice showing the amount required to remove the risk of disconnection for nonpayment.