

WUTC v. Puget Sound Energy / In the Matter of: Puget Sound Energy

**Docket No. UE-240004, UG-240005, and UE-230810 -
Vol. I**

October 9, 2024



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BEFORE THE WASHINGTON
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND)
TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION,)

Complainant,)

vs.) DOCKETS UE-240004
) and UG-240005
) (Consolidated)

PUGET SOUND ENERGY,)

Respondent.)

In the Matter of the Petition of) DOCKET UE-230810
)

PUGET SOUND ENERGY)
) ORDER 05
Petitioner,)

For an Accounting Order Authorizing)
deferred accounting treatment of)
purchased power agreement expenses)
pursuant to RCW 80.28.410) PAGES 1-20

PUBLIC COMMENT HEARING - VOL. I
CHAIR DAVID DANNER PRESIDING
October 9, 2024

Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission
621 Woodland Square Loop SE
Lacey, Washington 98504

TRANSCRIBED BY: ELIZABETH PATTERSON HARVEY, WA CCR 2731

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A P P E A R A N C E S:

FOR THE COMMISSION:

Commission Chair David W. Danner
Commissioner Milt Doumit
Commissioner Ann Rendahl

FOR PUBLIC COUNSEL

Brett Shearer
Brett.Shearer@atg.wa.gov

Jessica Johanson-Kubin
jessica.johanson-kubin@atg.wa.gov

Office of Public Counsel
Attorney General of Washington
800 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2000
Seattle, Washington 98104
206.464.7740

ALSO PRESENT:

Mel Castaneda-Kerson - Commission Staff
Kris Irelan - Commission Staff

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I N D E X O F P R O C E E D I N G S

1

2

3 COMMENTS BY PAGE

4 Frank Damiano..... 10

5 Andrea Smiley (phonetic spelling)..... 12

6 Melissa Petrini (phonetic spelling)..... 14

7 Eduardo Bailey (phonetic spelling)..... 16

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1 October 9, 2024

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4 CHAIR DANNER: All right. Good evening,

5 everyone. Today is October 9, 2024, and this is a public

6 comment hearing of the Washington Utilities and

7 Transportation Commission in Puget Sound Energy's general

8 rate case. This is Consolidated Dockets UE-240004,

9 UG-240005, and UE-230810.

10 I'm Dave Danner. I'm chair of the

11 commission. And I'm joined by my colleagues,

12 Commissioner Ann Rendahl and Commissioner Milt Doumit.

13 On February 15, 2024, Puget Sound Energy

14 filed with the Washington Utilities and Transportation

15 Commission revisions to its currently effective tariff,

16 WN U-60, Tariff G, Electric Service; and its currently

17 effective tariff, WN U-2 for natural gas.

18 On March 5, 2024, the commission entered an

19 order setting this matter for adjudication. In its

20 filing, Puget Sound Energy requests that the commission

21 increase its electric and natural gas rates in 2025 and

22 2026.

23 For electricity rates, Puget is requesting a

24 total revenue increase of 192.2 million in 2025, and

25 259.9 million in 2026.

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1 For natural gas rates, Puget is requesting a
 2 total increase of 196 million in 2025 and 25.4 million in
 3 2026.
 4 For electricity customers, this request is
 5 for a 6.74 percent increase in electrical revenues in
 6 2025, and an 8.48 percent increase in 2026.
 7 For natural gas customers, Puget's request is
 8 for an 18.96 percent increase in revenues in 2025, and a
 9 2.07 percent increase in 2026.
 10 The company cites the need for revenue
 11 because of major capital investments to meet additional
 12 mandatory regulatory obligations as set out in law and
 13 replace aging and damaged infrastructure. The company
 14 notes that it has endured inflation, increased interest
 15 rates, and increased energy costs.
 16 They also propose to increase the returns
 17 paid to investors from 9.4 percent to 9.95 percent in
 18 2025, and to 10.5 percent in 2026. The proposals would
 19 increase the average residential customer's bill by \$7.84
 20 a month in 2025, and another \$11.20 per month in 2026.
 21 For natural gas customers, this would be an average
 22 increase to the monthly bill of \$13.96 in 2025 and
 23 another \$1.51 per month in 2026.
 24 This matter is currently being adjudicated
 25 before the commission, and we sit as judges in what is

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1 essentially a trial.
 2 The other parties to this proceeding are as
 3 follows: Besides Puget Sound Energy, the utility
 4 commission staff, which operates independently from the
 5 commissioners; the Washington Attorney General's Office
 6 Public Counsel Unit, which participates under statutory
 7 authority; and then the following intervenors: The
 8 Alliance for Western Energy Consumers; Microsoft;
 9 Walmart; Nucor Steel; Fred Meyer Stores; The Northwest
 10 Energy Coalition; Sierra Club; Front and Centered, which
 11 is an environmental and low-income customer advocate, and
 12 The Energy Project, which is a low-income customer
 13 advocate. These parties are formally participating in
 14 the proceeding, and are either acting as intervenors or
 15 under statutory authority to participate.
 16 But we also in our proceedings want to hear
 17 from members of the public on their views on the case
 18 before us. The comments we receive from you this evening
 19 will be made part of the formal record in the case. And
 20 for that reason, we will -- because the commissioners sit
 21 as judges, we cannot answer questions from those
 22 commenting tonight. We are here to listen to your
 23 comments.
 24 And so with that, I'm going to turn it over
 25 to Kris Irelan from our staff. And Kris will lay down

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1 the ground rules, and then we will get started. Kris?
 2 KRIS IRELAN: Thank you, Chair Danner.
 3 Good evening. My name is Kris Irelan, and
 4 I'm a public involvement representative with the
 5 Utilities and Transportation Commission. I will be the
 6 moderator for the comment hearing this evening.
 7 If you did not sign up in advance to provide
 8 comment at this evening's hearing and wish to do so,
 9 please put your first and last name into the chat.
 10 If you're calling in, please press Star 9 to
 11 raise your hand, and we will call on you for your name in
 12 a few minutes. If you have already provided your name,
 13 there is no need to provide it again.
 14 Now for some meeting logistics: Please mute
 15 your connection unless you are called on to speak.
 16 If you are participating via the Zoom
 17 application, you can mute by clicking the microphone
 18 icon. A slash will appear across the microphone,
 19 indicating that you have successfully muted your
 20 connection. To unmute, click the microphone again, and
 21 the slash will disappear. Please remember to mute your
 22 connection after you are done speaking.
 23 If you called in with your phone, press Star
 24 6 on your phone to mute yourself. When you are called on
 25 to speak, press Star 6 to unmute yourself. After you are

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1 done speaking, please press Star 6 to mute yourself
 2 again.
 3 Please wait to be called on for comment, and
 4 do not interrupt other speakers.
 5 There are two options to report technical
 6 difficulties. You can use the chat feature in Zoom, or
 7 you can call Ryan Smith at 360-915-3646.
 8 The chat feature should be used to report
 9 technical difficulties and to ask to be added to the
 10 sign-in sheet. We will not be accepting comments via the
 11 Zoom chat feature, so please do not use the chat to
 12 provide your comments.
 13 Closed captioning is available via the
 14 toolbar at the bottom of the Zoom application.
 15 When you are called on to speak, you will
 16 have two minutes to provide your comment.
 17 If you do not wish to speak tonight, and you
 18 still would like to provide your comments in writing, you
 19 can submit written comments through the following ways:
 20 The online public comment form can be found on the
 21 commission's website at
 22 [www.utc.wa.gov/consumers/submit-comment/public-comment-](http://www.utc.wa.gov/consumers/submit-comment/public-comment-form)
 23 [form.](http://www.utc.wa.gov/consumers/submit-comment/public-comment-form)
 24 And we do that -- have that on the screen
 25 also. I know that's long.

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1 You can also submit a comment via e-mail
 2 using address comments@utc.wa.gov.
 3 The toll-free number is 1-888-333-9882.
 4 Or you can write to the UTC at PO Box 47250,
 5 Olympia, Washington, 98504-7250.
 6 As a reminder, the commissioners act as
 7 judges in formal filings like this, and cannot answer
 8 questions. However, if you do have questions, you can
 9 e-mail your questions to comments@utc.wa.gov, or by
 10 calling 888-333-9882, and ask to speak to Andrew Roberts.
 11 You can contact public counsel by e-mail at
 12 utility@atg.wa.gov or by calling 206-464-7744.
 13 Before I turn the time over to Chair Danner,
 14 if you wish to speak tonight and haven't provided your
 15 name yet, please put your first and last name into the
 16 chat if you are using the Zoom application.
 17 If you are calling in, please press Star 9 to
 18 raise your hand, and we will call on you to provide your
 19 name. When we call your phone number, please provide the
 20 first and last name with the spelling. After you provide
 21 your name, press Star 9 again to lower your hand.
 22 I will now turn the time over to Chair
 23 Danner, Commissioner Rendahl, and Commissioner Dournit.
 24 CHAIR DANNER: All right. Thank you very
 25 much.

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1 Let me turn to my colleagues and see if they
 2 have any comments. Otherwise, we will just get going.
 3 All right. We will start. There are a few
 4 people who have signed in. They're not sure whether they
 5 wish to comment.
 6 I will call on Mike O'Grady. Do you wish to
 7 speak to us tonight?
 8 All right. Suzanne Hensler, would you like
 9 to speak to us tonight?
 10 All right. Frank Damiano?
 11 FRANK DAMIANO: Oh, yes.
 12 CHAIR DANNER: Welcome back. Good to see
 13 you.
 14
 15 COMMENTS BY FRANK DAMIANO
 16 THE WITNESS: Okay. I'm a little nervous.
 17 I'll do the best I can.
 18 So Puget Sound Energy is requesting these
 19 rate adjustments. If you look at these adjustments,
 20 they're not fair. These increases are not fair.
 21 Inflation did not increase by the amounts they propose,
 22 and they've been increasing rates for years.
 23 Another reason that they've asked for
 24 increases, Bullet Point Number 2 says -- and I'm
 25 paraphrasing -- to deploy energy resources such as

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1 rooftop solar to reduce the need for large infrastructure
 2 projects.
 3 Said another way, they want to charge us to
 4 install rooftop solar to supply them with energy? I
 5 mean, they want to charge us to provide them with energy
 6 resources? This is ridiculous.
 7 Lastly, they say they must set rates for a
 8 multiyear rate plan that reflect their upcoming capital
 9 investments and operating costs over the next two years.
 10 Well, you know, it sounds like they want to increase
 11 rates to us for them to make investments so they can make
 12 profit so that they can raise our rates even higher.
 13 This is price gouging.
 14 And I'd like to add to the docket a proposal.
 15 I propose that the UTC create a bargaining unit agreement
 16 where companies compete for our business. They will have
 17 great impact on Washington, and so much so, Mr. Danner, I
 18 think that you'd be able to run for Congress, okay?
 19 There. I've said my piece.
 20 CHAIR DANNER: All right. Thank you very
 21 much, Frank Damiano, and thank you for your participation
 22 tonight and last night as well.
 23 For the record, I do not have any interest in
 24 running for Congress, but your points are well taken.
 25 Thank you.

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1 I will go down -- let's see. I saw that
 2 Suzanne Hensler, I believe that you had some comments in
 3 the chat. I hope my staff is responding to you so that
 4 we can get your comments in the record.
 5 Again, I will go back to some of the names
 6 that -- Mike O'Grady, are you on the line and do you wish
 7 to comment tonight?
 8 Is there anyone else on the call who wishes
 9 to comment tonight?
 10 Andrea Smiley, are you there?
 11 ANDREA SMILEY: Yes.
 12 CHAIR DANNER: Go right ahead.
 13
 14 COMMENTS BY ANDREA SMILEY
 15 ANDREA SMILEY: Thank you.
 16 Good evening, Commissioners. My name is
 17 Andrea Smiley, and I'm here to speak on behalf of the
 18 Building Industry Association of Washington, which
 19 represents about 8,300 members in the homebuilding
 20 industry.
 21 Our members are deeply concerned that Puget
 22 Sound Energy's proposed rate hikes for both electricity
 23 and natural gas in the following two years will create a
 24 more unaffordable environment for homeowners and renters.
 25 These increases, while they may seem minor, represent a

1 significant burden for Washington families that are
 2 already struggling with rising costs.
 3 And the average residential customer would
 4 face an additional 228 annually for electricity and 186
 5 for natural gas. Those cost increases for many could
 6 mean the difference between choosing between heating and
 7 eating.
 8 Our community is already facing economic
 9 hardship. 23 percent of middle income earners are cost
 10 burdened by rents, and 64 percent of PSE's customers have
 11 been known to be -- sorry; excuse me. 64 percent of
 12 customers struggle to pay their utility bills. These
 13 rate increases will only make the struggle even more real
 14 for them.
 15 We understand PSE's need to address
 16 operational costs, but we believe that there are
 17 alternative approaches that do not involve passing
 18 substantial costs on to ratepayers. PSE's role as a
 19 regulated monopoly requires accountability, not unchecked
 20 price hikes that harm families and businesses across our
 21 state.
 22 We urge the commission to reject the proposed
 23 rate increases and explore more equitable solutions that
 24 balance the needs of Washingtonians with those that are
 25 PSE customers.

1 rates tend to go up when we have increased demand.
 2 But if you're now diminishing a renewable
 3 energy, natural gas, then you're essentially manipulating
 4 that demand to increase. And we don't quite have the
 5 infrastructure to take on all that extra demand through
 6 pushing everyone towards electric.
 7 So there's a lot of questions about are we
 8 ready for this, that it should be a very slow -- you
 9 should have incentives for people to want to switch over,
 10 but we shouldn't be taking away natural gas, as we were
 11 sold 20, 30 years ago that that was the clean renewable
 12 energy of the future.
 13 So it makes no sense for someone like myself,
 14 who has several fireplaces and gas stoves, and our
 15 heating is all contingent on that. And I had PSE come
 16 out and do an assessment on my own home, like, how much
 17 would it cost for us to fully switch over. Because our
 18 fireplaces are at the end of their life, so we're trying
 19 to decide do we do natural gas again, or do we go
 20 straight into electricity and what would that cost? And
 21 they said for my home, it would be anywhere from \$70- to
 22 \$80,000 to replace all our utilities, which a lot of
 23 homeowners cannot afford.
 24 So just thinking about that, the potential
 25 cost to homeowners having to switch over, the rates being

1 Thank you for your time this evening.
 2 CHAIR DANNER: Thank you very much for your
 3 participation.
 4 And now let me turn to Melissa Petrini. Are
 5 you there?
 6 MELISSA PETRINI: Yes, I'm here. I don't know
 7 if you can see me.
 8 CHAIR DANNER: Go right ahead.
 9
 10 COMMENTS BY MELISSA PETRINI
 11 MELISSA PETRINI: Hi. Melissa Petrini, a
 12 director for Highline School Board. I'm not speaking on
 13 behalf of my board, but just as an elected official.
 14 I have some concerns as we're seeing a lot of
 15 our prices rise through inflation with our insurance, and
 16 also with electricity to all our schools. And so there's
 17 definitely concerns about the potential impacts for
 18 school districts and what kind of impact that will have
 19 for our kids.
 20 It's interesting, as a personal note, just
 21 that over the last several years as we've watched gas
 22 prices rise, we've had our own governor cite greedy
 23 corporations for those reasons. So there's then, you
 24 know, do we draw a conclusion that there's greed
 25 happening with these rate increases? If not, usually

1 increased is just really going to squash a lot of our low
 2 to middle income families.
 3 So I'd just like you to also recess those
 4 rate increases. So thank you.
 5 CHAIR DANNER: All right. Thank you very
 6 much. Appreciate your taking time out of your evening to
 7 talk with us.
 8 That looks like everybody that has signed in
 9 so far. Is there anybody else on the call who wishes to
 10 make a comment to the commission on this docket
 11 tonight?
 12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes, I would.
 13 CHAIR DANNER: Eduardo, what is your name,
 14 please?
 15 EDUARDO BAILEY: Eduardo Bailey. I think I
 16 pressed -- I went too fast when I saw my name.
 17 CHAIR DANNER: Okay. Well, here you are. So
 18 go right ahead.
 19
 20 COMMENTS BY EDUARDO BAILEY
 21 EDUARDO BAILEY: Okay. First, let me thank
 22 you for facilitating this meeting.
 23 And my question, it's just a single question.
 24 And of course, I'm not looking at a political point here.
 25 I just want to know if PSE is charging us secretly for

1 cap and trade. I read it somewhere online, but of course
2 that's online. So I'd appreciate a forthcoming answer
3 from PSE on that.

4 Thank you.

5 CHAIR DANNER: All right. Thank you very
6 much. Eduardo Bailey, the attorney general's public
7 counsel unit represents the interests of residential
8 ratepayers in our proceedings. And I note that they are
9 on the call tonight.

10 Brett Shearer, I see you. I don't know who
11 else from your office is there. But if you want to reach
12 out to public counsel, you'll see that there's a number
13 on screen, 206-464-7744.

14 EDUARDO BAILEY: Got it.

15 CHAIR DANNER: And you can discuss that with
16 them. Because I'm a judge in the case, I can't engage
17 you in the conversation.

18 EDUARDO BAILEY: (Inaudible).

19 CHAIR DANNER: But public counsel certainly
20 can.

21 EDUARDO BAILEY: I appreciate you. Thank
22 you.

23 CHAIR DANNER: Thank you.

24 EDUARDO BAILEY: Yes.

25 CHAIR DANNER: All right. Is there anyone

1 scheduled right now for November 4?

2 ATTORNEY JOHANSON-KUBIN: 4th and 5th.

3 CHAIR DANNER: 4th and 5th. So the deadline,
4 then, for comments would be the close of business
5 November 5.

6 And then the exhibit will be filed on

7 November 19; is that correct?

8 ATTORNEY JOHANSON-KUBIN: Yes, the 19th.

9 CHAIR DANNER: That's your proposal.

10 All right. Let me turn to my colleagues.

11 You've heard public counsel's proposal. It works for me
12 if it works for you.

13 COMMISSIONER DOUMIT: Works here. Thank you.

14 COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: Yes, that's just fine.

15 Thank you, Chair Danner.

16 CHAIR DANNER: All right.

17 Okay. Jessica Johanson-Kubin, you have your
18 dates, then. We will go with those. I appreciate it.

19 ATTORNEY JOHANSON-KUBIN: Thank you.

20 CHAIR DANNER: Is there anything else to come
21 before the commission this evening?

22 All right. Hearing nothing, thank you,
23 everyone, for your participation tonight, and we are
24 adjourned.

25 (Proceedings concluded at 6:24 p.m.)

1 else on the call tonight who wishes to make a comment for
2 this docket?

3 All right. I am not hearing any others.

4 Let me ask Mel Castaneda-Kerson, is there
5 anyone else that you know of who wishes to comment
6 tonight?

7 MEL CASTANEDA-KERSON: There has been no
8 more. No more people have signed up.

9 CHAIR DANNER: Okay. Well, at this point,
10 then, we will prepare to adjourn for the evening.

11 I would like to ask if public counsel is on
12 the line, do we want to talk about how long we will be
13 accepting written comments?

14 ATTORNEY JOHANSON-KUBIN: Hi, yes. I'm
15 Jessica Johanson-Kubin here for public counsel.

16 CHAIR DANNER: Oh, I didn't see your name.
17 Yes, good evening.

18 ATTORNEY JOHANSON-KUBIN: Good evening. We
19 would ask that the deadline to file public comments would
20 stay open until -- what is this -- November 19, which is
21 two weeks after the end of the hearing -- or excuse me;
22 the deadline for us to file the exhibit two weeks after
23 the conclusion of the hearing, and that the record be
24 open to comments until the hearing.

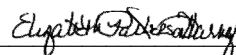
25 CHAIR DANNER: Okay. And the hearing is

C E R T I F I C A T E

1 STATE OF WASHINGTON)
2) ss
3 COUNTY OF KING)

4 I, Elizabeth Patterson Harvey, a Certified
5 Court Reporter and Registered Professional Reporter
6 within and for the State of Washington, do hereby
7 certify under penalty of perjury that the foregoing legal
8 recordings were transcribed under my direction; that I
9 received the electronic recording in the proprietary
10 format; that I am not a relative or employee of any
11 attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor
12 financially interested in its outcome.

13 IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my
14 hand this 24th day of October, 2024.

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Elizabeth Patterson Harvey, CCR 2731



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