



STATE OF WASHINGTON
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
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January 26, 2021

NOTICE OF OPPORTUNITY TO FILE WRITTEN COMMENTS
(By 5 p.m., February 12, 2021)

NOTICE OF RECESSED OPEN MEETING
(To be held at 9:30 a.m., Wednesday, February 17, 2021)

Re: In the Matter of Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic,
Docket U-200281

TO ALL INTERESTED PERSONS:

On April 17, 2020, Governor Inslee issued Proclamation 20-23.2, which prohibits all energy, water, and telecommunications providers from (1) disconnecting residential service due to nonpayment, (2) refusing to reconnect residential customers who were disconnected due to nonpayment, and (3) charging late fees or reconnection fees. The prohibition was set to expire on May 4, 2020, but subsequent proclamations extended that date through April 30, 2021. Proclamation 20-23.4, issued on May 29, 2020, also requires utilities to develop COVID-19 Customer Support Programs, consistent with state guidance from the Governor's office, that will address payment plan options for residential customers who are in arrears due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On June 16, 2020, the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) conducted a virtual special open meeting to receive status updates from regulated utilities and interested persons regarding their general experiences responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to discuss utilities' transition plans related to the Governor's moratorium on disconnections and late or reconnection fees. The Commission also received written comments on these issues both before and after the special open meeting.

The Commission formed a COVID-19 response workgroup of stakeholders to facilitate development of guidelines for ensuring that customers experiencing economic hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic maintain access to essential services after Proclamation 20-23 expires and the moratorium on disconnections and late fees is no longer in effect. Workgroup members included Commission staff (Staff), energy utilities Puget Sound Energy, Avista Corporation, d/b/a Avista Utilities, PacifiCorp, d/b/a Pacific Power & Light Company, Cascade Natural Gas Corporation, and Northwest Natural Gas Company (collectively Joint Utilities), and consumer, social justice, and environmental advocates including the Public Counsel Unit of the Washington Attorney General's Office, The Energy Project, Front and Centered, Northwest Energy Coalition, Puget Sound Sage, and the Sierra Club (collectively Joint Advocates).

Workgroup members exchanged proposed term sheets and participated in several workshops. The participants agreed on some of the issues presented but were unable to reach consensus on a single proposed set of guidelines or requirements. Accordingly, Staff prepared a term sheet that reflected the terms on which the workgroup agreed and Staff's recommended resolutions of the disputed issues (Term Sheet). The Commission issued a notice requesting written responses to the Term Sheet and received more than 1,700 written comments.

On October 6, 2020, the Commission convened a recessed open meeting to address the Term Sheet. The Commission heard oral comments from members of the public and presentations from Staff, the Joint Utilities, and the Joint Advocates.

Staff revised the Term Sheet to reflect the Commission's discussion during the recessed open meeting (Revised Term Sheet). The Commission heard additional comment on the Revised Term Sheet at the regularly scheduled open public meeting on October 15, 2020.

On October 20, 2020, the Commission entered Order 01; Extending Suspension of Disconnection of Energy Services for Nonpayment and Adopting Related Requirements (Order 01). Order 01, among other things, extended the suspension of disconnection for nonpayment of services by residential and small commercial customers until April 30, 2021. The Commission also stated that it would assess the health and economic conditions in early February 2021 to evaluate requirements prior to the April 30, 2021, disconnection moratorium expiration date.

On **Wednesday, February 17, 2021**, the Commission will hold a recessed open meeting to discuss available metrics and evaluate the current economic and public health landscape prior to the April 30, 2021, disconnection moratorium expiration date.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Utilities should come prepared to discuss:

- The progress of Arrearage Management Plans or debt forgiveness discussions, including whether each utility intends to implement a plan.
- Communication and outreach actions for customers with past due balances and communications regarding the resumption of disconnections.

- Current customer COVID-19 data as specified in Order 01.
- Bill assistance readiness with specific fund availability and projected needs.
- Plans to resume credit and collection processes.

Both Joint Advocates and Utilities should come prepared to discuss the specific metrics proposed by stakeholders, how to mitigate the length of time a moratorium may be needed, and the appropriate indicators that might support either: (1) maintaining the April 30, 2021, resumption date but with more narrowed disconnection restrictions or (2) keeping the moratoria in place without modification.

Stakeholders will have the opportunity to discuss next steps and the appropriate date to discuss potential changes to the Commission's Order as COVID-19 response and restrictions continue to evolve.

MEETING PARTICIPATION

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 public health crisis, the Commission will be holding the meeting virtually. Commission headquarters will not be open to the public for in-person participation. Interested persons may listen to the meeting via Teams by calling (253) 372-2181 and using conference ID 539 541 920#. To participate in the meeting via Teams, [Click here to join the meeting](#). If you wish to be placed on the interested parties contact list, please submit your request to the Commission's Records Center at records@utc.wa.gov.

In an effort to organize the meeting, members of the public or organizations that are not Utilities or Joint Advocates who are interested in addressing the Commission regarding the discussion topics listed above should contact the Commission's Records Center by 5 p.m. on February 16, 2021, by phone at (360) 664-1234. The Commission will create a digital "sign-in sheet" to call on those individuals during the Public Comment section of the meeting. Please be prepared to provide the Records Center with your name, the organization you are representing (if any), if you need interpreter services or accommodations, and your contact information.

If you wish to participate and need an interpreter, one will be provided at no cost to you. If you need an interpreter, please contact the Commission at least one business day prior to the meeting by calling (360) 664-1140 or by sending an email to paige.doyle@utc.wa.gov.

The Commission is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to participants with disabilities. If you need a reasonable accommodation for the recessed open meeting, please contact the Commission at least one business day prior to the workshop by calling 1-360-664-1132 or by sending an email to human_resources@utc.wa.gov. For TTY service, please call the Washington Relay Service at 1-800-833-6384 or 711.

WRITTEN COMMENTS

The Commission gives notice of your opportunity to submit written comments on the issues for discussion listed above no later than **5 p.m., February 12, 2021**. The Commission requests that comments be provided in electronic format to enhance public access, for ease of providing comments, to reduce the need for paper copies, and to facilitate quotations from the comments. Comments may be submitted via the Commission's Web portal at www.utc.wa.gov/e-filing or by electronic mail to the Commission's Records Center at records@utc.wa.gov. Please include:

- The docket number of this proceeding (U-200281).
- The commenting party's name.
- The title and date of the comment or comments.

Comments should be in .pdf format (created using Adobe Acrobat or comparable software) or in Microsoft Word. The Commission will post on its website all comments it receives in electronic format. The website is located at www.utc.wa.gov. Documents are generally posted within 24 hours of receipt. ***Please refer to Docket U-200281 to ensure that you are placed on the appropriate service list(s).***

If you have questions regarding this request for comments and recessed open meeting, you may contact Bridgit Feeser, Asst. Director of Consumer Protection, at bridgit.feeser@utc.wa.gov or (360) 664-1111.

MARK L. JOHNSON
Executive Director and Secretary