

NYSEG RATE CASE PUBLIC COMMENTS

WHAT: Public Statement Hearing on NYSEG proposed rate increases

WHEN: Wed August 14, 2019 1pm

WHERE: Tompkins County Public Library, Borg Warner Room

WHY: NYSEG plans to increase residential electric delivery rates 23% and gas delivery rates by 2%, resulting an average monthly billing increase of \$10 and \$1 respectively.

What are we – the customers who will pay for this – getting for these increases? Is it what we want? Does NYSEG deserve this increase? What are your expectations from NYSEG? What problems have you had? This is your chance to speak up!!

Plan to arrive at 12:45pm so you can sign in and be ready to go at 1pm. When you arrive, there will be 2 different sign-in sheets: one to indicate you attended, the other, a card if you want to speak. People will be called on to speak in the order in which they signed up.

The meeting will be divided into 2 parts. 1pm – 2pm = Info session in which NYSEG will present some information on the rate increases they propose, followed by Q&A. This part of the meeting will not be on the record. Then at 2pm the Public Statement Hearing will begin. This portion will be recorded and a verbatim transcript made that will become part of the record. PLEASE DO NOT MAKE COMMENTS DURING THE INFO SESSION – WE WANT THOSE ON THE RECORD!

Below is some basic information about NYSEG's rate increase proposal and suggestions for some topics/issues you might want to comment on, and some tips for commenting.

WHAT IS A RATE CASE?

Utilities are privately owned, state regulated monopolies. In trade for their monopoly over a region, they are subject to regulatory oversight by the Public Service Commission (PSC) and the Department of Public Service (DPS) staff. Usually every 3-4 years, a utility puts forward detailed plans for the projects, infrastructure, staffing and management changes, technology improvements, etc. they want to make and that we - the utility customers- will have to pay for. Then over the next 11 months, there's a process for the public to weigh in on the utility's proposal, and push for the outcomes the public wants. That package of proposals plus the process to evaluate it -including public and expert input – is known as the rate case. Ultimately it is a process by which the State, with public input, holds the utility accountable.

TIPS FOR SPEAKING AT THE PUBLIC HEARING

You don't need to be an expert to participate! Your experience and opinion is the most valuable thing you can provide. NYSEG is supposed to serve our interests – we, the people – not their shareholders. The public hearing is an opportunity to raise *our voice* about the quality of

services NYSEG is providing, how they should spend our money, and how much they should be allowed to spend. .

- Make your comments personal – something you have had direct experience with, and/or are passionate about is best.
- Don't worry about knowing all the answers or being an expert. You are an expert on your experiences and opinions and that's what matters here.
- Keep comments to 3 minutes. Write them down beforehand and practice reading them.
- You will be directing your comments to a Judge from the Department of Public Service, not to NYSEG, not to other people in the room.

Below are some topics you might want speak about. Don't try to speak on all of them – one or two is best (and probably all you could do in 3 minutes!) If you want to submit written comments, you can hand them to the Judge at the meeting. If you cannot make it to the meeting submit your comments here

<http://documents.dps.ny.gov/public/Comments/PublicComments.aspx?MatterCaseNo=19-e-0378>

TOPICS

Click below see info on the particular topic of interest, or just scroll thru the document.

- [Overall rate increase](#) impacts people with low or fixed income
- [Billing problems, shut-offs, and payment accommodations](#) Not in winter, please!
- [Customer Service](#) have you gotten yours?
- [Power outages and power quality](#)
- [Tree trimming](#) Chainsaw MaSSacre?
- [Marketing - still selling gas appliances? Really??!](#)
- [Fixed Charges – an equity issue](#)
- [Smart Meters](#) . Smart investment?
- [Community Solar Farms](#) -stop the delays.
- [Grid Readiness for renewables](#) – please do more!
- [Heat Pumps](#) -why no incentives?
- [Gas Pipelines](#) = Stranded A\$\$ets
- [The New NYS Climate Law](#) the game changer.

OVERALL RATE INCREASE

NYSEG plans to increase electric delivery rates 23% and gas delivery rates by 2%, resulting an average monthly billing increase of \$10 and \$1 respectively. For people with low or fixed income an extra \$130/year for their utilities is a lot! Are all these increases really necessary? Is money tight for you because you are low or fixed income? How will a bill increase of \$10 - \$11 per month affect you? Speak out at the public hearing!

BILLING PROBLEMS, SHUT OFFS AND PAYMENT ACCOMODATIONS

NYSEG, along with other utilities in NY, is still allowed to shut off people's services in the winter. Let NYSEG and the Department of Public Service know this inhumane practice should not be allowed. Indeed, United Illuminating, an Avangrid/Iberdrola subsidiary in CT prohibits this heartless action.

Have you been in the position of not being able to pay your utility bill? Has NYSEG helped? or cut off your service? What was the impact on you or others when that happened? Did your electric bill go crazy high in winter 2018 when gas prices spiked? This was especially a problem for people with day/night meters. Did NYSEG help you manage this situation? Please come tell your experiences.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

We all interact with NYSEG from time to time. We call with questions about our bill, or experience power outages or we smell gas. Builders/developers need to know where to dig and they NYSEG to hook up utility service to their properties. Municipal leaders try to get various projects done, street lights replaced, etc.

How responsive is NYSEG? When you call how long are you on hold? Do they respond to your questions/concerns in a timely way? Do they accomplish the service in the time frame they proposed?

POWER OUTAGES AND POWER QUALITY ISSUES

There have been several news stories about frequent power outages in Lansing – and computers and HVAC systems getting fried when power comes back on. Have you experienced frequent power outages? Or voltage fluctuations that have damaged equipment or posed other problems for your operations? Has NYSEG been responsive to your concerns? Please tell your experience on the record. This is an opportunity to push for improvements.

TREE TRIMMING = VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

A sizable portion of NYSEG's electric rate increase (\$64M/yr x 10 yrs) is for something as mundane as vegetation management, or what we commonly call tree trimming. NYSEG has some 30,000 miles of above ground wires in their service territory, which includes many rural areas and much of the Adirondacks. NYSEG is the only utility in NYS that does not use a Cycle Trimming Program, where, say, over the course of 5 years, all 30,000 miles gets trimmed, then start again. As a result, 44% of NYSEG's system suffers from overgrown vegetation issues. Meanwhile, more and more Ash trees are dying from the emerald ash borer, and as we know,

storms are getting more severe. Not a good combination of factors. NYSEG customers have endured many prolonged power outages in both winter cold and summer heat- a combination of lots of branches down and inadequate staffing to respond to storm damages. NYSEG has been reprimanded and even fined by the PSC for their poor storm response performance – much of which could be prevented if they managed their vegetation to begin with. So they're finally planning to get their act together. Horray for that. But why haven't they been maintaining things all along as other utilities have done? And why is it up to us to pay for their bad management practices? How much have we paid them previously and did they use that money properly? These would be great questions to ask not only during the information session, but also during public comments so they go on the record...

Has NYSEG ever cleared trees on your property? How did that go? What comments/advice do you have for what they need to do to protect property owners as they get underway with this more aggressive vegetation management program?

MARKETING

Why is NYSEG still selling gas appliances on their marketing website? Don't they know there's a climate emergency? How much of our money are they using to provide rebates for these appliances? Investing in new gas appliances commits to gas use for the 20+ year life of the appliance. To add insult to injury – NYSEG is advertising their gas appliances as "Heat Smart" - hijacking the name/branding of NYSERDA's HeatSmart program, that started here in Tompkins County and promotes energy efficient, electric Heat Pumps, not gas.

Also - have you been getting emails, online ads, bill inserts or door hangers about the various products NYSEG is selling? What do you think of those materials? Are they effective? Is this how you want your utility to spend our money? Perhaps instead they could educate people about making our buildings more energy efficient, or why cutting back on electricity use on really hot days from 3 – 7pm helps the grid and helps us all save money. Have you ever bought anything from NYSEG's "online marketplace"? Did it work as expected? What products do you want to see more of on their marketplace? (heat pumps!) What should they stop selling? (appliances that use fossil fuels!)

FIXED CHARGES – an equity issue.

are you low income, or a low energy user, or have rooftop solar? If so, it's likely fixed charges are making you pay more than your fair share.

Here's a terrific, short video to explain what fixed charges are and why they matter.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=138&v=9vEKi1HJz8g

Fixed charges unevenly impact low income residents and others who typically use less energy. NYSEG proposes to raise our electric fixed charges from \$15 to \$17 and \$16 to \$19 for gas. In other states fixed charges are as low as \$5. NYSEG should lower their fixed charges, not raise them.

SMART METERS

Over the past few years, NYSEG has conducted a Smart Meter pilot project in part of Tompkins County. They installed Smart Electric and Gas meters to approx. 12,000 households and businesses in Fall Creek, Northside, Cayuga Heights, Lansing, and parts of Groton and Dryden. Now NYSEG plans to install them to 900,000 electric and 280,000 gas customers across their service territory, costing around \$500,000 million. OTOH, they will save almost the same amount of money because they won't have to do monthly meter readings. In addition, the smart meters provide NYSEG with much more detailed information about power outages and energy use on the grid. This information can be important to incorporating more renewables and energy conservation solutions. NYSEG says that smart meters will also help their customers – by enabling us to enroll into special Time of Use rates and perhaps other programs that can help us save money. But they admit that successful customer engagement is key to the success of these programs.

Did you get a smart meter? What do you think of it? Has it been useful? Do you use the Energy Manager website to look at your energy use? Why or why not? Have you signed up for Time of Use rates? How has that worked out – did you save money or did it cost you more? Maybe you got a smart meter and nothing has changed for you at all. It would be great for the Public Service Commission to hear your thoughts on this.

COMMUNITY SOLAR FARMS

Community Solar farms are a great option to buy renewable electricity for a lower price than the electricity NYSEG provides. Some people have joined solar farms (Nexamp, Renovus, perhaps others) only to find that the start date for when they would be receiving renewable energy was delayed by months! Ends up, NYSEG didn't get these solar farms hooked up to the grid when they were ready. If this happened to you, please talk about it! Also, did NYSEG delay adding solar credits to your bill? Talk about that too. Make it clear that we need to switch to renewable energy ASAP and NYSEG should not be dragging their feet!

GRID READINESS FOR RENEWABLES

NYSEG proposes to spend \$300M over the next 3 years to make the grid more ready for renewables. Let them know you support this and want to them to do even more. NYSEG reports that their wires are aging and will need to be replaced. We need a robust grid if we are going to convert our heating and cars to electric!

Also, we need more grid readiness for more solar and wind farms. Perhaps you have seen fallow fields that aren't much good for farming, and you think would be a great location for a solar or wind farm. Problem is, there isn't a substation or the right kind of transmission lines nearby. Right now NYSEG makes the renewable developers pay for these grid improvements, making the cost of developing renewable energy farms cost prohibitive.

Let NYSEG know investing in the grid and substations benefits all of us and that we, as NYSEG customers, should share those costs, not put those cost burdens onto renewable energy developers.

HEAT PUMPS

NYSEG is the only utility in the state that does not currently provide any incentives for heat pumps. And the level of support they plan to provide in this new rate case is unclear. Other utilities have committed to meet the State's target for conversion to heat pumps and to provide adequate incentives. NYSEG has made no such commitment – not even in the moratorium area where gas is not an option!

Heating our buildings with fossil fuels is responsible for more than 1/3 of our GHG emissions. Heat pumps provide a source of clean, renewable heating and cooling, enabling the switch from fossil fuel based heating to efficient electric methods instead. They work great, even in our cold Tompkins Co climate!

If you've got a heat pump, talk about your experience with it. Does it keep you warm? Is it affordable? If you want one, urge NYSEG to step up like the other utilities to provide incentives to put heat pumps into everybody's reach. Small business owners – raise your voice too! We need incentives for small businesses most of all!

(for more info about heat pumps visit HeatSmartTompkins.org)

GAS PIPELINES

NYSEG proposes spending \$60M over the next 3 years for new gas pipelines and \$225M to replace old ones. Add in the various other associated costs and they propose to spend a whopping \$406M on new gas infrastructure in the next 3 years.

Apparently NYSEG hasn't gotten the memo that we need to decarbonize, not expand our use fossil fuel infrastructure.

Tell them to wake up! Tell them about the harms of methane to the climate.

NYSEG takes out long term (50-80 yr) loans on the infrastructure they develop. We will stop using these pipelines long before they are paid off. And we will be on the hook to keep paying off these loans, with interest. Tell NYSEG they should not be investing in new fossil fuel infrastructure that will become stranded assets. No more gas expansion. Support Heat Pumps instead.

NEW YORK'S NEW CLIMATE LAW

In July, Governor Cuomo signed the [Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act](#) (CLCPA) – hailed as the most ambitious climate law in the country, that makes the State's GHG reduction and renewable energy goals into LAW. It's a really big deal. But NYSEG and even some Department of Public Service staffers don't think it applies to them yet. In part that's because one portion of the CLCPA law says that it establishes a committee that will make recommendations 3 years from now. And to be fair, NYSEG applied for their rate increase in May, before this law came into effect. But the law is the law – and now both NYSEG and DPS

must follow it. The law clearly says, in Section 7, is that Agencies (like DPS) when making decisions, must

consider whether such decisions are inconsistent with or will interfere with the attainment of the statewide green-house gas emissions limits.. Where such decisions are deemed to be inconsistent with or will interfere with the attainment of the statewide greenhouse gas emissions limits, each agency, office, authority, or division shall provide a detailed statement of justification as to why such limits/criteria may not be met, and identify alternatives or green- house gas mitigation measures to be required where such project is located.

Let's make sure both DPS and NYSEG understand loud and clear - the CLCPA is the LAW, it matters to us and applies to them NOW!! That means no more gas pipelines, no trucked in gas, or gas expansion.