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July 5, 2012

Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission
Attn: Secretary
P.O. Box 3265
Harrisburg, PA 17105-3265

Re: Docket No. L-2009- 2107155

Dear Members of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission,

I am writing to you to about the new gas meter regulations that promote the installation of gas meters on the outside of properties without consulting homeowners. As a resident of Philadelphia I am very concerned about how this will impact our city since many of our neighborhoods are made up of row houses. This means that the gas meters will be installed on the front of the homeowners property. In 2011 our neighborhood had an experience that can be viewed as an accidental "experiment". The results of this experiment are directly relevant to your deliberations. I think it is instructive to take this "experiment" into consideration and I therefore describe it in the paragraph below.

I live in the Society Hill section of Philadelphia in a multi-home courtyard that the residents are proud of. We maintain the courtyard at considerable expense and make the courtyard available to the public. (Indeed it is a popular venue used by for-profit architectural/historic tours, but there are many such courtyards and walkways in our neighborhood). Last year, a gas meter on one of the homes needed to be replaced. The PGW crew that replaced the gas meter installed the new meter on the front of the home (without consulting the homeowners). Perhaps they were under the impression that the new regulations being deliberated were a fait accompli? Regardless, this PGW crew did an important experiment and it is instructive to observe the response of the neighborhood. Numerous individuals commented on how it significantly detracted from the courtyard appearance. The homeowners themselves were angry at PGW and then went through a process of trying to figure out who was to blame for this situation. Despite repeated efforts by the homeowners association and individual residents, PGW refused to return the meter to its previous (interior) location and also refused to move the meter behind a wall (a compromise that was turned down). We have snow removal machinery that runs (sometimes in a foot or more of snow) in the Winter months and we also remove debris from the courtyard with machinery. Therefore, a number of homeowners also had understandable safety concerns related to the possibility of a severed gas-line. To make a very long story short, we did finally have some success working through our local elected officials. Finally, PGW did reinstall the meter to its original location.

What are the implications and outcomes of this "experiment"? One outcome is that the courtyard residents and the neighborhood in general were very upset. One implication is that this regulation has the potential to negatively impact our neighborhoods. (Refer to the write-up of this episode in the Society Hill Reporter [a monthly newsletter from our neighborhood association] for verification). If the language in the new gas meter regulation is not tightened up to prevent PGW from damaging the visual appearance of our neighborhoods then I predict that the citizens of Philadelphia will speak very forcefully about this issue. In particular the citizenry will be asking why our neighborhoods were not protected and the public will be questioning who approved these regulations.

I strongly urge the Commission to do everything they can to protect the integrity of our neighborhoods and the architecture that make Philadelphia a truly unique and great city.

Sincerely,

Edward Winter
268 Saint Joseph's Way
Philadelphia, PA 19106