

RECEIVED
IRRC

2012 JUL 19 AM 10: 51

City of
 Lancaster
OFFICE OF MAYOR, J. RICHARD GRAY

RECEIVED
2012 JUL 16 AM 10: 27
PA P.U.C.
SECRETARY'S BUREAU

2950

July 6, 2012

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

RE: Comment on Docket No. L-2009-2107155, Amendment to Pa. Code § 59.18 Meter Location

Dear Commissioners:

The City of Lancaster submits the following comments to the proposed Rulemaking Amendment to 52 Pa. Code § 59.18, allowing natural gas utilities to have sole determination for meter set location. The language focuses on relocation of meters and regulators to outside locations, "with the exception of historic districts."

Clarification of Historic District Status

Item (7) (c) (1) of the PUC Proposed Rulemaking Order, (Rule) states that "Inside meter locations shall be considered only when: "(i) an acceptable outside location is not available due to restrictions in Federally-approved historic districts." Language elsewhere in the Rule allows for placement of entire meter sets inside a building due to historic area prohibitions and zoning ordinances. The Rule appears to allow for utility companies to consider alternatives to outdoor meter placement within historic districts – a provision which the City of Lancaster applauds – but the Rule does not clearly define "historic district" status nor does it clearly state what types of "restrictions" would trigger this exception.

The City of Lancaster has one of the largest federally-designated National Register Historic Districts in the United States, encompassing more than 14,000 historic structures. The City also has two different types of locally-controlled historic districts, established under P.L. 282, No. 167. Language contained within the Rule does not differentiate between federal and local historic districts, nor does it make clear whether local utility companies will alone determine the siting of meters, or will permit local municipalities to uphold regulations and design guidelines contained within local ordinances that govern locally controlled historic districts.

Clarification of Allowable Alternative Locations for Meters

While stating that “the utility will make the ultimate siting determination,” the Rule also states that: “Allowances for inside meter and regulator sets are based upon historic area prohibitions and areas that have high amounts of vandalism.” The Rule allows for, but does not require, inside meter locations, and does not make clear the range of alternative locations or placements that might be considered to minimize the visual impact of exterior equipment on historic buildings. The majority of buildings within Lancaster’s historic districts are nineteenth-century commercial buildings and contiguous rowhouses. Some but not all buildings have accessible rear yards or visible side walls accessed through narrow pedestrian alleys between adjoining buildings. Many of Lancaster’s historic buildings are situated at the edge of the public right-of-way, with no setback or front yard area. The layout of Lancaster’s grid system of streets and alleys dates from the late eighteenth century; many of the City’s streets feature narrow cartways and narrow sidewalks, exposing exterior meters and regulators to potential damage from vehicular traffic, the accumulation of plowed snow, ice from gutters and roofs as well as possible vandalism. The proposed Rule should require local utility companies to establish design guidelines or provide concrete examples of preferred and alternative placement of exterior meters and regulators, addressing both safety and the physical and visual impact on streets and buildings within historic districts.

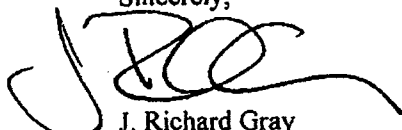
Public Notification Process

The proposed Rule has no specific provisions for public notifications, or clear procedures that require local utility companies to alert customers to impending meter installations. The Rule does not specify any advance notification, by mail or public media, nor require meetings between property owners and the local utility companies for discussion of meter installations. The utility companies should be required to provide property owners with an explanation for the impending work, a clear timetable for implementation of the work and alternatives available within designated historic districts. This notification process should also allow sufficient time for property owners to consider their alternatives and options. Installation of exterior meters will adversely impact the appearance of historic buildings and neighborhoods, but the Rule has no clear provision for property owner input or consent.

The City of Lancaster urges the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission to add more specific provisions to the PUC Proposed Rulemaking Order that will balance public safety with local regulations enacted by municipalities to protect local community character and historic architecture.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,



J. Richard Gray