

STATE OF VERMONT  
PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

Fifth Amended Order implementing standards )  
and procedures for issuance of a certificate of )  
public good for telecommunications facilities )  
pursuant to 30 V.S.A. § 248a )

Order entered: 9/14/2017

I. INTRODUCTION

The procedures governing Public Utility Commission (“Commission”) approval of telecommunications facilities are set forth in 30 V.S.A. § 248a. During the 2017 legislative session, the General Assembly enacted into law Act Nos. 32 and 53, which make revisions to § 248a. These revisions alter the comment and review periods for applications and supplement the notice requirements for applications under this section. In order to ensure compliance with these new requirements, the Commission has determined to revise its Fourth Amended Standards and Procedures Order (“Procedures Order”)<sup>1</sup> as set forth below.

In order to implement the amended statutes, on June 23, 2017, the Commission provided notice and solicited comments and recommendations with regard to the proposed revisions from all Vermont municipal legislative bodies, the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, the Vermont Department of Public Service (“Department”), and wireless telecommunications providers.

The Commission received comments from the Department, Bell Atlantic Mobile Systems of Allentown, Inc. and Cellco Partnership, each d/b/a Verizon Wireless (“Verizon”), and New Cingular Wireless PCS, LLC (“AT&T”). These comments are discussed below.

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1. *Fourth Amended Order implementing standards and procedures for issuance of a certificate of public good for communications facilities pursuant to 30 V.S.A. § 248a*, Order issued August 12, 2016.

## II. DISCUSSION

The Department states that the proposed modifications to the Procedures Order “comply with the statutory amendments to 30 V.S.A. § 248a, . . .” Accordingly, the Department recommends that the Commission adopt the revised Procedures Order without further modification.

Verizon and AT&T suggest further clarification regarding the timeframes associated with the Commission’s completeness determination and the subsequent comment period described in Section IV of the draft procedures. We agree that the time periods for the Commission’s determination and the subsequent comment period should be further clarified and we have revised the draft procedures accordingly.

Pursuant to § 248a(b)(2)(D) (and Section II of the procedures) a *de minimis* modification to a telecommunications facility means that “the addition, modification, or replacement of equipment, antennas, or ancillary improvements on the support structure, excluding cabling, does not increase the aggregate surface area of the faces of the equipment, antennas, or ancillary improvements on the support structure by more than 75 square feet.” The Commission has consistently interpreted this subsection of the statute to require applicants to account for square footage of prior *de minimis* modifications in order to calculate whether a subsequent modification when added to the prior modification still qualifies as *de minimis* (*i.e.*, will add up to 75 square feet or less in total).

AT&T states that its expansion plans for 2017-2019 will likely consist of modifications at existing telecommunications facilities that would qualify as *de minimis* modifications, but for the restriction in square footage imposed by the statute. AT&T maintains that requiring it to comply with the advance notice requirements and certain other requirements that apply to these types of projects will lengthen the approval process without any corresponding public benefit. Therefore, AT&T requests that the Commission waive the advance notice requirement for these types of projects.

While the Commission can waive the requirements of its rules or procedures, the Commission cannot waive the statutory requirements of § 248a(b)(2)(D). The Commission’s

application of the statute prohibits applicants from making successive, incremental *de minimis* applications in order to avoid the notice and other requirements for larger installations. We conclude that this practice is consistent with the plain language and intent of § 248a(b)(2). AT&T is requesting that the Commission effectively create a new category of *de minimis*-like modifications, which we conclude is beyond our authority. To the extent AT&T is seeking revision of the statutory requirements for *de minimis* modifications, it should bring this matter to the Legislature for consideration. In addition to the statutory prohibition, the Commission concludes that the advance notice process for projects other than *de minimis* projects is appropriate and necessary to inform recipients of these larger projects. Accordingly, we decline to make this revision to the procedures.

#### AMENDED STANDARDS AND PROCEDURES

**I. Purpose and Applicability:** The purpose of these standards and procedures is to implement 30 V.S.A. § 248a (“Section 248a”). These standards and procedures are applicable to the proposed construction or installation of telecommunications facilities that are to be interconnected with other proposed or existing telecommunications facilities. The Commission may, upon request of the applicant and for good cause, waive or modify the standards and procedures with respect to a specific project.

**II. Definitions:** “Ancillary improvements” means telecommunications equipment and site improvements primarily intended to serve a telecommunications facility, including wires or cables and associated poles to connect the facility to an electric or telecommunications grid, fencing, equipment shelters, generators, and access roads.

“*De minimis* modification” means the addition, modification, or replacement of telecommunications equipment, antennas, or ancillary improvements on a telecommunications facility or existing support structure, or the reconstruction of such facility or support structure, provided:

(a) the height and width of the facility or support structure, excluding equipment, antennas, or ancillary improvements, are not increased;

(b) the total amount of impervious surface, including access roads, surrounding the facility or support structure is not increased by more than 300 square feet;

(c) the addition, modification, or replacement of equipment, antennas, or ancillary improvements does not increase the height or width of the facility or support structure by more than 10 feet;

(d) the addition, modification, or replacement of equipment, antennas, or ancillary improvements on the support structure, excluding cabling, does not increase the aggregate surface area of the faces of the equipment, antennas, or ancillary improvements on the support structure by more than 75 square feet.

For purposes of this definition, where the proposed ancillary improvements will be installed on, within, or at the base of a building, the ancillary improvements may be excluded from the aggregate surface area calculation in subsection (d) provided that: (1) the ancillary improvements comply with the limitations in subsection (c) measured from the outer walls of the building (for width) and the highest existing element of the building (for height); (2) the aggregate surface area of the antennas and equipment other than ancillary improvements does not exceed 75 square feet; and (3) any other additions, modifications, or replacements associated with the facility otherwise comply with subsections (a) and (b).

“Good cause” means a showing of evidence that the substantial deference as defined in this section would create a substantial shortcoming detrimental to the public good or the State’s interests under 30 V.S.A. 202c.

“Landowner of record of property adjoining the project site” means a person who owns land in fee simple if that land will be crossed by a new private right-of-way or new utility easement to access and service the facility, shares a property boundary with the property upon which the facility will be located, or would share a boundary with the property upon which the facility will be located but for the presence of an intervening river, stream, public highway, or railroad line that shares a boundary or intersects the property.

“Limited size and scope” means a new telecommunications facility, including ancillary improvements, that does not exceed 140 feet in height; or an addition, modification, replacement, or removal of equipment at an existing telecommunications facility or support structure, and ancillary improvements, that would result in a total facility height of less than 200 feet and does not increase the width of the existing support structure by more than 20 feet. In order to qualify as a project of limited size and scope, construction of the project shall not result in earth disturbance of more than 10,000 square feet of earth, excluding temporary earth disturbance associated with construction activities.

“Proposed new support structure” means a structure to be constructed for the sole purpose of hosting a telecommunications facility where no such structure now exists. The replacement of an existing support structure does not result in the construction of a new support structure. The construction of a new structure that serves a purpose beyond hosting a telecommunications facility does not result in the construction of a new support structure.

“Substantial deference” means that the plans of the affected municipalities and the recommendations of the municipal legislative bodies and the municipal and regional planning commissions regarding the municipal and regional plans, respectively, are presumed correct, valid, and reasonable.

“Telecommunications facility” means a communications facility that transmits and receives signals from a network used primarily for two-way communications for commercial, industrial, municipal, county, or state purposes, any associated support structure, and any ancillary improvements that are proposed for construction or installation of the facility and are primarily intended to serve the communications facility or support structure.

**III. Advance Notice Requirements for Projects Other Than *De Minimis* Modifications:**

The applicant must provide written notice, at least 60 days in advance of filing a § 248a application, to the following entities:

- (a) legislative bodies and municipal and regional planning commissions in the communities where the project will be located;
- (b) the Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources;
- (c) the Division for Historic Preservation;
- (d) the Commissioner of the Department of Public Service and its Director for Public Advocacy;
- (e) the landowners of record of property adjoining the project site;
- (f) the Public Utility Commission (the notice to the Commission should be provided in electronic format only);
- (g) the Natural Resources Board (if the application concerns a telecommunications facility previously permitted under 10 V.S.A. chapter 151); and
- (h) the Secretary of Transportation.

The notice shall state that the applicant intends to make a § 248a application, identify the location of the telecommunications facility site, and provide a description of the proposed project, including a description of the amount of any clearing proposed for the project. In addition, the notice must contain sufficient detail about the proposed project to allow the parties receiving the notice to understand the impact of the project on the interests of those parties. The notice shall state that recipients may contact the applicant with questions or comments regarding the proposed project. The notice shall state that any comments, motions to intervene, or requests for hearing regarding the project must be filed with the Commission within the 30-day comment period commencing once the application is filed with the Commission. The notice shall state that the application is being filed pursuant to this Order and that the Order is available at the Commission’s offices and website. The notice shall include a written assessment of the collocation requirements set forth under Section IV(K). The notice shall attach a statement that itemizes the rights and opportunities available to the legislative body and planning commission of each municipality under §§ 248a(c)(2), (e)(2), (m), (n), and (o). The notice shall inform each legislative body and planning commission of the existence of the guide published under

§ 248a(p) and provide information on how to obtain a copy of the guide. If the applicant has not filed an application for the project, pursuant to the filing requirements below, within 180 days of the date of the advance notice, the notice will be considered withdrawn. Written notice may be filed electronically at the request of or with the permission of the recipient.

If the applicant makes a substantial change to the proposed project, the applicant is required to provide notice of this change to all parties and entities already notified, including any newly affected adjoining property owners. Parties and entities will then have 30 days to comment on the revised project. For the purpose of this subsection, a substantial change is one that has the potential for significant impact with respect to any of the criteria applicable to the project.

**IV. Application Filing Requirements for Projects Other Than *De Minimis* Modifications:**

The application must first be filed with the Commission for review prior to being served upon the other recipients as listed below. Applicants should receive an e-mail message with the results of the completeness review within 5 business days of the date the Commission received the application; however, the expiration of this time period without the receipt of an e-mail message does not constitute a determination that the application is administratively complete enough to process. Within two business days of receipt of notification from the Commission that the application is complete, the applicant must serve a copy of the application on the legislative bodies, municipal planning commissions, and regional planning commissions in the communities where the project is located, the Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources, the Division for Historic Preservation, the Natural Resources Board (if the application concerns a telecommunications facility previously permitted under 10 V.S.A. chapter 151), and the Department of Public Service.<sup>2</sup> The applicant shall, within two days of receipt of notification from the Commission that the application is complete, also provide notice to the landowners of record of property adjoining the project site, and any person who filed comments in response to the advance notice, that the application has been filed with the Commission and provide information on where the landowner may obtain a copy of the application. The application and notice provided shall inform recipients that they have 30 days to file comments, motions to intervene, or requests for hearing on the project with the Commission. The notice must also state that if a recipient would like to request a hearing, the recipient must make a showing that the project raises a significant issue with respect to the applicable criteria under 30 V.S.A. § 248a(c)(1) and pursuant to this Order. The Commission will grant reasonable extensions of the comment period when the applicant fails to cause the timely service of the application or notice.

The applicant shall ensure that the application filed includes testimony or exhibits addressing each of the areas listed below. Any witness sponsoring an exhibit must have personal knowledge of and be qualified to testify as to the accuracy of the information contained in the exhibit. The

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2. If the application is filed using the Commission's online document filing system ("ePUC"), ePUC will automatically provide the required state agencies with notice of and access to the filing. Pursuant to 30 V.S.A. § 11a, this will satisfy the applicant's obligation to serve these state agencies.

applicant shall file proposed findings of fact and a proposed certificate of public good with its petition.

A. Applicant's Name. The application shall include the name, contact information, and a description of the company or person making the application.

B. Host Landowners. The application shall include the names and addresses of the landowners on whose property the proposed facilities would be built.

C. Adjoining Landowners. The application shall include the names and addresses of all adjoining property owners. This information shall be obtained from the most recent version of the town's grand list.

D. Certification that Notice Requirements Have Been Met. The applicant must certify it has complied with all notice requirements.

E. Existing Permits. The applicant must provide copies of any relevant local or state permits (including Act 250 and municipal zoning permits) that relate to the facility and identify conditions in the permits that could affect the proposed development. If the proposed project would be inconsistent with any existing permit conditions, the applicant shall identify those conditions and explain why it is not feasible to harmonize the proposed project with those conditions. The applicant shall certify that it has not obtained or been denied a permit or permit amendment under the provisions of Title 24 or chapter 151 of Title 10 for the same or substantially the same project. An applicant may seek approval under Section 248a for a modification to a previously permitted project.

F. Project Description

1. Site Plans

The applicant must provide a site plan for each telecommunications facility project. A site plan shall include:

(a) Proposed telecommunications facility locations and any ancillary improvements.

(b) Property boundaries and setback distances to the base(s) of the proposed support structure or existing structure and to the nearest corners of each of the related structures to those boundaries, and dimensions of all proposed improvements.

(c) Proposed utilities, including distance from source of power, sizes of service available and required, and locations of any proposed utility or communication lines.

(d) A description of any areas where vegetation is to be cleared or altered and a description of any proposed direct or indirect alterations of wetlands.

- (e) Detailed plans for any drainage of surface and/or sub-surface water and plans to control erosion and sedimentation both during construction and as a permanent measure.
- (f) Locations and specific descriptions of proposed screening, landscaping, groundcover, fencing, exterior lighting, and signs.
- (g) Plans of any proposed access driveway, roadway, or parking area at the facility site, including grading, drainage, and traveled width, including a cross-section of the access drive indicating the width, depth of gravel, and paving or surface materials.
- (h) Certification that the project construction complies, at a minimum, with the requirements of the Low Risk Handbook for Erosion Prevention and Sediment Control issued by the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, regardless of any provisions in the handbook that limit its applicability.
- (i) The latitude and longitude coordinates for each proposed telecommunications facility.

## 2. Elevation Drawings

- (a) For each proposed support structure, the applicant must provide elevation drawings.
- (b) The elevation drawings must be at appropriate scales but no smaller than 1"/20'.
- (c) The applicant must include two elevation drawings of the proposed support structures drawn at right angles to each other, showing the ground profile to at least 100 feet beyond the edge of any proposed clearing, and showing any guy wires or supports. The elevation drawing shall show all proposed antennas, including their location on the tower or other support structure and the height of the tower or other support structure above grade at the base, and describe the proposed finish of the tower or antenna.
- (d) For proposed towers, the elevation drawing shall indicate the relative height of the tower to the tops of surrounding trees as they presently exist.
- (e) For proposed towers, the elevation drawing shall include a description of available space on the structure.
- (f) For proposed towers, the elevation drawing shall include a description of the tower and foundation design.
- (g) Each plan sheet shall be clearly labeled with the project title, date, revision date(s), scale, and name of the professional or firm that prepared the plan.



### 3. Coverage Maps

The applicant shall provide a signal propagation study that clearly identifies the proposed coverage area of each communications service that will use the proposed telecommunications facilities at the completion of construction or installation of the facilities.

(a) For proposed telecommunications facilities that will extend the coverage area of an existing communications network, the coverage maps shall show the areas of existing coverage as well as the additional areas of coverage that the proposed facilities will enable.

(b) Radial plots shall be in bright colors, showing clear demarcations between signal strengths. For each antenna or antenna array, identify the power output of the antenna(s) and any non-standard assumptions used to calculate the projected coverage area.

### 4. Project Scope and Narrative

The applicant shall provide a written narrative describing how the proposed facilities will be interconnected with other telecommunications facilities proposed or existing. If the facility relates to the provision of wireless service, the applicant shall demonstrate that the facility reasonably cannot be collocated on or at an existing telecommunications facility, or that such collocation would cause an undue adverse effect on aesthetics.

### G. Public Good

The applicant must explain how the proposed project would promote the general good of the State consistent with 30 V.S.A. § 202c(b).

### H. Environmental Criteria

1. The applicant must address each of the criteria set forth in 10 V.S.A. §§ 6086(a)(1) through (8) and (9)(k) and 1424a(d). To the extent that the proposal will create an adverse impact affecting any of these criteria, the applicant shall describe what measures, if any, will be taken to minimize such impact.

2. Conditional waiver of criteria for projects of limited size and scope: Pursuant to 30 V.S.A. § 248a(k), for telecommunications facilities of limited size and scope, the Commission conditionally waives all criteria under 30 V.S.A. § 248a(c)(1), with the exception of 10 V.S.A. §§ 6086(a)(1)(D) (floodways) and 6086(a) 8 (aesthetics, historic sites, rare and irreplaceable natural areas, endangered species, necessary wildlife).

### I. Local and Regional Plans

The applicant shall provide copies of the relevant sections of any town plan and regional plan in effect in the community in which the proposed facility will be located and describe how the project meets or complies with the land conservation measures in those plans. If the project does not so comply with a plan, the applicant shall explain why not and demonstrate how the applicant has nevertheless given substantial deference to those measures or explain why there is good

cause not to give substantial deference to those measures. A rebuttable presumption respecting compliance with the applicable plan shall be created by a letter from an affected municipal legislative body or municipal planning commission concerning compliance with the municipal plan and by a letter from a regional planning commission concerning compliance with the regional plan.

#### J. Fees

The applicant shall provide a completed copy of the Agency of Natural Resources' current Certificate of Public Good Application Fee Form. The applicant must also provide certification that the fees required under the form have been submitted to the State treasury pursuant to 30 V.S.A § 248b(e).

#### K. Collocation

If a proposed new support structure for a new wireless telecommunications facility will exceed 50' in height in a cleared area or will exceed 20' in height above the average treeline measured within a 100' radius from the structure in a wooded area, the application shall identify all existing telecommunications facilities within the area to be served by the proposed structure and, for each such existing facility, shall include a projection of the coverage and an estimate of additional capacity that would be provided if the applicant's proposed telecommunications equipment were located on or at the existing facility. That applicant shall also compare each such projection and estimate to the coverage and capacity that would be provided at the site of the proposed structure. The applicant must also address the collocation criteria under §248a(c)(3)(B).

#### **V. Application Filing Requirements for *De Minimis* Modifications:**

For *de minimis* modifications, upon filing an original and two copies of the application with the Commission, the applicant must also submit a copy of the application to the legislative bodies in the communities where the project is located, and the landowner of record of property on which the facility is located. Two copies of the application must also be submitted to the Department of Public Service.

Applicants shall ensure that the application includes testimony or exhibits addressing each of the areas listed below. Any witness sponsoring an exhibit must have personal knowledge of and be qualified to testify as to the accuracy of the information contained in the exhibit. Applicants shall file proposed findings of fact and a proposed certificate of public good with the petition.

**A. Applicant's Name.** The application shall include the name, contact information, and a description of the company or person making the application.

**B. Host Landowners.** The application shall include the names and addresses of the landowners on whose property the proposed facilities would be built.

C. Certification that Filing Requirements Have Been Met. The applicant must certify that it has complied with the filing requirements in this Section as listed above.

D. Existing Permits. The applicant must provide copies of any relevant local or state permits (including Act 250 and municipal zoning permits) that relate to the facility and identify conditions in the permits that could affect the proposed development. If the proposed project would be inconsistent with any existing permit conditions, the applicant shall identify those conditions and explain why it is not feasible to harmonize the proposed project with those conditions. The applicant shall certify that it has not obtained or been denied a permit or permit amendment under the provisions of Title 24 or chapter 151 of Title 10 for the same or substantially the same project. An applicant may seek approval under Section 248a for a modification to a previously permitted project.

E. Project Description

1. Site Plans

The applicant must provide a site plan for each telecommunications facility project. A site plan shall include:

- (a) Proposed telecommunications facility locations and a description of any antennas or any ancillary improvements, including the dimensions and aggregate surface areas of antenna faces.
- (b) Property boundaries and setback distances to the base(s) of the proposed support structure or existing structure and to the nearest corners of each of the related structures to those boundaries, and dimensions of all proposed improvements.
- (c) Proposed utilities, including distance from source of power, sizes of service available and required, and locations of any proposed utility or communication lines.
- (d) A description of any areas where vegetation is to be cleared or altered and a description of any proposed direct or indirect alterations of wetlands.
- (e) Detailed plans for any drainage of surface and/or sub-surface water and plans to control erosion and sedimentation both during construction and as a permanent measure.
- (f) Locations and specific descriptions of proposed screening, landscaping, groundcover, fencing, exterior lighting, and signage.
- (g) Plans of any proposed access driveway, roadway, or parking area at the facility site, including grading, drainage, and traveled width, including a cross-section of the access drive indicating the width, depth of gravel, and paving or surface materials.

## 2. Project Scope and Narrative

The applicant shall provide a written certification that the proposed facilities constitute a *de minimis* modification to an existing facility.

## F. Public Good

The applicant must explain how the proposed project would promote the general good of the State consistent with 30 V.S.A. § 202c(b).

## **VI. Waiver of Notice Requirements:**

An applicant seeking a waiver or modification of the notice requirements for an application shall file a request for such waiver or modification with the Commission and the Department of Public Service not later than 30 days prior to the date the notice is required, together with a description of the project, the reason for seeking the waiver or modification, and a demonstration that good cause exists for granting a waiver or modification. Any granting of such a waiver or modification shall be based on a determination that the entities subject to the waiver or modification could not reasonably be affected by one or more of the proposed facilities, and that notice to such entities would constitute a significant administrative burden without corresponding public benefit. The Commission shall rule on a waiver or modification request within 21 days of the filing of the request.

## **VII. Submission of Comments and Requests for Hearing:**

If any person wishes to submit comments or motions to intervene to the Commission concerning an application filed pursuant to Section 248a or request a hearing for projects other than *de minimis* modifications, such correspondence is due at the Commission within 30 calendar days of the date that the application was served upon all required recipients. The 30-day comment period commences once the application or notice is served and ends 30 calendar days later. Comments, motions to intervene, and requests for hearing filed outside the 30-day comment period will be considered untimely and will not be considered by the Commission. In order to request a hearing, commenters must make a showing that the application raises a significant issue regarding one or more of the substantive criteria applicable to the proposed project.

For *de minimis* project applications, if a person receiving a copy of the application wishes to object to a project's classification as a *de minimis* modification, such correspondence is due at the Commission within 30 calendar days of the date that the application was served upon all required recipients. If no objections to the classification of the project are timely filed with the Commission, a CPG shall be issued without further proceedings.

## **VIII. Issuance of Decision:**

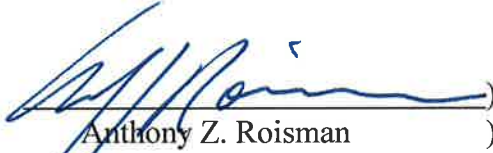
**A. For *de minimis* modifications:** If no objections to the classification of the project are timely filed with the Commission, the Commission shall issue a CPG without further proceedings.

B. For projects of limited size and scope: Unless the Commission determines that an application raises a substantial issue, it shall issue a final determination on an application within 60 days of the date on which the Commission notifies the applicant that the filing is complete. If the Commission determines that an application raises a substantial issue, it shall issue a final determination on an application filed pursuant to this section within 90 days of the date on which the Commission notifies the applicant that the filing is complete.

C. For all other projects: Unless the Commission determines that an application raises a significant issue, it shall issue a final determination on an application within 60 days of the date on which the Commission notifies the applicant that the filing is complete. If the Commission rules that an application raises a significant issue, it shall issue a final determination on the application within 180 days of the date on which the Commission notifies the applicant that the filing is complete.

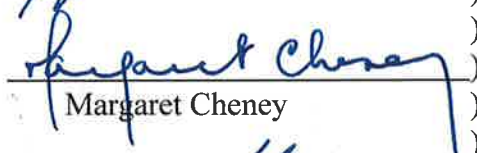
**SO ORDERED.**

Dated at Montpelier, Vermont, this 14<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2017.

  
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Anthony Z. Roisman )

PUBLIC UTILITY )

  
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Margaret Cheney )

COMMISSION )

  
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Sarah Hofmann )

OF VERMONT )

OFFICE OF THE CLERK

FILED: September 14, 2017

ATTEST: Judith C. Whitney  
Clerk of the Commission

*NOTICE TO READERS: This decision is subject to revision of technical errors. Readers are requested to notify the Clerk of the Commission (by e-mail, telephone, or in writing) of any apparent errors, in order that any necessary corrections may be made. (E-mail address: puc.clerk@vermont.gov).*