

STATE OF VERMONT
PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

CASE NUMBER 17-4909-PET

PETITION OF VERMONT GAS SYSTEMS, INC., PURSUANT
TO 30 V.S.A. SECTION 248, FOR A CERTIFICATE OF
PUBLIC GOOD TO AUTHORIZE CONSTRUCTION OF A
PRESSURE-REGULATION STATION IN MONKTON, VERMONT

January 8, 2018
7 p.m.

3747 States Prison Hollow Rd
Monkton, Vermont

Public Hearing held before the Vermont Public
Utility Commission, at the Monkton Fire Station, 3747
States Prison Hollow Road, Monkton, Vermont, on January 8,
2018, beginning at 7 p.m.

P R E S E N T

HEARING OFFICER: Michael Tousley
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PARTICIPANTS

<u>Name</u>	<u>Page</u>
Jane Palmer	6, 20
Nate Palmer	8
Renee McGuinness	9, 19
Susan Mahoney	10
Rebecca Gould	12
Lisa Barrett	14
Rachel Smolker	16
Father George Klohck	19

1 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Good evening
2 everybody. Again my name is Mike Tousley. I'm a
3 Hearing Officer for the Public Utility Commission and
4 I thank you all for being here. This is Vermont
5 Public Utility Commission public hearing in case
6 number 17-4909-PET which is a petition of Vermont Gas
7 Systems, Inc., pursuant to 30 V.S.A. Section 248, for
8 a Certificate of Public Good to authorize
9 construction of a pressure regulation station in
10 Monkton, Vermont.

11 Again my name is Mike Tousley. I'm a Staff
12 Attorney with the Public Utility Commission and have
13 been assigned as the Hearing Officer with this case.
14 There are representatives of VGS that are here
15 tonight that spoke with you earlier as well as their
16 attorney Debra Bouffard. There's also representation
17 from the Vermont Department of Public Service,
18 attorney Jake Clark and gas engineer GC Morris.

19 There's -- in the back where VGS put out
20 the map I put out a couple of handouts. There's a
21 handout that provides information on how to file
22 comments, how to read documents in the case, and the
23 schedule, as well as a handout from the Public
24 Participation Guide on our web site that describes
25 how the Section 248 process works. Again I encourage

1 you to use the web site because it's pretty easy to
2 get at and a good way to be able to contact us about
3 questions, et cetera.

4 The purpose of tonight's hearing is to provide
5 an opportunity to hear input from the public
6 regarding this proposed petition. The comments
7 received at this hearing will become part of the
8 public record in this case. You can also provide
9 written comments using the Commission's electronic
10 document management system ePUC or by direct mail or
11 e-mail. Contact information is here in the handout.
12 You can also subscribe to the case in ePUC which
13 means you will receive an e-mail notification of any
14 Commission order or filing made by a party in the
15 case. You will have to log into the ePUC with an
16 account to read those documents.

17 In general terms the schedule -- there
18 are four items in the current schedule for this
19 docket. The first item is tonight's -- well the
20 first item was this afternoon at 3 o'clock when we
21 held a site visit. Then there was the 6 o'clock
22 information session, and the 7 o'clock public hearing
23 that's going on now. On January 12th is a deadline
24 for the first round of discovery on VGS by the
25 Department of Public Service and the Agency of

1 Natural Resources. On January 19, 2018 is an
2 intervention deadline, and on January 26th is the
3 first -- is the deadline for the VGS responses to the
4 questions that are provided to them by DPS and ANR on
5 the 12th. That's what the schedule has right now for
6 this case.

7 Tonight's hearing will be transcribed by a
8 court reporter. This transcript, along with all the
9 other comments received by the Commission, become
10 part of the case's public file so that the Commission
11 members, staff, and participants in the case can
12 consider the comments. Although the public comments
13 do not become part of the formal record, formal
14 evidence in the case, they can be helpful in raising
15 new issues and perspectives that the Commission
16 should consider. So we look forward to hearing your
17 input.

18 The transcript of this public hearing will
19 also be available in ePUC which is directly
20 accessible online at <http://epuc.vermont.gov> or
21 from links on the Commission's web site which is
22 <http://puc.vermont.gov>.

23 I see that nine people have signed up to
24 speak. If it's okay, there's no amplification here,
25 please speak loudly enough so that the court reporter

1 can hear you. If there is a problem, I'll probably
2 put a chair up over here so you can speak so that the
3 court reporter can hear you, but we'll otherwise just
4 go around starting with Ms. Jane Palmer.

5 MS. PALMER: Good evening. Thanks for
6 coming. I just want to clarify, Nate and I have
7 applied for intervenor status, does that preclude us
8 from speaking?

9 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: No.

10 MS. PALMER: Okay. My concern and --
11 well the 248 process determines the public good and
12 one of the things that is factored is the cost and
13 the reasonableness of the cost, and I'm kind of
14 concerned as to how that can be determined, the
15 actual value of this pipeline or this distribution
16 line and gate station, if VGS does not know how many
17 customers will hook up, and the problem with that,
18 even sending out postcards, is that the people that
19 are on this line can't make a decision unless they
20 know how much it's going to cost. So, you know, when
21 anybody is determining something as important as your
22 heating plant in your home, you need to know all the
23 factors including what it's going to cost. Somebody
24 posted on Facebook I think today that she was quoted
25 \$13,000 to hook up to Vermont Gas several years ago.

1 So that's a big deal, and I propose that this
2 decision should not be made by the PUC until Vermont
3 Gas does an extensive study of the route and people
4 have a chance to actually get concrete estimates as
5 to how much it's going to cost them to convert and
6 how much they will save.

7 Now our own town school and the town offices
8 and, you know, they are all weighing this right now.
9 So -- and it's not looking that good for gas and
10 we've kind of heard some negative moving towards
11 that. So that's my first point. It really needs --
12 if this is going to be six hundred some thousand
13 dollars and they only pick up 14 customers, that
14 seems like a real dumb deal, and you know tonight I
15 heard the number was over one hundred that they could
16 possibly get, but I had heard 14 customers in the
17 past. So there's quite a discrepancy in how many
18 customers Vermont Gas is anticipating.

19 The other part is that this was -- Ms.
20 Simollardes said this is not a part of the 7970
21 because it was just the agreement with Monkton that
22 they were going to build, but if this was part of
23 getting Monkton to agree to have the transmission
24 line come through town, it is a cost associated with
25 the transmission line. You know if this is something

1 that they have to do in order to get towns to agree,
2 then it has to be considered a cost of the initial
3 pipeline and I think that's a big deal. You know
4 660,000, if that's what it costs, we all know how
5 good Vermont Gas is with estimates. So this is like
6 -- this is an important point to consider because it
7 is part of the whole thing.

8 So my suggestion is that the Board postpone
9 any decision until there's a really good study about
10 the potential customers and they have a chance to
11 really know what they are up against in terms of
12 cost, and what they are going to gain if they get it.
13 I guess that's it.

14 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Thank you.

15 Mr. Palmer.

16 MR. PALMER: My concern has been ever
17 since I heard about this that where this is being
18 sited was our old town dump decades ago, and unless
19 you take a look at it and do a proper assessment of
20 that and make sure there's not going to be a further
21 issue from disturbing that area I think that needs to
22 be considered. It's an old town dump. It's not
23 lined. Maybe it's not a problem, but it could be a
24 little sleeping dog that might waken right up when
25 you start putting in a 400-foot access road and start

1 trenching. So I think we need to have a little more
2 assessment of the site itself, and that's that.

3 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Thank you.
4 Renee McGuinness.

5 MS. MCGUINNESS: Yes. I would actually
6 like to request another -- a second public hearing
7 for this particular docket, and the reasons why I
8 would request another public hearing is because there
9 was an error in the public notice that this hearing
10 was about a solar project for St. Albans which is a
11 grievous error, and the Commission -- the Public
12 Utility Commission is legally required to publish and
13 maintain a notice on its web site for 12 days before
14 the date of the public hearing, and so the notice was
15 posted on the Public Utility Commission web site on
16 the 29th. So including the 29th through to today
17 that's 11 days which is one day short of the required
18 by statute.

19 Also the public notice is supposed to appear
20 in a newspaper that's in the county where this
21 facility will be located which is in Addison County,
22 and as far as I'm aware there was only a notice
23 published in the Rutland Herald on Friday the 5th and
24 Rutland is in Rutland County which is not the correct
25 county. So I don't know if it went somewhere else or

1 if it was published locally or not, but my
2 understanding it was not published locally in Addison
3 County. I think more people -- this is a very poor
4 turnout here tonight and I think the public deserved
5 better notice.

6 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Thank you, Ms.
7 McGuinness. Susan Mahoney.

8 MS. MAHONEY: Thank you. You bring up
9 an interesting point. So my property is an abutter
10 to the gas line and I began to receive direct
11 mailings about this forum tonight and about the site
12 visit which I was the sole representative, and I
13 assumed because it was coming right to my house and
14 it told about 6 o'clock this and 7 o'clock that -- I
15 have it right here -- that everybody was getting
16 that. Lo and behold no. Rutland Herald would have
17 been great. I never would dream of reading the
18 Rutland Herald so I would have never known a thing
19 about it, and I would have hopefully gotten the
20 information from somebody. So communication is
21 definitely a big question.

22 I would also like to bring up the
23 question that a large majority of people in town are
24 not going to get gas even if it comes through, and
25 how will the addition of another fuel supplier affect

1 our already hard working busy folks who deliver
2 propane and oil and will it reduce their customer
3 list therefore and drive costs up for all of us who
4 are not getting gas and wouldn't want it anyway or
5 couldn't possibly get it because the route is so
6 small.

7 And a third point I would like to bring
8 up is that the route that I have seen where it goes
9 it traverses both of our villages, and the very
10 beginning of this process had many members of the
11 town and people really paid attention to this. Now I
12 know it's not the transmission line, I know it's a
13 distribution line, but it's still the same quiet
14 town; small houses, some near the road, plantings,
15 trees, et cetera, and the disruption and damage that
16 comes from a digging project which I watched in New
17 Haven all last fall. I watched all of that going on
18 North Street as I drove back and forth.

19 So, you know, it's wait we're putting a line
20 through both the borough and ridge where we have, you
21 know, historic buildings and traffic calming. It's
22 not even wide enough for a sidewalk in the ridge and
23 we're going to invite all the disruption of the
24 digging and, you know, interference with traffic for
25 goodness knows all the cars that go through there

1 these days. So I'm concerned about the impact to the
2 historic qualities of the village and the attractive
3 nature of our villages that we're working on trying
4 to improve. So those three points. Thank you.

5 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Thank you, Ms.
6 Mahoney. Rebecca Gould.

7 MS. GOULD: I want to echo some of the
8 points that were already made and particularly Renee.
9 I never met you. Thank you for that. I too am sort
10 of suffering under the consequences of inadequate
11 information and notice. So I would have been able to
12 come to this meeting a lot more prepared had I known
13 about it sooner than I did which was basically
14 because somebody posted it on the web site and
15 somebody posted it on Front Porch Forum. For that
16 reason alone there should be arguing for a second
17 hearing. I think there's a strong case to be made
18 that there should be a second hearing so that more
19 citizens of Monkton can have this conversation.

20 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Can I ask a
21 question? I also heard that tonight is the night
22 that the selectboard meets.

23 MS. GOULD: Well I was also concerned
24 about that and I reached out to a selectboard member
25 about that because it seems to me it would be nice to

1 have a selectboard here.

2 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Do we know
3 what night they meet so they don't conflict again?

4 AUDIENCE: Every other Monday and it's
5 calendared on their web site.

6 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Okay. Thank
7 you.

8 MS. GOULD: The notice of the meeting
9 never made it to the calendar of the Town of Monkton,
10 but that would also been helpful because I had to ask
11 someone is this meeting tonight really happening
12 because there's a selectboard meeting and could you
13 clarify. So I think that's reason enough to have a
14 second meeting to hear from more people in our town.

15 I also feel like a lot of concerns have
16 been raised here tonight that collectively suggest
17 some more thought. I've heard environmental concerns
18 including noise impacts and not a clear answer about
19 that. So there's been an environmental impact study,
20 but seems like it hasn't been fully comprehensive in
21 addressing everything that could be addressed.

22 The cost concerns that Jane -- we've met
23 now -- mentioned. The high cost area question that
24 was raised I realize that has to do with transmission
25 and not distribution, but it does concern me that the

1 distribution line will be going to the school. I
2 don't know if the school itself has said for sure
3 it's purchasing from Vermont Gas. So in fact it's
4 going to the school or plotted to go to the school,
5 but we don't know yet whether the school wants to
6 make the purchase; is that right? Just want to make
7 sure.

8 So to me there are a whole cluster of concerns
9 that have been raised here that deserve another
10 hearing so that more people can participate in this
11 conversation in a more informed way so that we as a
12 town can really think about whether we want to take
13 advantage of the distribution possibility. If the
14 majority of town wants it, that's something I want to
15 hear. I wouldn't stand in the way, but I think there
16 are a lot of questions that remain to be answered and
17 remain to be discussed.

18 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Thank you.

19 MS. GOULD: Thank you.

20 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Lisa Barrett.

21 MS. BARRETT: Yes. I agree with
22 everything that's been said, and in terms of the
23 money \$637,234 dollars to connect to 14 houses or 68
24 houses max just doesn't seem reasonable, but when we
25 look at the entire project, when you're looking at

1 the total cost of the ANGP and dividing that by the
2 3,000 prospective total customers, that's \$55,000 a
3 customer anyway. So the whole thing just doesn't
4 make sense to me financially.

5 Another point. Since this has -- since this
6 proposed gate station has such a small footprint it
7 just makes no sense to me that they -- that the
8 company has chosen to put it where it will have an
9 impact, however small, on wetlands. There's no need
10 to be next to wetlands with something that is this
11 small. Did they do that just because they already
12 owned the property or because they thought the town
13 dump was a good place for it? I don't know.

14 Perhaps a more important point is that
15 we need to be converting and getting away from fossil
16 fuel infrastructure and this gate station, this
17 project, just runs completely against that. Vermont
18 Gas always estimates demand based on its price
19 advantage over oil and propane, but their product has
20 no price advantage over their fellow company Green
21 Mountain Power's savings from switching to a heat
22 pump and supplementing with oil or propane on the
23 coldest days of the year. Most people don't realize
24 this and it makes no sense to have gas as an
25 occasional backup because gas furnaces don't operate

1 very well, I'm told, when they only run once in a
2 while, and the cost of converting to natural gas --
3 the cost is very high. So when you really look at it
4 bringing natural gas in is -- flies absolutely in the
5 face of everything we're trying to do to get away
6 from fossil fuels.

7 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Thank you, Ms.
8 Barrett. Miss Smolker.

9 MS. SMOLKER: Yeah that's the perfect
10 lead-in because I wanted to talk about methane which
11 is what natural gas is which is -- yes it's lower in
12 CO2 emissions than some other forms of energy, but
13 it's much higher in methane, and since 2013 when this
14 project received its Certificate of Public Good our
15 understanding of methane and climate impacts of
16 methane have changed, and it is pretty disturbing to
17 continue to hear repeated over and over again that
18 natural gas is clean when we know what we know about
19 methane now since at least for a decade or so our
20 understanding has shifted that we understand now the
21 methane is about 86 to 105 times more potent than
22 carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas. It's not carbon
23 dioxide, but if you measure in terms of carbon
24 dioxide equivalents, it's a lot worse than carbon
25 emissions are, and that's what natural gas is and I

1 think we need to catch up with the science and
2 understanding of this. By now it's long overdue and
3 it's just misleading people to continue to talk about
4 gas as something that's a clean climate friendly
5 option. It's not.

6 In 2013 -- and I'm taking these things
7 that I'm about to talk about from an affidavit that
8 was submitted by Phil McGibbon in earlier cases
9 before the Supreme Court that I'm sure you're all
10 mostly familiar with. In 2013 over flights from
11 fracking basins in western North America found leak
12 rates as high as 9 percent. Any rate of leakage
13 greater than 20 percent makes burning natural gas
14 more damaging to the climate than burning coal, which
15 is the most greenhouse gas expensive fuel.

16 Between 2002 and 2014, a period that
17 coincided with the onset of large scale fracking,
18 U.S. methane emissions increased more than 30 percent
19 accounting for 30 and 60 percent -- 30 to 60 percent
20 of the spike in global methane emissions. So, you
21 know, and then the final point is that -- and recent
22 studies have shown that the expansion of fracking and
23 natural gas continued to be advocated as clean and
24 climate friendly is having a profound drag on the
25 expansion of and the buildout of other renewable

1 energy, real renewable energy, real clean energy, and
2 so those things in combination I just feel like it's
3 time that -- the PUC approved this project back a
4 while ago. It's really time to update this not just
5 in terms of whether we're going to build a
6 distribution in the little town of Monkton, but in
7 terms of looking at the -- where natural gas fits
8 into the state's energy mix, not just in this little
9 instance with this town in this gate station but
10 overall and in all of what the PUC oversees and so
11 on. We need to have much more assessment.

12 Building out this little town expansion
13 in the Town of Monkton is going to have a domino
14 effect through the entire industry and there will be
15 more wells fracked out west where they are doing over
16 flights and seeing the expansion spikes of methane in
17 the atmosphere that they are measuring and climate
18 change is very obvious at this point. I think global
19 warming sounds really nice to us right now today
20 after what we've just been through, but we just can't
21 pretend any more, and I think it's time to catch up
22 with the science and the reality.

23 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Thank you.
24 Lawrence Shelton.

25 MR. SHELTON: I'm going to pass. Thank

1 you.

2 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Douglas
3 Vandelt.

4 MR. VANDELT: I'll pass also.

5 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Okay. Those
6 are the folks that signed up to speak. Does anybody
7 else wish to speak having now heard them?

8 MS. MCGUINNESS: Can I add something?

9 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Sure.

10 MS. MCGUINNESS: I just wanted to add
11 that I too would like to see a study completed for
12 potential customers before the PUC -- PUC -- that's
13 how it reads -- before they make a decision, and I
14 think it can be done without getting people excited
15 about -- superficially excited about natural gas.
16 Looking into, you know, providing natural gas and
17 would you be interested; getting people excited about
18 something that might not happen. I don't think
19 that's an issue.

20 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Thank you. Is
21 there anyone else? Yes, sir.

22 FATHER KLOHCK: My name is George Klohck
23 K-L-O-H-C-K and those things that everybody around
24 the table talks about costs involved and the number
25 of potential customers there are. I think I'm

1 understanding that the potential for the gas company
2 to make a profit on the sale of gas to potential
3 customers seems unlikely, and I would like to ask if
4 there's some other reason for building infrastructure
5 in Monkton or any place that doesn't involve selling
6 gas. A reward somehow the government has set up so
7 just building infrastructure, never mind who's going
8 to use it, provides some profit and reward to the gas
9 company.

10 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Thank you.

11 MS. PALMER: I guess I have one more
12 thing I want to add too. Jane Palmer. The issue as
13 one of my points, and I was hoping somebody else
14 would bring that up, but I'm concerned, especially in
15 light of all the things that are coming to light
16 about the transmission line, and I have to say in the
17 beginning when this first started safety was not a
18 big issue in my mind. I felt confident that even
19 though this wasn't the right thing to do it would be
20 built safely and that there would be oversight from
21 our Department and the Public Service Board then
22 assured us that things would be, if they were spelled
23 out in the Certificate of Public Good, that that's
24 the way they would be built, and lo and behold we're
25 finding that's not the case, and it concerns me; and

1 a good friend of mine, Clare Broughton, lived on Pond
2 Road and she was deathly afraid of gas. She had --
3 she had seen her mother get badly burned and she
4 faced -- in the last part of her life she faced
5 losing her home because she could not live near a
6 transmission line, and her fear was there would be a
7 transmission line behind her and a distribution line
8 in front of her; and while I comforted her I didn't
9 feel her fears, but now I do because I know how this
10 pipeline was built, and I don't feel that this
11 company can be trusted to do the right thing and I
12 don't feel that our Department is -- can be trusted
13 to oversee these important installations. So I guess
14 Clare is not worried about it any more, she passed
15 away, but I am and everybody who lives near this
16 transmission line or even near the distribution line
17 should be concerned.

18 HEARING OFFICER TOUSLEY: Thank you.
19 Are there any other comments? Very well. This
20 public hearing is adjourned. Thank you very much
21 again for coming out on this cold and windy night.

22 (Whereupon, the proceeding was
23 adjourned at 7:40 p.m.)
24
25

C E R T I F I C A T E

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I, JoAnn Q. Carson, do hereby certify that I recorded by stenographic means the public hearing re: Case Number 17-4909 at the Monkton Fire Station, 3747 States Prison Hollow Road, Monkton, Vermont, on January 8, 2018, beginning at 7:10 p.m.

I further certify that the foregoing testimony was taken by me stenographically and thereafter reduced to typewriting, and the foregoing 21 pages are a transcript of the stenograph notes taken by me of the evidence and the proceedings, to the best of my ability.

I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties thereto or their Counsel, and I am in no way interested in the outcome of said cause.

Dated at Burlington, Vermont, this 9th day of January, 2018.

JoAnn Q. Carson
Registered Merit Reporter
Certified Real Time Reporter