

Antonia Hover

From: Kim, Breanna <KIM.BREANNA@leg.state.fl.us>
Sent: Wednesday, April 22, 2020 3:24 PM
To: Records Clerk; Kurt Schrader
Cc: JR Kelly; Morse, Stephanie; jcarmichael@highlandsfl.gov
Subject: Docket No. 20190166
Attachments: 20190166 - Letter to Schrader w Attachments.pdf

Good afternoon,
Please find attached for filing in the docket OPC's letter to Kurt Schrader, in follow-up to the letter submitted by HC Waterworks on April 9, 2020.

Thank you,
Breanna Kim
Office of Public Counsel



BILL GALVANO
President of the Senate

J.R. KELLY
Public Counsel

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JOSE R. OLIVA
Speaker of the House of Representatives

April 22, 2020

Kurt Schrader
Office of the General Counsel
Florida Public Service Commission
2540 Shumard Oak Blvd.
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Re: Docket No. 20190166 – Application for increase in water rates in Highlands County by HC Waterworks, Inc.

Dear Mr. Schrader,

The Office of Public Counsel (“OPC”) is actively monitoring the docket for HC Waterworks, Inc. (“HCW” or “Utility”). We reviewed the April 9, 2020 letter submitted by HCW (the “HCW Letter”) in response to a letter from the Highlands County Attorney. Among other things, the HCW Letter discusses the Utility’s account of its follow-up efforts after the Customer Meeting held February 20, 2020.

OPC has received correspondence from customers who dispute some of the representations in HCW’s letter. Specifically, some customers informed OPC the quality of the water they receive from HCW remains poor, they still must purchase water to drink, and they remain opposed to the rate increase requested by HCW. Copies of the customer correspondence received by OPC in response to the HCW Letter are attached for your review.

HCW’s letter suggests that most of the complaints expressed at the Customer Meeting related to a tank repair which occurred in January 2020. HCW further alleged no additional work is required to remedy the quality of water because the water is “clear.” However, the customer comments filed in the docket long after the January tank repair, and as recently as this month (April

2020), show the customers' complaints about discolored water, sediment and odor problems have continued to date. Customers stated they are still paying high rates for water they cannot drink, and spending additional money to buy bottled water or to frequently change filters on faucets in their homes. In addition to the customer comments received by OPC which are attached, below are excerpts of customer comments mailed directly to the Commission:

Document No. 01772-2020 filed 4/6/2020: "The quality of the water is awful. Not Drinkable so we have to spend additional funds on filters."

Document No. 01499-2020 filed 3/19/2020: The water "often is dirty & smelly."

Document No. 01498-2020 filed 3/19/2020: "The water quality is not good ... and the service is terrible."

Document No. 01426-2020 filed 3/17/2020: "Dirty water – Black ... scared to drink it."

Document No. 01326-2020 filed 3/10/2020: "The water we have here is undrinkable a good deal of the time ... I would not drink water that was brown and smelled ... When we hear that they are trying to raise the rates on water that we can't even drink it just doesn't make sense."

Document No. 01314-2020 filed 3/9/2020: "Too many times the water has odor, brown or milky coming from the faucet ... we never get the notice to boil our water."

Document No. 01154-2020 filed 2/28/2020: "The water has at many times smelled like sewer ... [i]t has come out of my bathtub brown and stinky with grains of sand ... I do not drink it I buy bottled water."

OPC brings the above-referenced updated information and customer comments, including the attached comments, to Staff's attention to aid Staff in its evaluation of the Utility's rate increase request, and to allow Staff to conduct any further investigation that might be needed. If you should have any questions, please feel free to call or e-mail me.

Sincerely,
/s/ Stephanie A. Morse
Stephanie A. Morse
Associate Public Counsel

From: J Tavano <jtir@bellsouth.net>

Sent: Thursday, April 16, 2020 4:17 PM

To: Kim, Breanna <KIM.BREANNA@leg.state.fl.us>

Subject: Re: Docket No. 20190166 - HC Waterworks

During the month of March, I have been home every day do to COVID 19, they did not come by or leave any note on my door.... also around midnight on a few nights the pressure drops they're probably doing cleaning and the water smells afterwards for a few minutes.... I've also replaced the water filter again after 3 months when normally I do it once a year.... on average 4 to 5 per year for the last 4 years No I'm still against any price increase !!!!!

John

From: Manny Ernhart <mfkge2@gmail.com>

Sent: Thursday, April 16, 2020 10:04 PM

To: Morse, Stephanie

Subject: Re: FW: HC Water Request for Rate Increase Sebring Florida - PSC Docket No. 20190166

Thank you for allowing me this chance to respond;
Yes they did in fact visit our address but unfortunately we were not at home. The water quality has been acceptable for several week now, but this has happened before only to to regress later. Hopefully this will not be the case this time. As to my position to the requested rate increase, I still have reservations, namely if I am not mistaken we either pay the highest or very nearly the highest rate per unit in the state of Florida if not the country.

Yours truly:

Manny & Kathy Ernhart

From: Bob Grassman <bobgrassman@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, April 17, 2020 10:50 AM
To: Kim, Breanna <KIM.BREANNA@leg.state.fl.us>
Subject: Re: Docket No. 20190166 - HC Waterworks

Kim, I thank you for the update. The water situation does seem to have changed for the better. But I still have objections to the rate increase. I worked for a utility for 47 years. So I am somewhat familiar with relocation practices. As I understand it, when a utility is in public right of way it is a chance they take for free access to provide service and their responsibly to relocate when required by local government to do so. It is not fair to pass that cost to their costumers.

Secondly, I feel that when they bought this company they didn't do diligence investigating the product.

I aslo understand that over time costs do increase and therefore may be eligible for some degree of increase. I just don't believe they are due all they're asking for.

Thanks for the consideration.

From: Mathy, Tamra [Tamra.Mathy@southflorida.edu]
Sent: Thursday, April 16, 2020 2:47 PM
To: Kim, Breanna
Subject: Re: Docket No. 20190166 - HC Waterworks

First let me start off with saying this they are liars. I was home all day March 9th and 10th and no one left a door tag or knocked on my door or gate or even for that matter honked the horn. I can testify to this and so can my husband, why you wonder? Because March the 9th was my birthday and we stayed home. I did not leave my home until Thursday March 12th to go to work. So they can say what they want because it is a lie.

From: Mathy, Tamra <Tamra.Mathy@southflorida.edu>
Sent: Sunday, April 19, 2020 12:37 PM
To: Morse, Stephanie
Subject: Re: Docket No. 20190166 - HC Waterworks

since the meeting i have still been having an issue with the smell and taste. i still do not consume the water and buy it elsewhere. and yes what i stated about being on 3/9 and 3/10 is god's honest truth. i never left home and no one contacted me or left a door knocker. they are just trying to cover their ass. and yes by all means you have my permission to do what ever is necessary to ensure that we get and continue to get safe drinking water without having to pay a arm and leg for it and at the same time have to buy water to drink.

thank you and have a good day

From: Keith Fortner <thefortners301@yahoo.com>

Sent: Tuesday, April 21, 2020 4:30 PM

To: Morse, Stephanie

Subject: Docket No -WU HC Waterworks

Dear Ms. Morse,

Thank you for your correspondence of April 17 regarding the above referenced Docket of HC Waterworks. We appreciate your letter and the accompanying documents that you provided. Those documents did explain the problem our area had in January which unfortunately for HC Waterworks was just prior to the customer meeting regarding rate increases.

To answer your question, YES....the quality of the water has improved since our initial letter. The water pressure still leaves a little to be desired but it is probably within the required parameters. I will reiterate.... if the company was better at keeping their customers informed of problems such as happened in January, they probably would not get the bad "reputation" that seems to follow them.

Thank you for your attention to our situation and if there is anything else we can do or provide, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

R. Keith & Andrea J. Fortner
304 Yellow Willow St
Sebring, FL 3876

From: Keith Fortner <thefortners301@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 21, 2020 9:27 PM
To: Morse, Stephanie <MORSE.STEPHANIE@leg.state.fl.us>
Subject: Re: Docket No -WU HC Waterworks

Ms Morse,

We have no objection to you using our letter(s) as a part of public record. As far as the increase, as I said in our initial letter, we understand that from time to time, rate increases are necessary. The documents provided shows us that the company has invested money in repairs and improvements to the system. We do not believe the increase they are requesting is unreasonable. Again, had the company been sharing the information and costs with customers throughout the years, customers would be aware of the investments being made and would be more understanding when a rate request comes along. Communication is the key !

Thank you

Andrea & Keith Fortner