

for 11/12/15
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State of New Jersey
DIVISION OF RATE COUNSEL
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BOARD OF PUBLIC UTILITIES
MAIL ROOM

CHRIS CHRISTIE
Governor

KIM GUADAGNO
Lt. Governor

STEFANIE A. BRAND
Director

November 5, 2015

Via Hand-Delivery and Electronic Mail

Honorable Irene Kim Asbury, Secretary
New Jersey Board of Public Utilities
44 South Clinton Avenue, 9th Floor
P.O. Box 350
Trenton, NJ 08625-0350

**Re: In the Matter of the Petition of South Jersey Gas Company for
Approval of a Municipal Consent in the Borough of
Chesilhurst, Camden County
BPU Docket No.: GE15070802**

Dear Secretary Asbury:

Please accept for filing an original and ten copies of comments submitted on behalf of the New Jersey Division of Rate Counsel ("Rate Counsel") concerning the above-referenced Verified Petition of South Jersey Gas Company ("SJG" or "Company") for approval of a municipal consent in the Borough of Chesilhurst, Camden County. We enclose one additional copy. Please date stamp the copy as "filed" and return it to us in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope. Thank you for your consideration and attention to this matter.

Case Mgmt
List Opns

Background

The Company filed the above-referenced Petition on July 7, 2015, seeking approval, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 48:2-14, N.J.S.A. 48:3-15 and N.J.A.C. 14:1-5.5, of Borough of Chesilhurst Ordinance 2015-3 granting the Company consent to provide natural gas utility service, and to construct and maintain pipes and related facilities in streets and other public areas, within the Borough. SJG currently provides natural gas service to approximately 347 residential customers and 22 commercial customers within the Borough. Petition, ¶ 2. The Company anticipates customer growth within its service territory of approximately 1% annually for the next 3 to 5 years. Id. SJG represents that it has the capacity necessary to ensure a continuation of its natural gas service and does not foresee any concerns regarding its ability to meet the existing and future demands of the Borough. Petition, ¶ 3.

The Company services its customers within the Borough through its Glassboro Division customer service center located at 142 South Main St., Glassboro, New Jersey. SJG anticipates that its Glassboro Division will continue to service its customers in the Borough, with no changes in its location or hours of operation. Petition, ¶ 4.

The Borough granted the Company consent and permission to provide natural gas utility service and to construct and maintain pipes and related facilities in streets and other public areas within the Borough by Ordinance adopted on September 25, 1947. Petition, Ex. A. Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 48:3-15, the Company's right to use the streets within the Borough for the provision of service statutorily expired on September 25, 1997. Petition, ¶ 6 and Ex. A.

In Ordinance 2015-3, adopted on May 14, 2015, the Borough set forth certain limits on its renewed consent and permission to SJG, including limiting the consent to a period of fifty years from the date of its final adoption. Petition, ¶ 7 and Ex. B. On June 8, 2015, the Company

accepted and agreed to the terms and conditions of the municipal consent in Ordinance 2015-3, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 48:3-16. Petition, ¶ 8 and Ex. C.

At the hearing held by the hearing officer for the Board of Public Utilities on this Petition on September 28, 2015, Joseph R. Schneider, General Manager of System Engineering and Planning, testified that the Company has the capacity to meet the existing and future needs of customers located within the municipality. 7T:L18-21 & 9T:L7-20 (9/28/15). No member of the public appeared at the hearing and no one has contacted our office with any objection regarding this matter.

Rate Counsel Position

The Company represents that it has the capacity necessary to continue providing natural gas service to its customers located in the Borough. Petition, ¶ 3. For this reason, and the fact that the municipal consent in Ordinance 2015-3 is limited to the statutorily required fifty year term limit, Rate Counsel does not object to approval of SJG's Petition. Rate Counsel recommends that the Board's Order specifically provide that its approval does not include authorization to include in rate base any specific assets that may be constructed as a result of approval of this Petition. The determination of any assets to be included in rate base and any ratemaking impacts as a result of the municipal consent should be addressed in a future base rate case or other appropriate proceeding.

Accordingly, Rate Counsel recommends that any Board Order approving the Company's Petition contain the following language:

1. As required by N.J.S.A. 48:3-15, the municipal consent for the use of streets and other public places is limited to a term not exceeding fifty years.

2. This Order shall not be construed as directly or indirectly fixing for any purposes whatsoever any value of any tangible or intangible assets now owned or hereafter to be owned by the Petitioner.
3. This Order shall not affect, nor in any way limit, the exercise of the authority of this Board or of this State, in any future Petition or in any proceedings with respect to rates, franchises, service, financing, accounting, capitalization, depreciation, or in any other matter affecting the Petitioner.

These provisions will satisfy the concerns of Rate Counsel that the Company is in compliance with the proper statutory framework, that Board approval is limited to the municipal consent, and that there is no authorization to include any specific assets or amounts in rate base, nor authorization for any other ratemaking treatment. If the Board adopts these conditions, Rate Counsel is not opposed to approval of the above-referenced Petition.

Respectfully submitted,

STEFANIE A. BRAND
Director, Division of Rate Counsel

By: 

Brian Weeks, Esq.
Deputy Rate Counsel

c: Service List (by regular mail)
Electronic service to: Stacy A. Mitchell, Esq.

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South Jersey Gas Company for
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the Borough of Chesilhurst,
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