



For Immediate Release

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News Media Contact:

Anthony Swinger, (317) 233-2747 or

aswinger@oucc.IN.gov

Columbus City Utilities Water Rate Case: OUCC Invites Consumer Comments

If you are a Columbus City Utilities customer and would like to comment on the city's pending water rate request, you have the chance to do so.

The Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor (OUCC), the state agency representing consumer interests in cases before the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission (IURC), is reviewing the city's request and is scheduled to file testimony on Dec. 11, 2020.

Written customer comments

While using its legal and technical resources to review Columbus City Utilities' request, including examining the utility's books and operations, the OUCC is inviting written comments from customers through Tuesday, Dec. 8, 2020.

Consumers who wish to submit comments for the case record are strongly encouraged to do so in writing. The OUCC will include comments received by Dec. 8 in its public testimonial filing with the IURC, and the comments will become part of the case's evidence. Comments are welcome via the OUCC's website at www.in.gov/oucc/2361.htm, by email at uccinfo@oucc.IN.gov, or by mail at:

Consumer Services Staff
Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor
115 W. Washington St., Suite 1500 South
Indianapolis, IN 46204

The OUCC needs to receive all written consumer comments no later than Dec. 8, 2020 so that it can: 1) Consider them in preparing its testimony and 2) File them with the Commission to be included in the case's formal evidentiary record. Comments should include the consumer's **name, mailing address**, and a reference to either "**IURC Cause No. 45427**" or Columbus City Utilities. Consumers with questions about submitting written comments can contact the OUCC's consumer services staff toll-free at 1-888-441-2494.

Public field hearing

The IURC is currently scheduled to hold a public field hearing on the city's request on Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2020 at the Hotel Indigo Columbus Architectural Center in Columbus (400 Brown St.). The hearing is scheduled to begin at 6:00 p.m. in the Belvedere Room and is statutorily required in this case.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, customers who wish to speak during the field hearing are urged to participate by telephone instead of appearing at the venue in person. Those who appear at the venue will be required to wear face coverings and comply with CDC social distancing guidelines.

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Customers who plan to speak at the hearing are encouraged to preregister by calling 1-317-232-5888 no later than Noon on Dec. 2.

- Oral comments during the live hearing will become part of the case record, along with written consumer comments submitted to the OUCC by Dec. 8.
- Each caller who speaks during the hearing will be sworn in and will speak directly to the Commission under oath and on the record.
- Customers who speak by phone on Dec. 2 will do so by calling 1-415-655-0001. When prompted, a caller should enter the following meeting number: 1722127359#.
- A live stream of the hearing will be available on YouTube at https://youtu.be/2_QWw0xeEGc.

The field hearing's sole purpose is to receive public testimony.

- Utilities do not make presentations or answer questions during field hearings. The focus, again, is on public input. In this case, Columbus City Utilities filed testimony and exhibits in August 2020.
- Commissioners are not allowed to answer questions about the case. They will ultimately render a decision after weighing evidence from the utility, the OUCC, and any intervening parties.
- No final decisions will be made at the Dec. 2 hearing.

Case overview

Current water rates for Columbus received IURC approval in 1992. The city is proposing an increase in three phases. If approved, water charges for a residential customer using 5,000 gallons per month would rise in August 2021 from \$11.43 to \$16.60. Those charges would later increase to \$19.41 in January 2023 and then to \$20.65 in January 2024.

In its testimony, Columbus City Utilities states that its requested increase is due to higher operating and maintenance costs and to pay for infrastructure improvements for which it seeks IURC approval to issue up to \$22.2 million in bonds. Specific improvements include the construction of new wells, a new storage tank and improvements to four others, new transmission and distribution mains, laboratory and treatment plant improvements, upgraded software, and new meters, among additional projects.

Southwestern Bartholomew Water Corp. has formally intervened in this case. Any testimony it files is due on Dec. 11, 2020.

Only the city's *water* rates are at issue in this case. The IURC does not have jurisdiction over municipal *sewer* rates, with those rates set by locally elected city and town councils throughout the state.

A final Commission order is currently expected in July 2021.

The OUCC is posting case updates online at www.in.gov/oucc/2781.htm. Case updates are also available through the agency's monthly electronic newsletter. Consumers can subscribe at www.in.gov/oucc/news.

(IURC Cause No. 45427)

The Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor (OUCC) represents Indiana consumer interests before state and federal bodies that regulate utilities. As a state agency, the OUCC's mission is to represent all Indiana consumers to ensure quality, reliable utility services at the most reasonable prices possible through dedicated advocacy, consumer education, and creative problem solving.