



Agenda Date: 11/17/21

Agenda Item: 7A

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
Board of Public Utilities
44 South Clinton Avenue, 1st Floor
Post Office Box 350
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0350
www.nj.gov/bpu/

CUSTOMER ASSISTANCE

IN THE MATTER OF THE PETITION OF SUEZ WATER)
NEW JERSEY INC. FOR APPROVAL TO CLOSE ITS) ORDER OF APPROVAL
CUSTOMER PAYMENT WINDOW AT 69 DEVOE)
PLACE, HACKENSACK, NJ) DOCKET NO. WO21050790

Parties of Record:

Bryant Gonzalez, Esq., Attorney for Suez Water New Jersey
Brian O. Lipman, Esq., Director, New Jersey Division of Rate Counsel

BY THE BOARD:

On May 11, 2021, Suez Water New Jersey Inc. ("Petitioner" or "Company") filed a petition, pursuant to N.J.A.C. 14:3-5.1 to close its customer payment window at 69 Devoe Place ("Office") in Hackensack, which also houses a call center ("Petition"). This Office has been closed for in-person customer payments since the start of the pandemic in March 2020. The Petitioner has complied with N.J.A.C. 14:3-5.1(c) and (e), including mailing copies of the petition to the Clerk of the affected municipality, as well as to the New Jersey Division of Rate Counsel ("Rate Counsel").

In the Petition, the Company gave five (5) reasons why the closure of the Office is reasonable and in the public interest. First, the Office is not a secure facility, and it would require several capital improvements to make it safer for the Petitioner's employees. The necessary improvements include the installation of bulletproof material in the customer service area, and making security improvements to the gate, fence, and entry doors. Second, the location presents a higher risk of Covid-19 transmission due to its inadequate social distancing capability. Third, entry into and exit from the Office is limited due to a narrow driveway. Fourth, closing the payment center will enable the Company to have its customer service representatives at the Office focus on other customer service issues, such as answering customer calls and emails. Fifth, there are several alternative ways that customers can make payments, including two (2) other payment centers in Hackensack that are located at 77 Anderson Street and 179 Main Street.

On August 3, 2021, Rate Counsel submitted its comments concerning this matter. In its comments, Rate Counsel noted that prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, an average of 28 customers a day visited the Office, but foot traffic at the location was down 25% in 2019, from its 2016 levels. Further, Rate Counsel noted that the Company has not received any complaints since the Office closed to in-person customer payments at the start of the pandemic. Accordingly, Rate Counsel stated that it did not object to the Board approving the Company's Petition.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

After review of the entire record in this matter, including the comments filed by Rate Counsel, the Board **HEREBY FINDS**:

1. On May 11, 2021, the Company filed a petition, pursuant to N.J.A.C. 14:3-5.1, to close its customer payment window at 69 Devoe Place in Hackensack.
2. Petitioner has complied with N.J.A.C. 14:3-5.1, including the relevant notice requirements.
3. No objections to this closure have been received by the Board.
4. The closure of the payment window located at 69 Devoe Place, is not unreasonable and will not unduly prejudice the public interest.

Therefore, based on the foregoing, the Board **HEREBY APPROVES** the closure of the Company's payment window located at 69 Devoe Place in Hackensack, New Jersey, subject to the following conditions:

1. This Order shall not be construed as directly or indirectly fixing for any purposes whatsoever the value of any tangible or intangible assets now owned or hereafter to be owned by the Company; and
2. 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 any other matter affecting the Company, including any request that may be made to recover costs associated with this closure.

This order shall be effective November 24, 2021.

DATED: November 17, 2021

BOARD OF PUBLIC UTILITIES
BY:



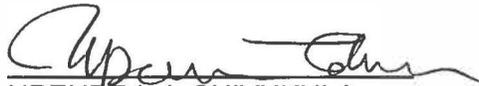
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PRESIDENT



MARY-ANNA HOLDEN
COMMISSIONER



DIANNE SOLOMON
COMMISSIONER



UPENDRA J. CHIVUKULA
COMMISSIONER



ROBERT M. GORDON
COMMISSIONER

ATTEST: 

AIDA CAMACHO-WELCH
SECRETARY

IN THE MATTER OF THE PETITION OF SUEZ WATER NEW JERSEY INC. FOR APPROVAL
TO CLOSE ITS CUSTOMER PAYMENT WINDOW AT 69 DEVOE PLACE, HACKENSACK, NJ

BPU DOCKET NO. WO21050790

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