

Stop the Williams Pipeline Coalition
c/o Noelle Picone
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Brooklyn, New York 11201
campaign.rep@nyc.surfrider.org

March 19, 2020

Via email at john.rhodes@dps.ny.gov
John B. Rhodes, Chair and Chief Executive Officer,
New York State Public Service Commission

Dear Commissioner Rhodes,

We are writing as a coalition of groups about our concerns over the pending public participation process created pursuant to the Order Adopting and Approving Settlement dated November 26, 2019, Case No. 19-G-0678 (the “Settlement Order”).

In light of the current coronavirus public health crisis that New York State—and the rest of the country—is facing, we request that the public meetings conducted by National Grid pursuant to the Settlement Order be postponed until the crisis abates.

While National Grid has changed the meetings to a “virtual” setting, that does not solve the participation problem for the public. Many people are currently too ill or distracted to participate in a meeting. People are worried about the health of their loved ones, when they are getting their next paycheck, or whether they will be able to get groceries. Many people are dealing with the stresses of working from home while also having to deal with childcare. There are also many New Yorkers who do not have the luxury of being able to work from home. So, they are dealing with having to get to work every day in the face of this dangerous, and potentially deadly, virus.

Submitting verbal comments at a public meeting is the last thing on the minds of the public, regardless of what form the meetings take. Additionally, not everyone has access to the Internet or methods of submitting verbal comments. This is not the time to be holding a public meeting in any format.

The Settlement Order contemplates a meaningful public participation process in an “open and transparent” setting. Holding public meetings during the largest health care crisis that this country has faced in many decades runs completely contrary to the purpose of the Settlement Order and, frankly, is irresponsible and unethical. It completely defeats the purpose of a “public meeting” if a large portion of the public is unable to participate.

As the state agency charged with properly regulating this monopoly utility and the public participation process mandated by the Settlement Order, we ask that you direct National Grid to

postpone its public meetings until a time when the coronavirus does not present such a threat and distraction to New Yorkers.

We remind you that National Grid was ordered to hold these meetings, in part, because it abused the public trust by issuing an unnecessary self-imposed moratorium. By continuing with these meetings during a time of crisis while curtailing public involvement, National Grid only risks furthering that damage.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to your response. Please respond to Noelle Picone, campaign.rep@nyc.surfrider.org. Please email rather than mail any correspondence as the first virtual meeting is this Monday, March 23, 2020.

Sincerely,

Stop the Williams Pipeline Coalition

350Brooklyn,
350.org,
Food & Water Watch,
New York Communities for Change,
Sane Energy Project,
Surfrider Foundation NYC Chapter, and
Rockaway Beach Civic Association

cc: *Via Email at secretary@dps.ny.gov*
Hon. Michelle Phillips, Secretary to the Public Service Commission,

Via Email at john.rhodes@dps.ny.gov
John Sano, Public Service Commission

Via email at philip.decicco2@nationalgrid.com
Philip A. DeCicco, Vice President and Deputy General Counsel, National Grid USA