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**Sent:** September-13-16 1:21 PM

**To:** BoardSec

**Subject:** Letter of Comment Submitted: EB-2016-0061

## LETTER OF COMMENT

### Comments:

Greetings and thank you for allowing me to comment on the application by Canadian Niagara Power to increase their distribution rates in Port Colborne and Fort Erie.

CNP has managed the local distribution network through a lease from Port Colborne Hydro, a subsidiary of the City of Port Colborne, from 2002 - 2012. The company then exercised their option to purchase Port Colborne Hydro. They are now the sole owner operators of the network.

I have lived in Port Colborne since 2011 and in that time the quality of delivery has been acceptable.

What has not been acceptable is the degradation of customer service.

When I first located to this city, CNP had a local office that customers could visit. That office was closed and from that time, there has been no local point of presence for customer service. While this does not impact me significantly, there are many in this city that have been inconvenienced.

The Regional Municipality of Niagara has the third highest proportion of senior citizens of all municipalities in the Province of Ontario. Port Colborne has the highest proportion of senior citizens within Niagara. As such, many of our senior residents that prefer doing their business in person cannot do so unless they choose to make the 60km round trip to/from CNP's Fort Erie office. Note that there is no efficient and affordable transportation between Port Colborne and Fort Erie.

I would also like to note that even for Fort Erie residents, accessing CNP's offices are challenging. They are located in an out of the way industrial area that is not serviced by affordable public transportation.

While many people have embraced telephone and computer banking and, therefore, have little reason to visit a local office, many seniors do not share this method of doing business. Further, many seniors are also uncomfortable with paying their bills at their local financial institution.

I would also like the OEB to know that even when customers do have contact with CNP, the general quality of customer service is rather poor. When calling in, it is not uncommon to wait on the telephone line for many minutes to speak with a customer service agent. Further, it has been my experience that the customer service department seems to have little regard for their customers. In my experience, I have had to forward my inquiries to more than one person because of what I perceive as the staff's lack of empathy or interest in helping customers.

As an example, recently I sent an email on behalf of my elderly parents to inquire as to why their utility account was closed a few days before the date that was requested. Not only did it take

CNP 9 days to reply to my inquiry, their answer was for me to call them.

Similarly, a few months ago I sent an email to CNP to comment on this application when it was first announced. It took two weeks to receive a reply and it came from someone claiming to be a CNP employee and yet there was no signature in their email. In other words, they did not even identify what position they held with the company.

In one other example, until just over a year ago, I was having challenges with paying my invoice on time. When I first subscribed to the service, the billing due date was near the end of the month when I rarely had enough funds available to pay the bill. I asked twice about changing the billing date and was flatly refused with the explanation that company policy set billing dates and they could not be adjusted. Finally last year after being frustrated at paying late charges every month, I drove to Fort Erie to speak to management about it. The customer service supervisor was very friendly and told me that changing the billing date was no problem. Problem solved. My question is, if it was so easy to accomplish, why had I been told twice that it was not possible? I apparently have paid out a lot of money in late fees for no good reason.

What I have just told you sounds more like the horror stories of customers from Hydro One. I would note that that company has apparently made many improvements to their policies including guaranteeing to return a customer's inquiry within 2 business days. While Hydro One is a much larger company and services many more customers than CNP, this is the level of service that should be expected especially since local utilities hold a monopoly on providing electricity to its customers.

It is my opinion that the EOB should deny the application by Canadian Niagara Power for an increase in distribution rates until they can demonstrate that they can provide excellence in customer service to their customers.

I look forward to presenting to the EOB at the public hearing on September 13.

Thank you.

**Name:** John Robinson

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