

Residents say 'no' to proposed Pepco rate hike

Speakers at public hearing acknowledge some improvement but want to see more

by Margie Hyslop, Staff Writer, *The Gazette*. Published June 27, 2012.

Montgomery County residents told Maryland Public Service Commission officials Monday that Pepco does not deserve a 4 percent rate hike requested by the electric utility.

Pepco's application for a rate increase, which the PSC must act on by July 13, is calculated so that the utility would collect about \$67.7 million more from ratepayers.

Pepco has said it needs the money, in part, to pay for vegetation management and improvements.

The six residents who spoke at a public hearing Monday night disagreed and urged Commissioner Kevin Hughes, who conducted the hearing, to deny Pepco's request.

"I oppose a rate increase — I don't think it will be used very well by current management," said Major Giese of Rockville.

Pepco managers have not been accountable for providing reliable electric service and have "shifted blame to trees," Giese said.

Kate Planco Waybright, interim executive director of Progressive Maryland, said that she and her organization are "strongly" against a rate increase.

She said Pepco cut maintenance to increase profits for its parent company, while ratepayers in the past few years lost millions of dollars in spoiled food and lost work time waiting for electric service to be restored.

Patricia Mulready of Silver Spring told Hughes that Pepco should not get a rate hike "unless they do something different," such as install more outage-resistant tree wire.

Joe Edgell of Takoma Park said he has lived in several places in the United States but has yet to see a company that has the "level of problems, let alone the arrogance, of Pepco."

Edgell and others said the utility's performance has improved some but not enough since a series of prolonged outages prompted the PSC to begin investigating the utility's reliability in August 2010.

"This isn't going to happen in a minute," Pepco spokesman Bob Hailey said of Pepco's reliability improvements.

The average time it took Pepco to restore a customer's service in 2011 was 6.98 hours, but the average time to restore power improved to 1.8 hours when only "blue sky days" without storms or major events were considered, according to reports that Pepco filed with the PSC last month. That was better than the 8.41 hours and two hours on "blue sky days" that it took Pepco to restore service in 2010.

Critics at the hearing said the improvements probably had more to do with mild weather the past year than Pepco performance measures.