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September 7, 2021

Mr. Patrick Wruck  
Commission Secretary and Manager  
Regulatory Support  
British Columbia Utilities Commission  
Suite 410, 900 Howe Street  
Vancouver, BC V6Z 2N3

Dear Mr. Wruck:

**RE: British Columbia Utilities Commission (BCUC or Commission)  
British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority (BC Hydro)  
Complaint Filed by E.C.  
Final Argument**

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BC Hydro writes to provide its Final Argument with regard to the Complaint filed by E.C. This complaint concerns the provision of new permanent service, including the installation of a new Low-Profile Transformer, to the home of E.C., located at West 51<sup>st</sup> Avenue in Vancouver.

In the sections below, BC Hydro:

- Provides an overview of E.C.'s request for new service;
- Explains why the only option to provide the new service is the Low-Profile Transformer;
- Explains that E.C. was aware of the Low-Profile Transformer and its proposed location before their sewer and gas lines were installed; and
- Explains why E.C. is responsible for costs associated with the relocation of the sewer and gas lines to accommodate the Low-Profile Transformer.

## **1 OVERVIEW OF E.C.'S REQUEST FOR NEW SERVICE**

On April 30, 2018, E.C. contacted BC Hydro about temporary service during the construction of their new home. Their original home (along with three neighbouring properties) was serviced from a pole line on a City of Vancouver (**City**) easement. This line runs west from East Boulevard along the back of E.C.'s property. There is an overhead transformer located on this line situated in the Arbutus Greenway east of their property (please refer to the map found in Attachment 1).

On May 3, 2018, BC Hydro confirmed temporary service from the existing easement pole. However, BC Hydro informed E.C. that the new permanent service would need to be designed to meet BC Hydro's access requirements, which would consist of an underground connection, and that they would need to provide a location on their property for a Low Profile Transformer. Just like a transformer on a pole, BC Hydro uses Low Profile Transformers to supply underground service to single family homes.

After a site visit on May 8, 2018, BC Hydro confirmed the temporary service requirements to E.C. and reiterated that the new home's permanent service would require a Low-Profile Transformer on their property.

On May 16, 2018, BC Hydro provided a marked-up site plan with proposed locations for the Low-Profile Transformer as well as its dimensions and asked E.C. to discuss these locations with the City. Throughout this project, BC Hydro has been willing to schedule and attend meetings with E.C. and the City to advance progress. However, it is the responsibility of the owners of the property to coordinate with the City, BC Hydro, and any third party utilities to ensure their new home meets all applicable requirements, as well as their own project timelines.

On August 7, 2018, E.C. emailed BC Hydro with several concerns regarding their new home's proposed underground service and the Low-Profile Transformer. BC Hydro replied explaining that E.C. could work with the City to find a suitable location for the proposed Low-Profile Transformer and clarified that BC Hydro required a right-of-way for its new Low-Profile Transformer. We asked E.C. to submit an Electric service connections on multi-residential, commercial and industrial projects or Electric Service Information form, to determine the required size of their permanent service.

An Electric Service Information form is required for all types of new service requests, including residential homes; however, given the reference to multi-residential, commercial and industrial projects, E.C. was under the impression that BC Hydro believed they were building multiple residence homes such as townhouses and condominiums.

In an email from BC Hydro to E.C. dated August 13, 2018, BC Hydro explained that a single Electronic Service Information form is used for all service applications in order to determine the size and type of service required.<sup>1</sup> BC Hydro acknowledges that the title of the Electronic Service Information form may be misleading and apologizes for any confusion.

We have not received a completed Electric Service Information form but did receive the information the form would have provided from E.C. in April 2020.

On September 17, 2018, BC Hydro emailed E.C. informing them of a conflict with the proposed location of the gas and sewer service for their property. In the email, BC Hydro

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<sup>1</sup> BC Hydro Rebuttal to E.C. responses to IR No. 1 at page 2.

confirmed that no other utilities can be located beneath a Low-Profile Transformer and advised E.C. to identify an alternate location for the gas and sewer service.

On April 20, 2020, BC Hydro followed up with E.C. with regard to BC Hydro's Low-Profile Transformer requirements. However, by this time, E.C. had already installed their sewer and gas lines without allocating space on their property for the Low-Profile Transformer and a right-of-way. As a result, in order to install the Low-Profile Transformer, the sewer and gas lines need to be relocated.

## **2 THE ONLY OPTION TO PROVIDE SERVICE IS THE LOW-PROFILE TRANSFORMER**

BC Hydro provides new or upgraded service to its customers in accordance with its Electric Tariff. Sections 3.1 (New and Replacement Service Connections) and 8.2 (Types of Distribution Extensions) of the Electric Tariff state that BC Hydro will provide service connections and extensions, "subject to and in accordance with BC Hydro's current distribution system development plans, distribution standards and applicable laws and regulations in each case." BC Hydro's current design practices require new infrastructure to be constructed along public roads or along BC Hydro rights-of-way that are cleared of trees and are accessible by our crews and equipment.

The reason for this requirement is that past construction practices have resulted in certain cases where overhead distribution infrastructure was constructed at the back of residential lots instead of on public property along property frontages. Over time, access to these overhead corridors has been impacted by, among other things, the growth of trees and the installation of fences. This has resulted in BC Hydro being unable to reasonably access its infrastructure without significant impacts to property owners.

Therefore, with respect to E.C.'s request for service, upgrading the existing overhead pole line within the City's utility easement is not an option, because it would not be in accordance with BC Hydro's current design practices and the Electric Tariff.<sup>2</sup>

This is consistent with BC Hydro's past practice. There have been no new, permanent connections made to the existing infrastructure since April 2018 when E.C. applied for new service. In fact, the last connection made to the existing transformer was completed in September 2003.<sup>3</sup> If the neighbouring properties request new or upgraded service, they will similarly be required to take service from an accessible route that complies with

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<sup>2</sup> See BC Hydro's response to BCUC IR 2.2. Upgrading the current transformer would also require upgrading all of the conductors within the City of Vancouver utility easement to address the voltage drop on the line to the Complainant's property. An increase in conductor size would further necessitate the installation of additional pole anchors and down guys (support wires) to support the increased horizontal tensions caused by the larger conductors.

<sup>3</sup> BC Hydro response to BCUC IR 2.3.

BC Hydro's current design practices and the Electric Tariff. Any infrastructure that is no longer required as a result of such requests will be removed.<sup>4</sup>

There was another potential option to provide service involving the installation of two new poles along West 51<sup>st</sup> Avenue, but that option was not supported by the City. In an email dated September 17, 2018, the City stated: "As per section 3.9 of the Utilities Design and Construction Manual, the City does not permit any utility to install new pole lines or extensions to existing pole line."<sup>5</sup> On that same day, BC Hydro advised E.C. by email that the City had not approved that option.

In an email dated June 13, 2019, BC Hydro reiterated to E.C. that the Low-Profile Transformer was the only option to provide new service to their home.

### **3 E.C. WERE MADE AWARE OF THE LOW-PROFILE TRANSFORMER AND ITS PROPOSED LOCATION**

BC Hydro provided E.C. with the opportunity to consider the potential location of the Low-Profile Transformer on several occasions.

- In an email dated May 3, 2018, BC Hydro advised E.C. of the need to provide a location for the Low-Profile Transformer;
- In an email dated May 9, 2018, BC Hydro confirmed that an onsite Low-Profile Transformer would be required and would need to be underground;
- In an email dated August 8, 2018, BC Hydro reconfirmed, among other things, the need for E.C. to propose a location for the Low-Profile Transformer and the need to complete the Electronic Service Information form to determine costs; and
- In an email dated August 13, 2018, BC Hydro suggested that E.C., the City and BC Hydro should work together to find a location for the Low-Profile Transformer that would be acceptable to all parties.<sup>6</sup>

In their response to an information request from the BCUC, E.C. acknowledged that they had the map of the proposed location for the Low-Profile Transformer on May 16, 2018, which was before the sewer and gas lines were installed on their property. However, E.C. submits that it was BC Hydro's obligation to notify the City (and presumably FortisBC) about providing electricity service to the home by way of a Low-Profile Transformer.

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<sup>4</sup> BC Hydro response to BCUC IR 4.1.

<sup>5</sup> See the email dated September 17, 2018 (RE: 2016 W 51st Ave., Vancouver.msg) from the City of Vancouver, which was attached to BC Hydro's email to the BCUC dated March 4, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> BC Hydro Rebuttal to E.C. responses to IR No. 1 at page 3.

BC Hydro respectfully submits that it has no such obligation. For any private development, it is the responsibility of the landowner (or their consultant or contractor) to coordinate the utility services for their property with any applicable municipal, crown or private utilities, each of which may have their own unique requirements to provide service.<sup>7</sup>

BC Hydro is not privy to information from the City's Engineering Department pertaining to the installation of their utility service lines and BC Hydro does not normally engage the City or other private utilities about their proposed infrastructure on private property.

Due to the constraints on the property from the protected trees, BC Hydro recommended a meeting with E.C. and stakeholders from the City regarding the location of the Low-Profile Transformer, but the meeting did not occur.<sup>8</sup>

#### **4 E.C. ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR COSTS TO RELOCATE THE UTILITIES**

BC Hydro installs Low-Profile Transformers in response to a customer's request for a new or upgraded service. BC Hydro works with the customer to install the necessary equipment in a mutually acceptable location in accordance with the applicable standards and regulations. If a mutually acceptable location cannot be agreed upon, BC Hydro is unable to provide service.<sup>9</sup>

In the past, BC Hydro has not paid to relocate underground services in order to install an Low-Profile Transformer.<sup>10</sup> Finding a location that does not conflict with other underground utilities or paying for the relocation of such underground services is the responsibility of the customer.

In this case, E.C. was aware that a Low-Profile Transformer was required and was also aware of its proposed location before the underground sewer and gas lines were installed.

In BC Hydro's view, it would be unfair to other customers if, in this case, BC Hydro paid the costs associated with the relocation of the sewer and gas lines on the E.C. property.

BC Hydro will pay the costs to install the Low-Profile Transformer and the arborist's fees to address protected trees on the E.C. property, as required by the City. E.C. is responsible for paying BC Hydro's standard connection charges and meter installation charge, totaling approximately \$1,451, as well as any costs associated with the relocation of sewer and gas lines on their property.

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<sup>7</sup> BC Hydro Rebuttal to E.C. responses to IR No. 1 at page 2.

<sup>8</sup> BC Hydro Rebuttal to E.C. responses to IR No. 1 at page 2.

<sup>9</sup> BC Hydro response to BCUC IR 3.1.

<sup>10</sup> BC Hydro response to BCUC IR 3.1.

## 5 CONCLUSION

For the reasons discussed above, BC Hydro submits that the Low-Profile Transformer is the only option to provide the new service to E.C.'s home. E.C. knew about the Low-Profile Transformer and its proposed location before their sewer and gas lines were installed and are responsible for any costs associated with their relocation.

For further information, please contact Alicia Henderson at 604-623-4381 or by email at [bchydroregulatorygroup@bchydro.com](mailto:bchydroregulatorygroup@bchydro.com).

Yours sincerely,



Chris Sandve  
Chief Regulatory Officer

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Enclosure



Attachment A – E.C. Complaint

This aerial screenshot shows the service lines in red on the easement.

