

Summary
Patterson Park and Highlandtown -
BGE-PSC Meeting with Senator Ferguson
Thursday, September 9, 2021

Introduction: Senator Ferguson opened the meeting by thanking the participants for their participation and for responding quickly in response to concerns about natural gas regulator installations at homes in the neighborhood. The Senator reiterated the frustration of homeowners and explained his expectation that this meeting would provide productive information and answers, but not necessarily decisions. There are several pre-submitted questions that will be answered during the presentations and there will be time for other questions and answers.

Participants:

- Senator Bill Ferguson
- Jason Stanek – PSC Chairman
- John Clementson – PSC Deputy Chief Engineer
- Allyson Black Woodson, BGE
- Eric Parker, BGE
- Faviola Donato-Galindo, BGE
- Other BGE representatives
- Approximately 25 homeowners in Patterson Park

Presentations:

- Chairman Stanek:
 - The Public Service Commission (PSC) is responsible for overseeing the safety of utilities, including the project at hand.
 - As BGE will explain, we are in the midst of a 15-year project to replace old low pressure gas pipeline systems with an upgraded medium pressure system.
 - This will bring more reliability, less outages, less leaks, less cracks, and a safer system.
 - Three years ago, a low-pressure natural gas utility line in Massachusetts exploded in 131 residences; there were no safety regulators in the individual townhomes.
 - This is the type of event we are hoping to avoid with these upgrades.
 - Generally, we have not seen regulators on homes in Baltimore City. Some have been installed on E. Pratt St, with more to come.
 - This is largely a safety and liability program that has been approved by PSC.
 - It is a program that has been designed to meet best industry practices.
 - But it is understood that energy infrastructure is not pretty to look at, and many citizens have real concerns.
 - The Chairman wants to be responsive and was able to tour this neighborhood this week and spoke to homeowners.

- Deputy Chief Engineer John Clementson:
 - Reiterated that the installation of regulators is for safety. We want to avoid catastrophic events.
 - If regulator is outside and malfunctions, it will vent to the atmosphere and will not collect (in a basement, garage, etc.)
 - Additionally, it will be easier for the Fire Department to turn off the regulator valve to stop venting.
 - Finally, outside regulators will make it easier to detect issues and will allow BGE to respond faster than if the regulator was inside the home.
 - It is designed to save lives.
- BGE – Eric Parker – Project Manager
 - We are replacing existing gas mains, modernizing equipment, and increasing natural gas pressure from low to medium.
 - As of right now, we have over 90 services scheduled to be modernized for this project.
 - Project timeline: they started in mid-June and have almost completed the gas main installation. They will start soon on the 90 services that have already been scheduled. The installations are expected to be completed by early December, with final sidewalk restoration to occur thereafter.
 - The biggest factor for the timeline is how quickly they can complete services.
 - Not part of the STRIDE program, but it will have the same result on the community.

Open Discussion/Questions from Community:

- Q: Will other residences in the area be subject to this same project?
 - A: Yes, we just completed projects in other areas around Patterson Park.
- Q: Will it roll out to the rest of the neighborhood at any point to change to medium pressure?
 - A: That is correct; our goal is to eliminate low pressure system. We will have to circle back when other parts of the neighborhood will be completed.
- Q: Are there issues with tampering with external unit?
 - A: External regulators are preferred. Equipment is very durable. Tampering can occur, but this has not been an issue for BGE in the past. The benefits outweigh the potential cost.
- Q: Was this regulator approved as part of a program for regular upgrade by PSC?
 - A: That is correct. There have been recommendations from government regulators to move the equipment outside, and industry has accepted that standard.
- Q: Are there multiple regulator options, or just the one?
 - A: Generally, they are all the same. There may be small variations between manufacturers.

- Q: What about installation in historic neighborhoods? There is frustration about the contractor's approach to doing the work. Was there approval for accommodation in historic districts?
 - A: Outside installations have taken place in historic districts.
- Q: Standards for Multi-Family Dwelling units?
 - A: In 2018, the standards changed to ensure new installations took place outside. Now, we are looking to adhere to these standards for already existing buildings.
- Q: Many people frustrated with sub-contractor's works. Is there anything BGE would like to add about review of contractor work?
 - A: There is an inspection team that oversees the quality of work done by contractors. Folks can reach out to BGE via email with concerns and BGE will respond. We want to be aware of issues.
- Q: What outreach from BGE to the community has taken place? It is not clear that each resident received multiple notices or specifics about the project.
 - A: Generally, a notice letter that work will be happening with details and contact information is sent. Then a second, more specific letter, is sent with details on when work occurs. Finally, a third letter will be sent as BGE begins scheduling service work. The final letter is when the contractor reaches out to residents to schedule installation. The communication could be better. BGE uses a contractor for its outreach.
- Q: What are the expectations of residents for these installs? Some residents have stated that contractor told them they needed to perform their own demo work so contractors can reach meters.
 - A: Generally, there needs to be 3 ft of space around the gas meter for maintenance or other work. That clearance must remain for the duration of the installation. We do ask for residents to do the renovation, since many residents prefer to do the renovation instead of having the contractor do that.
- Q: Can regulators be built underground with manhole covers?
 - A: The exterior method of installation is the current means of method, but if manhole covers became an option, we will explore it.
- Q for the PSC: Are there other methods of installation approved by the PSC?
 - A: Other methods exist, but cost was also a consideration. Putting the regulators in an "underground vault" may increase cost more than desirable for PSC.
- Q: Are you willing to consider alternative installation methods after hearing from communities?
 - A: There are instances where outside installation is not feasible. On the Kenwood project, there are 2-3 homes that have interior installation, which is not against our standards but are the exception to the new norm after 2018.
- Q: Who sets those standards and reviews whether property meets those standards?
 - BGE sets the standards, but contractors look at specific properties.
- Q: Has BGE looked at covers or protectors for these regulators?
 - A: We have explored it but have not seen anything that matches what we need. Now, we have not approved a product that works. A cover cannot block access or ventilation or signals.

- Q: If a safer option (such as underground regulator) became available, would there be a process of replacement?
 - A: We would have concerns about underground regulators, and we would need to review it.

Next Steps:

BGE will follow-up on the following issues:

- 1) What discussions have there been related to historic structures and new installations? It was stated that there have been discussions with CHAP for other projects.
- 2) What is the contact information – both email and phone – to report issues with project contractors? What is the process?
- 3) What is the specific timeline for the current project and for the broader city roll-out?
- 4) Please provide specific details about the expectations of homeowners for interior access (for what is the owner responsible).
- 5) What model of regulators are approved? Are there other models that may be utilized for this project?
- 6) What is the relationship between the current project and the STRIDE project?
- 7) Please provide the citation for space requirements for around meters. Are the space requirements part of the inspection process?