Vermont Gas
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December 12, 2012

Hinesburg Selectboard
Town of Hinesburg
10632 VT Route 116
Hinesburg VT 05461

Dear Hinesburg Selectboard Members,

Thank you for your letter dated December 4, 2012 to Vermont Gas and the Public Service Board regarding the Addison Natural Gas Project. After review of your letter, I am glad we agree on the fundamental points that this project benefits Vermont and that natural gas will play an important role in energy planning for the state and the nation. I am hopeful that with this common perspective we will be able to work through the differences and concerns expressed in your letter.

As you know, Vermont Gas expanded into in Hinesburg in 2009. Expansion to Hinesburg would not have been possible but for the previous system expansion in other communities and their willingness to work toward the collective good. As a result, Vermont Gas customers in Hinesburg are saving money and are paying 40% less than they would for oil and 50% less than for propane. Emissions are also lower. With this project we want to bring these same benefits to more Vermonters.

I have observed that virtually every major infrastructure project in Vermont raises questions and concerns that need to be addressed and balanced. That is why we have been in regular contact with the Selectboard and Hinesburg Town Officials – we value your input and want to ensure this process is respectful, and consistent with the state's goals.

Developing a project like this requires balancing many interest including environmental impacts, archaeological areas, constructability, and landowner issues. As part of the required field work to assess the preliminary alignment in Hinesburg along the VELCO corridor, the experts identified environmentally and archaeologically sensitive areas and landowner issues that caused us to evaluate other potential alternative alignments, including the Baldwin Road public right-of-way.

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Our decision to place the alignment along Baldwin Road, as shown on the 45-day plans submitted, was based on several considerations, including the reduction in environmental and archaeological resources impacted and the reduction in the number of private landowner easements. Under the preliminary VELCO alignment we studied, 6.5 miles of would have been on privately owned property; that has been reduced to approximately 2 miles. It is also important to note that there were landowners on this preliminary VELCO alignment that did not want to give permission or access to Vermont Gas and did not want their land used for the project.

We would like to request a public meeting with Hinesburg on January 16th, 2013 during which the reasons for the proposed routing can be explained and concerns and potential alternatives can be discussed. We really want to work with the town to understand the various interests related to environmental, archeological, constructability and land owners to find the best route for this project. I will be in touch to discuss arranging this meeting.

While the petition for a Certificate of Public Good is scheduled to be filed on December 20th, 2012, it may be possible to refine the route alignment after our filing.

Let me again apologize for the accidental and unintentional conflict that occurred when one of our contractors inadvertently entered private lands. As we have explained, this was accidental – there was no intent to cause harm or create difficulties. As we have also indicated, steps have been taken, and protocols put in place to ensure that such an issue does not happen again. I encourage you to let me know immediately of any citizen complaints so I can respond and address the situation in a timely manner.

Finally, with respect to service in the area of Richmond Road, we have explained that the presence of rock and ledge makes construction expensive. We have committed to conducting a further study to characterize the amount of rock in that area in the next construction season. If the Town of Hinesburg plans to provide water or sewer service to the citizens of Hinesburg in that same area in the future, and if you open a utility corridor along that public right of way and road, we would of course be interested in serving people in that area.

I appreciate your willingness to continue the dialogue and work with Vermont Gas to expand service to more Vermonters and provide other communities with the benefits of natural gas that Hinesburg residents have come to appreciate.

Sincerely yours,

Stephen J. Wark

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