

logo not found or type unknown

Dozens of WAPA Customers Vent Frustrations for a Last Time Before Thursday's PSC Vote

WAPA / **Published On December 11, 2019 05:23 AM /**

Robert Moore **December 11, 2019**

Image not found or type unknown



ST. THOMAS -- For Pastor Charles Brown Jr. of Family and Faith African Methodist Episcopal Church and WAPA electric customer, the Water and Power Authority rate issue boils down to two basic concepts: trust and accountability.

And both are absent from the public debate over utility rate changes in the territory. Virgin Islanders, by and large, do not trust WAPA, a government entity. Most will also argue that WAPA has not been held accountable for stunning examples of financial waste and mismanagement.

“The propane project was \$87 million dollars,” Mr. Brown said, referring to the authority’s partial transition from the use of diesel fuel to liquid propane to generate electricity beginning in 2013. “All of a sudden it became \$160 million. We’re paying for that project and nobody from WAPA, that I know of, has been held accountability.”

Several dozen St. Thomians showed up to express their overwhelming discontent with utility rates one final time before the V.I. Public Services Commission (PSC) rules on changes to the base utility rate and other charges on Thursday.

The Virgin Islands Alliance for Consumer Justice invited residential customers, business owners, lawmakers and others to a town-hall meeting Tuesday evening on St. Thomas to air grievances and shed some light on how complex utility rates are calculated.

With the PSC vote just a day away, uncertainty has grown more intense. WAPA in recent weeks has publicly called for “rate adjustments” that would have no impact on monthly utility bills. However, in official filings the authority still requests rate changes which would “nominally” increase power bills.

“This community can’t take another nickel” of rate increase,” said Clarence Payne of the Alliance for Consumer Justice. “The elderly on fixed income. Churches – their light bills are going up and they cannot reach the poor. Small business ... It’s a travesty to talk about.”

The Consortium on Tuesday [obtained a copy PSC staff and consultants LEAC rate change report](#). The document was highly critical of WAPA.

“In a break with the normal protocol for filing a LEAC WAPA has petitioned the Commission to consider three different options that it has presented for the upcoming LEAC rate. It is not immediately clear which of the three options WAPA is petitioning the Commission to adopt,” the December 9th report by the Georgetown Consulting Group Inc. and the PSC technical staff read.

The report focuses on the Levelized Energy Adjustment Clause, or LEAC, rate. The LEAC portion of customers’ bills are supposed to cover the cost WAPA pays for the combination of diesel oil and liquid propane that fuels the massive generators at WAPA’s St. Thomas and St. Croix power plants.

Meanwhile, PSC Hearing Examiner Kye Walker’s report to the PSC was [delayed for days](#) because of a November letter from WAPA Executive Director Lawrence Kupfer in which he said customer utility rates would not change.

“The November 26, 2019, correspondence, on its face, is wholly inconsistent” with Mr. Kupfer’s previous testimony to the PSC and with WAPA’s official base rate filing, Ms. Walker wrote.