WEST VIRGINIA CODE: §24-2H-8

§24-2H-8. Commission approval of operating agreement, acquisition price; rates for distressed and failing utilities; improvement plan; debt obligations; cost recovery.

(a) After an order has been entered pursuant to §24-2H-7 of this code, the distressed utility and another acquiring public utility shall file a petition with the commission under §24-2-12 of this code to approve the necessary operating agreement if such alternative is directed by the commission. After an order has been entered pursuant to §24-2H-7 of this code, the failing utility and acquiring utility shall file a petition with the commission under §24-2-12 of this code, to approve the purchase price of the acquisition. Where the parties are unable to agree on an acquisition price, the filing may request that an evidentiary hearing be held so that the commission may determine the acquisition price and any other issues related to the acquisition. The acquisition price must, at a minimum, satisfy all outstanding loans, tax obligations, required grant repayment, liens, and indebtedness owed by the failing utility or the acquiring utility must agree to assume the indebtednesses if legally permitted. The acquiring utility shall consult with the lenders or lienholders regarding payment in full or the assumption, to the extent legally permissible, of any outstanding obligations of the failing utility.

(b) The parties to an acquisition may propose to the commission other methods of determining the acquisition price.

(c) As part of the proceeding, the acquiring utility may propose to the commission that it be permitted for a reasonable period of time after the date of acquisition, to charge and collect rates from the customers of the failing utility pursuant to a separate tariff, which may be higher or lower than the existing tariff of the distressed or failing utility, or may allow a surcharge on both the acquired and existing customers. A separate tariff or rate filing must be made by the acquiring utility before the commission will consider any increase in rates or allow a surcharge to be placed on the acquiring utility's acquired or existing ratepayers.

(d) As part of this proceeding, the acquiring utility shall submit to the commission for approval a plan, including a timetable for bringing the failing utility into compliance with applicable statutory and regulatory standards, including, but not limited to, plans for regionalization. The acquiring utility shall have previously obtained the approval of the plan from the Department of Environmental Protection and the Bureau for Public Health, as applicable, and those agencies are directed to use their full discretion in working towards long-term solutions that will support compliance. The failing utility shall cooperate with the acquiring utility in negotiating agreements with state and federal agencies, including, but not limited to, negotiation of hold harmless agreements, consent orders or enforcement moratoria during any period of remediation. In addition, the failing utility shall cooperate with the acquiring utility in obtaining the consent of the failing utility's and the acquiring utility's bondholder(s) to the acquisition. The acquiring utility must present to the commission as part of its financing plan, documentation on how the failing utility's

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indebtedness will be paid or assumed.

(e) A nonprofit acquiring public utility may seek grant funding from the Distressed Utilities Account established pursuant to §31-15A-9(i) of this code to repair, maintain, and replace the distressed water and wastewater utilities facilities as needed. The reasonably and prudently incurred costs of the acquiring utility shall be recoverable in rates as provided in §24-2H-9 of this code.

(f) If the distressed or failing utility is a public service district, then the commission shall make a recommendation to the respective county commission(s) with regard to the acquisition of distressed or failing utilities as provided in §16-13A-2(a)(2) of this code. If the distressed or failing utility is a municipal corporation, then the commission shall make a recommendation to the respective municipal council with regard to the acquisition of distressed or failing utilities as provided in §8-12-17 of this code.

(g) The capable proximate utility may propose one or more of the cost recovery methods or incentives set forth in §24-2H-9 of this code as part of its petition for approval from the commission.

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