

PROCEDURAL ORDER: CONDUCT OF HEARINGS

In this Order, the Vermont Public Service Board (“Board”) seeks comments on how to ensure the orderly conduct of the technical hearings in Dockets 8641, 8642, 8643, and 8645. The Board is anticipating the need for such planning in light of disruptions that occurred during recent prehearing conferences in three of these cases.¹ These hearings were disrupted by members of the public who protested the proceedings by shouting, singing loudly, and leaving their seats to crowd the physical space around many of the parties and the court reporter. This conduct made it difficult for the parties and Board staff to communicate efficiently while conducting official State business. At the February 19, 2016, prehearing conference in Docket 8642, the number of people engaging in disruptive behavior was noticeably larger than that during the previous prehearing conferences, possibly in response to calls from individuals or groups opposed to the Vermont Gas Systems, Inc. pipeline project to attend hearings in these proceedings for the express purpose of preventing the hearings.

Recently, the Board has been advised by law enforcement officials that they are concerned about their ability to maintain order in the hearing room should large numbers of individuals continue to attend the proceedings in these dockets and attempt to disrupt the conduct of official State business.

Given the disruptions that have occurred to date in three of the four above-captioned dockets, and given the possibility of continued disruptions in each of these proceedings, the Board is soliciting recommendations from the parties of record in each proceeding on what steps, if any, the Board should consider taking to ensure that future hearings in these dockets can be conducted in an orderly fashion and to ensure the safety of all participants and anyone else in attendance. In developing their recommendations, parties should consider options ranging from mechanisms for maintaining order in the hearing room with full public access allowed, up to and including prohibiting access to the hearing room by the general public during the course of official State business in these proceedings.

Parties shall file their recommendations no later than close of business on March 31, 2016.

SO ORDERED.

1. These prehearing conferences were held on December 30, 2015, in Docket 8645; February 9, 2016, in Docket 8641; and February 19, 2016, in Docket 8642.

Dated at Montpelier, Vermont, this 17th day of March, 2016.

<u>s/James Volz</u>)	
)	PUBLIC SERVICE
)	
<u>s/Margaret Cheney</u>)	BOARD
)	
)	OF VERMONT
<u>s/Sarah Hofmann</u>)	

OFFICE OF THE CLERK

FILED: March 17, 2016

ATTEST: s/Judith C. Whitney
Clerk of the Board

NOTICE TO READERS: This decision is subject to revision of technical errors. Readers are requested to notify the Clerk of the Board (by e-mail, telephone, or in writing) of any apparent errors, in order that any necessary corrections may be made. (E-mail address: psb.clerk@vermont.gov)