STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
ENERGY FACILITY SITING BOARD

IN RE: THE NARRAGANSETT ELECTRIC COMPANY'S NOTICE OF INTENT APPLICATION FOR THE JOHNSTON TAP LINES T172S-2 & S171-2 115kV REBUILD PROJECT – DOCKET NO. SB 2025-03

ORDER AND DECISION

I. INTRODUCTION

On May 16, 2025, The Narragansett Electric Company ("Company") filed a Notice of Intent Application pursuant to Rule 1.6(F) of the Board's Rules of Practice and Procedure (Rules)[1] for the proposed rebuild of the T172-2 & S171-2 115 kV transmission lines (collectively, the "Johnston Tap Lines").[2] The Company proposes the replacement all the structures, wires, and shield wires in the 1.9 miles from the Johnston Substation to the tap points on the T172S and S171 Main lines (collectively, the "Project" and/or "NOI"). Pursuant to the instant application, the Company requests that the Board determine that the Project is not subject to the full Board permitting process pursuant to Rule 1.6(F) because it does not constitute an alteration to a major energy facility and any impact the proposed Project may have on the environmental resources and the social environment will be negligible.

II. STANDARD

Rule 1.6(F) of the Board's Rules provides for an abbreviated review of an application for the construction of power lines of more than 1,000 feet, but less than 6,000 feet, or the modification or relocation of existing power lines. See *445-RICR-00-00-1.6(F).* Pursuant to Rule 1.6(F), a copy of the Notice of Intent must be filed with the Council of the municipality

[1] 445-RICR-00-00-1.6(F).
[2] Because the transmission lines the Company seeks to rebuild have a design rating of greater than or equal to 69 kV, they are classified as major energy facilities and requires license from the EFSB pursuant R.I.Gen.Law § 42-98-4. *Siting Report, at § 1.3.*

affected by the construction of said lines at least ninety days before construction is commenced. *Id.* Rule 1.6(F) also allows the municipality, or any intervenor, up to thirty days after the Notice to file an objection with the Board. *Id.*

Pursuant to Rule 1.6(F), after an abbreviated application is filed and a public hearing held in one or more of the cities or towns affected by the project, the Board must make a determination as to whether the project "may result in a significant impact on the environment or the public health, safety and welfare."[3] *Id*. If the Board finds no significant impact, the project does not constitute an alteration of a major energy facility, and the applicant may proceed without further review.

III. THE APPLICATION

In support of its NOI, the Company filed a Siting Report outlining the proposed Project. The Company first proffers that the instant Project is needed to improve the condition and performance of the Johnston Tap Lines between the mainline right-of-way located in Johnston and the Johnston Substation. *Siting Report, at 2.2.* According to the Siting Report, such need includes the fact that the majority of the All Aluminum Conductor ("AAC") on the line were installed in 1966. The standard life expectancy for the conductor is 65 years. *Id.* On top of the conductor nearing its end-of-life expectancy, an inspection of the conductor in 2023 revealed

[3] The rule specifies that the Board would make a determination within sixty days. However, to the extent that an application is complex, the Board may exercise its discretion to extend the review period in order to hold an evidentiary hearing to examine the project specifics on the record to make the required evidentiary finding. Section 1.6(J) of the Rules also provides that the Board "may at any time require the applicant, or the party responsible for filing a notice of intent as described above, to file additional information." The Board exercised its discretion in this case to extend the time to consider the additional information.

damage in the form of a "birdcaged" conductor[4] at one location. *Id.* The Siting Report also identified issues with the condition and age of the wood structures on the line. In addition to the fact that 51% of the structures are surpassing their life expectancy, 42% of the structures are H-frame structures that are susceptible to avian nesting and damage. *Id.* The Company reported that recent inspections in 2020 and 2023 revealed that the wood structures are exhibiting signs of woodpecker damage, pole deterioration and pole rot along with six (6) failed insulators. *Id.* The Company further detailed the plan to install optic fiber shield wires along the lines to improve grid automation and other device communications.

By and through the instant NOI, the Company thus proposes a rebuild of 1.9 miles of the Johnston Tap Lines in order to avoid future reliability issues as well as safety risks. *Id. at § 2.3.* Detailed images of the proposed Project route (including adjacent properties and renderings of proposed structures) were submitted and presented to the Board. These images can be found in "Siting Report Figures" available on the Energy Facility Siting Board (EFSB) docket page at: https://ripuc.ri.gov/Docket-SB-2025-03. See also *Transcript ("Tr.") (July 22, 2025),* TNEC Exhibit 3. As described in the Company's Siting Report, the rebuild will consist of replacing thirty-seven (37) structures using the "direct embed method" with fourteen (14) structures being replaced on "concrete caisson foundations." *Siting Report, at 3.1.* "One (1) existing structure will be removed, and five (5) existing structures will undergo general maintenance. The existing conductor on all Tap Lines will be reconductored with new single 1113 KCMIL Aluminum Conductor Steel-Supported cable ("ACSS") conductor. The existing shield wire will be replaced with one (1) Overhead Ground Wire ("OHGW") and one (1) Optic-Fiber Ground Wire

[4] "Birdcaging occurs when the conductor strands naturally unravel. . . . Birdcaging indicates that the conductor is damaged, and may lead to further damage to insulators and ultimately the failure of the conductor." *Siting Report at 2.2.*

("OPGW") on the T172S-2 line, and with two (2) OHGW wires on the S171-2 Line. The line will be designed using structures that can support a second circuit in the future." *Id.* The Company also proposes maintaining and upgrading access roads, signage and grounding along the full length of Project, as applicable. *Id.*

Although calling for some vegetation mowing to provide safe works sites for personnel within the ROW, no tree removals are expected. *Id. at § 3.2.1.1.* In addition, the Company proposes clearly marking any wetland to prevent encroachment on wetlands, as well as following appropriate forestry techniques to minimize ground disturbance. *Id.* The Company's Siting Report also outlines the soil and sediment control plan and devices (straw wattles/bales, siltation fencing and/or chip bales) that will be utilized in accordance with approved plans and permit requirements. *Id. at § 3.2.1.2.* The Company also reported that because the Project involves work activities on existing lines with an established and maintained ROW, the Project is anticipated to have only negligible impacts on the geology, surficial geology, air quality, population trends, and employment and labor force. *Id. at § 5.* The impact of the Project on the natural and social environments is described in Section 7 of the Siting Report. The Company proffers that any impact on environmental resources and/or the social environment, as more fully detailed in the Siting Report, will be negligible. The Company accordingly requests a finding that the Project will not result in a significant impact on the environment or the public health, safety and welfare such that it is not an alteration of a major energy facility and is not subject to the full EFSB permitting process. See *Notice of Intent Application, at § 5.*

IV. PROCEDURAL HISTORY

In accordance with Rule 1.6 the Company's proposed Project was presented to the Town of Johnston. *Tr. (July 22, 2025) at 134.* See also *445-RICR-00-00-1.6(C).* In that meeting, the

Company advised the Town of the scope of the Project including the height increases of the new poles. *Id.* Consistent with Rule 1.6(F), a public comment hearing on the Project was held in the Town of Johnston on October 1, 2025.[5] *Notice of Public Comment Hearing (Aug. 20, 2025).* However, no public comments were offered. In the instant case, there were no objections to the NOI filed by either the municipality involved or any potential intervenor.

On June 9, 2025, the Board issued its First Set of Data Requests to the Company identifying twenty-four (24) requests for specific information. The information requested first centered on the Company's policy regarding the use and replacement of wood poles with steel poles. The Board asked the Company to provide a complete copy of the Company's current standards, policies, engineering guidance, or transmission line design criteria that prohibit the use of wood poles for new or replacement transmission structures along with all applicable versions or revisions that have been in effect since 2010. The information sought also included a request for the engineering guidance and basis for said policy and the cost comparison between the steel and wood poles. The Board also requested more particular information on the useful life and justification to support the replacement of each structure identified in the instant Project including any inspection reports and/or field notes related to the condition of the current poles. On July 2, 2025, the Company forwarded its responses to the Board's First Set of Data Requests that provided all the detailed information requested, including the Company's policy for the replacement of wood poles with steel poles. *See Tr.,* TNEC's Exhibit 4.

[5] The previous version of the order indicated that notice of the public hearing had been sent to abutters when the notice sent to the abutters was for the open house prior to the filing.

V. EVIDENTIARY HEARING

On July 22, 2025, after proper notice, an evidentiary hearing was conducted by the Board in accordance with Rule 1.6(J). See *445-RICR-00-00-1.6(J).* The purpose of the hearing was to obtain additional information related to whether the proposed Project is entitled to an expedited decision or whether the Project could move forward without a full hearing and review by the Siting Board. *Tr. at 5-6.* During this hearing, in addition to the NOI and Siting Report, the Company introduced its Responses to the Board's First Data Request and its Siting Board Figures as Exhibits. See *TNEC Exhibits 1 through 4*. In addition, testimony was received from Steve Selkregg (Director of Asset Management), Glenn Harper (Lead Construction Supervisor of the Project from EN Trust Solutions), Brandon Farrell (Director of Transmission Engineering from Westwood Professional Services), Alison Milliman (Project Manager for Environmental Permitting and Licensing Services from BSC Group); and Ricardo R. Austrich (Director of Landscape Architecture from BSC Group).

During the July 22, 2025, evidentiary hearing, Mr. Selkregg, Director of Asset Management, first explained that in determining if there is a need for a project including the rebuild of the Johnston Tap lines, the Company currently follows the ISO New England's Transmission Owner's Asset Condition Process Guide. *Tr. at 19.* Overall, the Company reviews the condition of the assets as a whole, the maintenance history, outage history, age and any age triggers, such to identify solutions to mitigate the problems. *Id. at 20.* Once an issue with an asset is identified the Company reviews potential solutions taking into account the reliability, cost, construction sequences, outage constraints, safety, and other circumstances. *Id.* In accordance with the ISO New England Process Guide, the Company also takes into consideration whether

the issues identified affect the entire line or they are more targeted issues which could be addressed with more targeted maintenance. *Id. at 20-21.*

Mr. Selkregg, Director of Asset Management who oversees the team responsible for scoping the rebuild project and reviewing the need and scope of the project, explained that applying these standards to the Johnston Tap line demonstrated that the Project is needed to improve the condition and performance of the Lines, which are nearing the end of their useful lives. Mr. Selkgregg testified that the existing line has two H-frame single circuit lines constructed with wood poles. *Tr. At 86.* The lines are transmission lines into the Johnston substation which feeds over 50,000 customers. *Id.* Prior to PPL's acquisition of the Company, this line had been identified by the previous owners in 2020 for partial replacement. *Id.* The scope of the proposed work in the 2020 plans, however, was limited to the replacement of approximately half the wood structures with steel poles. *Tr. At 87*. Mr. Selkregg testified at the evidentiary hearing that because this line has an aging conductor with "vintage insulation" which would also need to be replaced shortly, along with an aging shield wire, the Company concluded that rather than replace half the structures now, it would more cost effective to rebuild the entire line by replacing all the wooden structures and install a new conductor and shield wire. The Company reasoned that the reconductoring at a future date could result in overload structures that would need replacement as well as having to replace the remaining wood poles at a later time. In essence the Company seeks the current rebuild in order to perform all work in one construction sequence rather than possibly three construction sequences in the future. *Id. at 87.*

The Project proposes keeping single pole lines into Johnston Tap substation in order to maintain service to the customers during construction. *Id. at 88.* As explained by Mr. Selkgregg the tie-in to the mainline prohibited an alternative solution without resulting in power outages for

the 50,000 customers serviced by the Johston substation. *Id. at 88, 93-94, 96-97.* The majority of the new steel poles would be approximately 20 feet higher than the current structures, with some being forty (40) feet higher due to topography and change from a tension structure to a suspension structure. *Id. at 99, 115-116.*[6] The Project is projected by the Company to contribute to the overall reliability of the circuits and service to the customers. *Id. at 89.*

The Company also reported that they have environmental permits in hand for the Project. These include the joint application for freshwater wetlands permit and the Rhode Island Pollutant Discharge Elimination System, as well as the Army Corps permit under section 404 of the Clean Water Act. *Tr. At 125*. In obtaining the DEM permit, the Company worked with the DEM reviewer to ensure that the Project avoided two populations of state-listed species. *Id.*

In summary, in order to improve the condition and reliability of the T-172S-1 and S-171-1 lines, the proposed Project will replace the conductor, install optic fiber shield wire and replace the supporting wood structures that have deteriorated since construction in the 1960s.

VI. DECISION

On October 22, 2025, the Board conducted a properly noticed Open Meeting to determine whether the project may result in a significant impact on the environment or the public health, safety and welfare.[7] At that time, the Chair made a motion for the finding that the project does not constitute an alteration of a major energy facility as defined by R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-98-

[6] Mr. Farrell, the Director of Transmission Engineering, explained that the 90-foot structures were required at on particular location for couple of reasons. First, there is an extreme increase in elevation after a short dip in the topography at the location of the 90-foot structures. At this same location, there is a distribution crossing. In addition, the decision was made to replace the current tension structures with suspension structures because of a number of factors including cost and the fact that a tension structure would only save approximately five (5) feet in height. *Tr. At 118.*

[7] EFSB Board Member Terrence Gray was unable to attend this Open Meeting. Therefore, In attendance at this Open Meeting was EFSB Chairman Ronald T. Gerwatowski and EFSB Board Member Meredith E. Brady.

4(b) in that it will not result in a significant impact on the environment or public health, safety, and welfare and that the Company may proceed without further review. The Motion was based upon the filings by the Company along with information obtained during the July 22, 2025, evidentiary hearing. The proposed Motion passed upon aye votes from the Chairman Gerwatowki and Board Member Brady.

Accordingly, it is hereby

(172) ORDERED:

The Energy Facility Siting Board finds that the project does not constitute an alteration of a major energy facility as defined by R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-98-4(b) in that it will not result in a significant impact on the environment or public health, safety, and welfare and that the Narragansett Electric Company may proceed without further review.

DATED AND EFECTIVE AT PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND ON OCTOBER 22, 2025, PURSUANT TO AN OPEN MEETING DECISION. WRITTEN ORDER ISSUED ON DECEMBER 5, 2025.

ENERGY FACILITY SITING BOARD

Ronald T. Gerwatowski, Chairman

Meredith E. Brady, Member

Terrence Gray, Member