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BEFORE THE FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

In re: Annual reestablishment of price increase or decrease index of major categories of operating costs incurred by water and wastewater utilities pursuant to Section 367.081(4)(a), F.S.

DOCKET NO. 20210005-WS
ORDER NO. PSC-2021-0463-PAA-WS
ISSUED: December 17, 2021

The following Commissioners participated in the disposition of this matter:

GARY F. CLARK, Chairman
ART GRAHAM
ANDREW GILES FAY
MIKE LA ROSA
GABRIELLA PASSIDOMO

NOTICE OF PROPOSED AGENCY ACTION ORDER
ESTABLISHING 2022 PRICE INDEX FOR WATER AND WASTEWATER UTILITIES

BY THE COMMISSION:

NOTICE is hereby given by the Florida Public Service Commission that the action discussed herein is preliminary in nature and will become final unless a person whose interests are substantially affected files a petition for a formal proceeding, pursuant to Rule 25-22.029, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.).

Background

Since March 31, 1981, pursuant to the guidelines established by Section 367.081(4)(a), Florida Statutes (F.S.), and Rule 25-30.420, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.), we have established a price index increase or decrease for major categories of operating costs on or before March 31 of each year. This process allows water and wastewater utilities to adjust rates based on current specific expenses without applying for a rate case.

This Order calculates the 2022 price index by comparing the Gross Domestic Product Implicit Price Deflator Index for the fiscal year ended September 30, 2021. This same procedure has been used each year since 1995 to calculate the price index. The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, released its most recent third quarter figures on October 28, 2021.

Since March 31, 1981, we have received and processed approximately 3,872 index and pass through applications. We have jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to Section 367.081, F.S.

Decision

In 1993, the Gross Domestic Product Implicit Price Deflator Index (GDP) was established as the appropriate measure for determining the water and wastewater price index. At the same time, the convention of using a four quarter fiscal year comparison was also established and this practice has been used every year since then.¹ The GDP is prepared by the U.S. Department of Commerce. Prior to that time, the Gross National Product Implicit Price Deflator Index (GNP) was used as the indexing factor for water and wastewater utilities. The Department of Commerce switched its emphasis from the GNP to the GDP as the primary measure of U.S. production.

Pursuant to Section 367.081(4)(a), F.S., we, by order, shall establish a price increase or decrease index for major categories of operating costs incurred by utilities subject to its jurisdiction reflecting the percentage of increase or decrease in such costs from the most recent 12-month historical data available. Since 1995, the price index adjustment has been determined by comparing the change in the average GDP for the year ending September 30, instead of the original December 31, in order to more easily meet the statutory deadline.²

In Order No. PSC-2020-0493-PAA-WS, issued December 14, 2020, in Docket No. 20200005-WS, in keeping with the practice started in 1993, we reiterated the alternatives which could be used to calculate the indexing of utility revenues. Past concerns expressed by utilities, as summarized from utility input in previous hearings, are:

- 1) Inflation should be a major factor in determining the index;
- 2) Nationally published indices should be vital to this determination;
- 3) Major categories of expenses are labor, chemicals, materials and supplies, maintenance, transportation, and treatment expense;
- 4) An area wage survey, Dodge Building Cost Index, Consumer Price Index, and the GDP should be considered;
- 5) A broad measure index should be used; and
- 6) The index procedure should be easy to administer.

Based upon these concerns, we have previously explored the following alternatives:

- 1) Survey of Regulated Water and Wastewater Utilities;
- 2) Consumer Price Index;
- 3) Florida Price Level Index;
- 4) Producer Price Index – previously the Wholesale Price Index; and

¹ Order No. PSC-1993-0195-FOF-WS, issued February 9, 1993, in Docket No. 19930005-WS, *In re: Annual reestablishment of price increase or decrease index of major categories of operating costs incurred by water and wastewater utilities pursuant to Section 367.081(4)(a), F.S.*

² Order No. PSC-1995-0202-FOF-WS, issued February 10, 1995, in Docket No. 19950005-WS, *In re: Annual reestablishment of price increase or decrease index of major categories of operating costs incurred by water and wastewater utilities pursuant to Section 367.081(4)(a), F.S.*