

**Lisa Smith**

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**From:** Lisa Smith on behalf of Records Clerk  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 20, 2022 1:01 PM  
**To:** 'donesch53@gmail.com'  
**Cc:** Consumer Contact  
**Subject:** RE: Docket #20200226-SU

Good Afternoon, Don and Sherry Esch,

We will be placing your comments below in consumer correspondence in Docket 20200226-SU and forwarding them to the Office of Consumer Assistance and Outreach.

Thank you.

*Lisa Smith*

Commission Deputy Clerk I  
Office of the Commission Clerk  
Florida Public Service Commission  
2540 Shumard Oak Blvd.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0850  
850-413-6770

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**From:** donesch53@gmail.com <donesch53@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 20, 2022 12:19 PM  
**To:** Records Clerk <CLERK@PSC.STATE.FL.US>  
**Subject:** Docket #20200226-SU

To Whom it may concern:

Our names are Sherry and Don Esch and we are property owners on "Palm Island" and have been since 2011.

We first purchased a condominium in Palm Island Resort and were later able to find a property out of the resort that we could afford and we purchased in 2015. We purchased an additional vacant lot on the island in 2016. These properties were purchased in anticipation of enjoying a

peaceable retirement within our financial means which finally occurred at the end of 2019. We are opposed to the proposed sewer project for several reasons that I have listed below:

- Uncertain Hook-up Cost: When EU first presented to PIE, the connection fee was estimated at approx. \$20K per unit. When the rates and tariffs were finally submitted by the applicant, the requested Service Availability Charge per ERC was reduced to total estimated \$13,221. This represents a significant unplanned expense in our retirement.
- Average Residential Bill: \$178.78, which is roughly twice the amount that a ratepayer on the mainland in Rotonda pays per month for water and wastewater combined. Note that the average cost to EU per customer per month is \$97.18. Again, this would be a new and recurring monthly expense that was not anticipated in our retirement. In addition, it seems excessive given local comparisons.
- Electric: the system pump requires a separate electric panel, installed by a licensed electrician at the expense of the owner. This is an additional expense that was not anticipated in our retirement.
- More electric: If the owner has maxed out their main electric grid with pool equipment or other large-draw items, the panel will need an expensive upgrade to accommodate the new panel.
- Generator: the grinder pump has a limited capacity (60 gal) and in the event of a power outage will be unable to function for long. Homeowners will need a generator to keep the system running to avoid sewage back-up. This is awful. One would expect any utility service sanctioned by the county to have proper back-up systems and work without fail.
- Tree removal: Landscaping and hardscaping around the septic area will need to be cleared at the expense of the homeowner to gain access to crush & fill the septic tank. We came to this place for its natural beauty and feeling of “old Florida”. The disruptions to the landscaping would harm the ‘look and feel’ of the island and diminish our property values. Again, the expense to crush and fill our existing septic tanks is unanticipated in our retirement budget.
- No pay-over-time plan: Ratepayers may need to take loans to cover the cost of connection. This is another financial hardship this change would impose.
- No grandfathering of septic systems: regardless of age or condition.
- No “contract” and no single point of general oversight: EU is not a contractor that has won a bid to install sewer. The PSC approves certification solely based on the 4 criteria above

and regulates rates and charges. Each of the other agencies (County, DEP, Army Corps, etc.) is responsible for supervising only their specific area where regulation and/or permitting is involved. There is no performance bond required and we have no single point of recourse in the event of cost overruns or project failure.

- Access to homes: Some properties have physical constraints that will complicate how the applicant gains access to the property without leaving the boundaries or damaging the grounds.
- Disruption of traffic: Vehicles have only one point of entry/egress -- the car ferry. With normal traffic, service and construction trucks, delays at the ferry line in season can be an hour or more. This project could result in years of traffic issues.
- New easement giveaway: Most utility easements are placed in the road right-of-way. EU has claimed ownership of a utility easement that will go from the sewer equipment, located near the house to the connection in the road without compensating the homeowner.
- System maintenance and emergencies: The applicant has not addressed how the system will be serviced in the event of failure during a storm or other adverse conditions.
- Lifespan of the equipment: Salt air takes a heavy toll on mechanical and electrical equipment here. Equipment will need replacing when it fails, possibly at 5-year intervals. This proposal places too much responsibility on the homeowner at too great a cost.
- Environmental concerns: No water quality testing has been done in our area to prove a need for sewer. This project brings the potential for destruction of habitat and interference with endangered species such as the gopher tortoise.
- Potential of sewer spill in the Intracoastal: The risk of a central sewer leak with a subaqueous crossing is greater than the risk of one or more septic systems developing leaks.

In short, this project would bring significant financial hardship to us as property owners, not only for the expenses related to the construction, hook-up and operation of the new plant but also in terms of diminished property value and the inconvenience of transportation on the island. Second, the applicant has not demonstrated competence in building and operating a system of the sort contemplated. Our island is too precious to trust to any company without a significant track record of competence and accomplishments. Third, the expenses and proposed service rates seems disproportionately high relative to others in the area. Finally,

while we generally support the conversions of septic systems over time to city sewer facilities, it would seem that this project was conceived in haste given the high cost and relatively low number of conversions to be completed all in the absence of testing data to demonstrate that the facility is actually needed here.

We are formally requesting that the PSC deny EU's application for wastewater service.

Sincerely,

Don and Sherry Esch

[Donesch53@gmail.com](mailto:Donesch53@gmail.com)