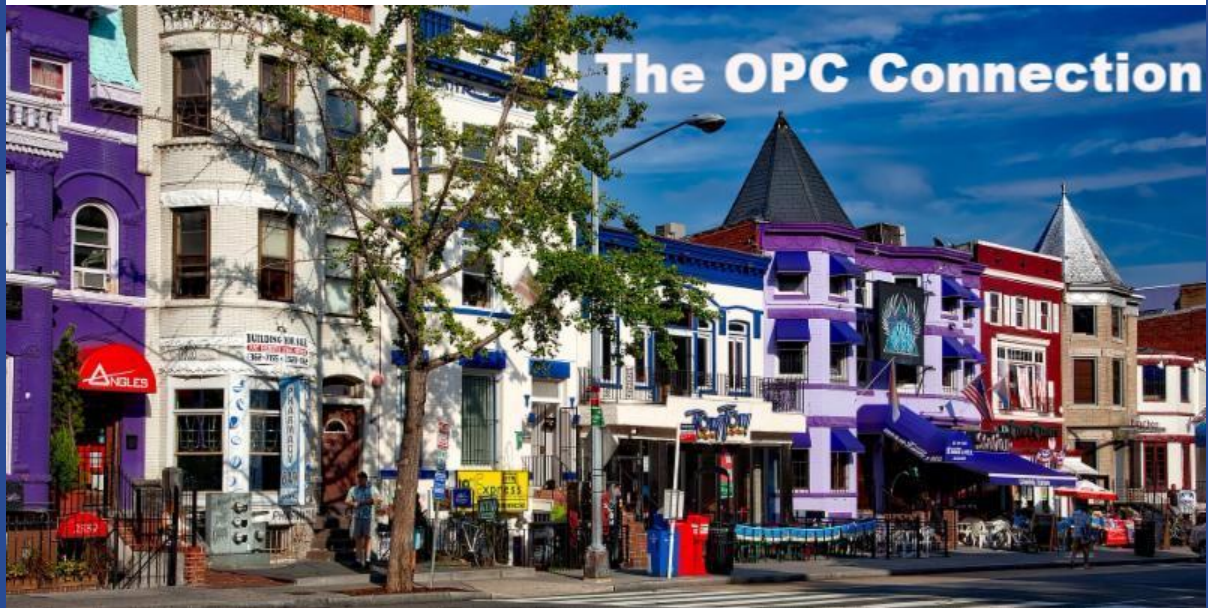




Office of the People's Counsel

ADVOCACY | EDUCATION | PROTECTION



January 2024

**A Note from Your
People's Counsel
Sandra Mattavous-Frye**

**Advocating for
Environmental Justice**

On January 11, I reaffirmed OPC's steadfast commitment to advocate, educate, and protect DC utility consumers during a roundtable to consider my reappointment as People's Counsel before the DC Council Committee on Business



and Economic Development, chaired by At-Large Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie. I am honored that Mayor Muriel Bowser submitted my nomination for Council consideration to serve a fourth 4-year term.

During my [testimony](#), among OPC's many achievements, I highlighted our work to address climate change solutions and environmental justice.

Coincidentally, I and OPC staff recently joined the Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum for a tour and forum focused on the [exhibit](#): "To Live and Breathe: Women and Environmental Justice in Washington, D.C." Our host for the enlightening [program](#) was Museum Director Melanie A. Adams, who launched the Smithsonian's Center for Environmental Justice in 2023. We are grateful for the "green carpet" she and museum staff rolled out for us, and their efforts to make the experience one that OPC could apply to our daily work on behalf of DC residents.

An eye-opening part of the program was an informative panel discussion that featured Lisa M. McClure, Associate Director of the Center for Environmental Justice, DC Public Service Commissioner Ted Trabue, and Dr. Sacoby Wilson, Director of the Center for Community Engagement, Environmental Justice, and Health at the University of Maryland. We also heard from Rachel Seidman, Curator of Women's Environmental History at the museum.

Importantly, OPC did not go alone, we invited community representatives to the event, and I am pleased to share, their feedback has been positive.

I welcome innovative opportunities like this to brainstorm for solutions to challenges in the environmental space. With the help of the Anacostia Community Museum, we brought together stakeholders, subject matter experts, and OPC staff to discuss concerns in a part of the city where underserved communities

suffer the greatest impact of environmental injustice. Be sure to scroll down for some photos of the day.

OPC stands ready to continue to do everything in our power to address environmental and climate change issues in Anacostia and other communities across the District.



OPC Works to Put the Brakes on Questionable Pepco Plans that Could Increase Your Rates

OPC does not waiver when it comes to aggressive defense of fundamental ratepayer issues. After extensive review of Pepco's rate increase proposal, on January 12, OPC filed expert testimony explaining why the Public Service

Commission should reject Pepco's \$190 million request to rates over the next three years.

In every rate case, OPC assembles economics, accounting, and engineering experts to review every aspect of a utility's application. With OPC, these expert witnesses have developed a comprehensive assessment, pulling together facts, data, and information that support why Pepco's proposal should be rejected.

The assessment reveals that Pepco may be seeking to "gold plate" its services. That translates into additional company spending to be passed on to consumers that are not necessary to provide quality service.

Additionally, Pepco may be attempting to capitalize on the growing demand for environmentally friendly options and the District's climate goals through "greenwashing." That is, attributing certain costs to the goal of reaching "green" standards that actually increase shareholder profits, at the expense of consumers.

OPC is intent on ensuring all rate increases are justifiable, fair, and reasonable. We'll keep you up to date as the rate case proceeds.

Navigating Verizon's Old-to-New School Transition

About a year ago, OPC hosted a community meeting to hear from consumers, primarily senior citizens in Ward 5, who had concerns about Verizon's transition from copper wire to fiber optics and its impact on their landline telephone service. Verizon has informed customers with landline phones that the company will no longer provide service over copper lines, and to maintain service with Verizon, they must switch to fiber. As seniors in other wards are still saying they are not happy with the transition, OPC held a briefing on January 18 in partnership with Ward 7 community representatives to get some answers.



DC residents continue to be concerned about the possible loss of phone service during power outages and the quality of information Verizon is providing on the transition. Verizon representatives maintained that the transition has gone well. Nonetheless, OPC urged the phone company to do a better job of informing its DC customers what to expect.

Why is this happening?

Over the last few years, the largest telecom providers have increasingly replaced “old school” service over copper wire infrastructure with service via internet-based fiber optic cables. According to the providers, there is a decreasing use of traditional landlines, and the newer fiber is more reliable and cheaper to maintain.

Why are consumers concerned?

Many consumers believe copper wire service is more reliable because the copper lines carry enough electricity to enable corded phones to continue to operate during a power outage without the need for a battery backup.

What does this mean for consumers?

According to Verizon, the transfer to fiber will be at no additional cost to consumers and protections will be unchanged. Verizon states it will provide a backup battery device at no charge that will allow you to make and receive calls, including to 911, on corded telephones during a power outage. The backup devices contain D-cell batteries that consumers may replace if needed.

As the advocate for landline phone consumers, we urge you to contact OPC at (202) 727-3071, should you experience problems with your service or have questions about the transition.

Anacostia Gas Explosion Calls Attention to the Importance of Utility Safety Awareness

As the advocate for Washington Gas consumers, OPC is monitoring the investigation of the January 18 natural gas explosions in the 1200 block of Marion Barry Avenue SE. On that morning, DC Fire responded to a report of a gas leak near a convenience store and daycare center. Firefighters quickly evacuated children and staffers from the daycare center.



Shortly thereafter, there were two gas explosions, causing a fire and extensive damage. Fortunately, only one person was reported to have suffered non-life-threatening injuries from flying debris.

The cause of the explosions remains under investigation. However, the Fire Department said it appeared to have happened after a vehicle struck a gas meter attached to one of the buildings.

OPC Technical Director Naunihal Singh Gumer (pictured above) was on the scene to informally investigate the incident. Washington Gas is required to provide an incident report within 30 days to the DC Public Service Commission and OPC is privy to the report.

OPC will include that information as we advocate for Washington Gas consumers during ongoing Commission proceedings involving the utility's gas line replacement and infrastructure plans.

This incident, while rare, highlights the serious safety concerns around utility service connections and leaks and the need to act on suspicions to possibly save lives and property.

OPC reminds consumers that whenever you see, smell, or even suspect a gas leak, it is critical to report it immediately to WGL at 844-WASHGAS (844-927-4427) and to DC Fire by dialing 911.



DC Property Owners Can Keep "PACE" with Clean Energy

**Guest Contributor
Ronald Hobson
DC PACE Program Director**

As bank executives forecast a downturn in the economy, access to capital has tightened in recent months for commercial property owners seeking to finance real estate projects. The DC Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Program, which falls under the DC Green Bank, offers an innovative financial solution to commercial property owners who are making green energy upgrades.

[The DC PACE Program](#) allows commercial property owners to finance the upfront costs for qualified energy, water, resilience, and public benefit projects with funding through a voluntary

assessment on the owner's property tax bill. DC PACE helps cut costs, saves energy, and improves property values. The program provides financing for commercial projects such as multi-family and low-income housing, commercial offices, daycare centers, industrial buildings, and nonprofits among other properties.

One of the main benefits of DC PACE is that it can be used to cover 100% of the upfront cost of upgrades such as solar installations or stormwater resilience. Another benefit is long-term financing at lower interest rates. The loan is considered an off-balance sheet item, and the investments are then repaid over the useful life of the installed equipment. The longer payback period – and lower annual or semi-annual payments – can make upgrades more affordable for District property owners.

As of January 1, 2024, there have been more than \$104 million in investments to District property owners in over 50 commercial projects throughout every ward.

For more information about the DC PACE Program, contact Ronald Hobson, DC PACE Director, at (202) 301-5579.

OPC Comments on Federal Initiative Designed to Protect Consumers from Deceptive and Hidden Fees



In response to growing concern about unclear and potentially misleading utility fee structures, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has proposed a major rulemaking initiative to regulate fees charged to consumers. OPC has expressed support for this initiative given its potential to benefit ratepayers who have third-party service

providers or billers. However, OPC is proposing stronger provisions.

In comments to the FTC, OPC endorses proposed mandatory fee disclosure requirements. OPC also advocates for clear standards for billing statements, to ensure that consumers are not charged fees they have not explicitly agreed to, and penalties for companies that do not comply.

OPC points out that these provisions are critical enhancements that will significantly empower consumers and clarify billing processes for third-party utility providers and billers. Importantly, OPC notes that while the proposed rules may impose some compliance obligations on regulated entities, these are considered minor adjustments compared to the substantial long-term benefits for utility consumers.

OPC suggests that federal officials collaborate with national and local stakeholders to develop effective consumer education, stringent monitoring, and enforcement of these new regulations. Developing these partnerships is vital to raising consumer awareness about their rights while ensuring utility providers and billing agents adhere to the new standards. OPC views this initiative as pivotal in safeguarding consumers from unwarranted financial burdens while enhancing transparency in utility services regardless of who you pay your bill to.

Playing on A Winning Team: Antaeus Hayes

Meet Antaeus Hayes, who came on board as OPC's Water Services Division Manager in August 2023. His responsibilities include ensuring that our outreach specialists are strategically and efficiently responding to consumers who seek assistance with their water bills.

Antaeus is also responsible for brainstorming with other managers for new and effective ways to improve the agency's performance and connections with consumers.



Antaeus was born in Washington, DC, and raised in Greenbelt, MD. He received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Communications from Nyack College in New York City. At 6'3, he played basketball in college and professionally in Iceland and Germany. He says he has never been afraid of adapting to new environments like Europe. Antaeus believes being on ball teams helped him build team player and management skills. Not to mention, he had to learn to be a part of a team early--he has an identical twin.

Antaeus' first position in the DC government was as a manager at the Office of the State Superintendent of Education. He worked at OSSE for 13 years before heading to the Department of Motor Vehicles Adjudication Services Division where he was the supervisor in the Hearing Support Division. His next team was OPC.

Basketball is still in Antaeus' blood and in his spare time, look for him on a court, with his 6-year-old son tagging along. Antaeus also enjoys writing, directing, recording, and sometimes starring in his own film productions.

It's good to have Antaeus on the winning OPC team.



PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

OPC is Advocating for Consumers in the Following Cases:

Formal Case No. 1176: Pepco's Application for Authority to Implement a Multiyear Rate Plan

On December 18, OPC filed with the DC Court of Appeals, and before the PSC, a Response to the November 28 Show Cause Order issued by the court. The response discusses how the Commission addresses the review process of rate case applications and the fixed legal relationship with administrative agencies.

On January 12, OPC filed a motion with the PSC to renew its request for a stay of certain parts of the Procedural Schedule relating to the Multiyear Rate Plan- Pilot Program, and the specific Multiyear Rate Plan as proposed.

Formal Case No. 1142: Merger of AltaGas, Ltd. and Washington Gas Holdings, Inc.;

Formal Case No. 1169: The Application of Washington Gas Light Company for Authority to Increase Rates

On December 19, OPC filed comments in response to AltaGas' Motion for the Adoption of its Proposed Penalty for Breach of Term No. 5 of the merger agreement. Under the term, WGL must develop either 10 megawatts of electric energy or equivalent Tier One

renewable energy resources in Washington DC. OPC requested the Commission to reject the request and propose penalties.

Formal Case No. 1130: The Investigation into Modernizing the Energy Delivery System for Increased Sustainability (MEDSIS);

Formal Case No. 1155: Pepco's Application for Approval of its Transportation Electrification Program

On January 10, OPC filed comments on Pepco's Response to Order No. 21932 Regarding Offering 10 and the Mid-Atlantic Electrification Partnership (MAEP) Grant. OPC requests the Commission reject Pepco's request to use the MAEP Grant.



OPC Working for You in Working Groups

Continuing our series, Working Groups at the PSC, this month we look at the "Procurement Cost Adjustment Technical Conference Working Group." This working group reviews how Pepco calculates and collects fees from customers receiving Standard Offer Service that are associated with the procurement of electricity. These costs are based on actual and forecasted collections under the Standard Offer Service. This helps ensure consumers are not overcharged and get the best rate possible from Pepco.

OPC In Your Neighborhood!

OPC welcomes opportunities to speak at your Advisory Neighborhood Commission, civic association, community group

activity, or meeting onsite or virtually. We can give updates on utility issues, and trends, and highlight how we serve DC consumers. Call (202) 727-3071 if your group would like our staff to make an onsite or virtual presentation.

Community Justice Advisory Network:
Stalking Prevention, Awareness, and Resource Center (SPARC)
Wednesday, January 31
1:00 pm to 2:00 pm
Virtual: Join [ZoomGov Meeting](#)

Tabling at Northwest One Library
155 L St NW
Wednesday, February 21
10:30 am - 11:30 am

ANC 8F04 Meeting
250 M Street SE
Tuesday, February 27
6:30 pm - 7:30 pm

Photo Gallery



People's Counsel Sandra Mattavous-Frye appears at the DC Council committee roundtable on her renomination to serve a new term as People's Counsel. Below she is with staff.



Below are scenes from OPC's forum on environmental justice at the Anacostia Community Museum. (Photos by Maven Security Tech TV)





OPC Outreach Specialist Jean Gross-Bethel is "all aboard" with attendees at the Martin Luther King, Jr. parade in Ward 8. The Department of Aging and Community Living invited OPC to ride in its trolley car along the parade route.

Connect With OPC!

Do you have feedback or an idea for an article that could be featured in an upcoming edition of the OPC Connection? We want to hear from you! Just drop our editorial team an email @ info@opc-dc.gov or X/tweet us [@DCOPC](https://twitter.com/DCOPC).

OPC Connection Editorial Team:

Doxie McCoy, Phillip Harmon, Quaneisha Glover, Chawndise Battle,
Dwayne Houston, Valca Valentine

Contributors:

Sandra Mattavous-Frye, Karen Sistrunk, Laurence Daniels,
Linda Jefferson, Ade Adeniyi, Adam Carlesco,
Jean Gross-Bethel, Pamela Nelson, Knia Tanner

The Office of the People's Counsel, 655 15th Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20005 | Tel: (202) 727-3071 | Fax: (202) 727-1014 |
TTY-TTD: (202) 727-2876
www.opc-dc.gov | info@opc-dc.gov

STAY CONNECTED

