

August 14, 2025

Mike Bull
Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
121 7th Place East, Suite 350
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-2147

RE: Comments of the Minnesota Department of Commerce
Docket No. G008/M-25-43

Dear Mr. Bull:

Attached are the comments of the Minnesota Department of Commerce (Department) in the following matter:

*CenterPoint Energy's Natural Gas Energy Conservation and Optimization
2024 Status Report & Associated Compliance Filings (Petition)*

The Petition was filed by CenterPoint Energy on May 1, 2025.

The Department recommends that the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) approve CenterPoint Energy's Petition. The Department is available to answer any questions that the Commission may have in this matter.

Sincerely,

/s/ Dr. SYDNIE LIEB
Assistant Commissioner of Regulatory Analysis



Before the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission

Comments of the Minnesota Department of Commerce

Docket No. G008/M-25-43

I. INTRODUCTION

On May 1, 2025, CenterPoint Energy (CPE or the Company) submitted its Petition with the Commission in docket no. G008/M-25-43. In its Petition, the Company requests that the Commission approve:

- Performance incentive of \$7,942,034 for 2024 ECO activities.
- 2024 ECO tracker account, resulting in a December 31, 2024, tracker balance of \$23,652,462.
- Conservation Cost Recovery Adjustment (CCRA) of \$0.01885/therm to be effective October 1, 2025.

The Petition also contains the Company's 2024 Energy Conservation and Optimization (ECO) Status Report (Status Report). The Status Report is intended to fulfill the requirements of the Department's annual ECO reporting rules contained in Minnesota Rules part 7690.0550. Since the Company's Status Report does not require Commission approval, this portion of the Petition has been assigned to a separate docket.¹

II. PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND

May 1, 2025	The Company submitted its Petition with the Commission.
May 16, 2025	The Commission posted a Notice of Comment Period for the Petition.
July 28, 2025	The Department filed a request for variance extension, requesting an additional 14 days to complete its analysis and file comments.
July 28, 2025	The Commission granted the request for extension.

Topics open for comment:

- Should the Commission approve CenterPoint Energy's proposed DSM Financial Incentive of \$7,942,034 for ECO activities in 2024?
- Should the Commission approve CenterPoint Energy's proposed 2024 ECO Tracker Account, resulting in a year-end balance of \$23,652,462?
- Should the Commission approve CenterPoint Energy's proposed 2026-2027 CCRA of \$0.01885 per therm, effective October 1, 2025?
- Are there other issues or concerns related to this matter?

¹ See Docket No. G008/CIP-23-95

III. DEPARTMENT ANALYSIS

The Department's analysis of the Company's Petition is provided below in the following sections:

- A. Commission's Order from the Previous Year
- B. Minnesota's Energy Conservation and Optimization Statute
- C. Proposed 2024 Shared Savings DSM Financial Incentive
- D. Proposed 2024 ECO Tracker
- E. Proposed Conservation Cost Recovery Adjustment
- F. Historical ECO Achievements and Shared Savings Incentives

A. COMMISSION'S ORDER FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR

On November 8, 2024, the Commission issued its Order approving CPE's Natural Gas Conservation Improvement Program 2023 Status Report & Associated Compliance Filings,² with the following determinations:

1. Approved a 2023 Demand-Side Management (DSM) financial incentive of \$8,450,662 to be included in CenterPoint Energy's tracker account no sooner than the issue date of the Commission's Order in the instant docket.
2. Approved CenterPoint Energy's 2023 Conservation Improvement Program (CIP) tracker account activities with a December 31, 2023, ending balance of \$6,131,707
3. Approved the revised gas Conservation Cost Recovery Adjustment (CCRA) of \$0.1704 per dekatherm (Dth) for all of CenterPoint Energy's Minnesota customer classes, effective the first billing cycle in the month following the Commission's Order in this matter.
4. Approved CenterPoint Energy's customer notification message that reads as follows: The PUC has approved a Conservation Cost Recovery Adjustment (CCRA) factor of \$0.01704 per therm. This charge will be used to fund energy conservation activities and has been added to your delivery charge. For more information, please call or visit our website.
5. Required CenterPoint Energy to submit a compliance filing with tariff sheets including all necessary calculations within 10 days of the issue date of the Order.

B. MINNESOTA'S ENERGY CONSERVATION AND OPTIMIZATION STATUTE

In 2021, the Minnesota Legislature passed the Energy Conservation and Optimization Act (ECO Act).³ The ECO Act primarily serves to modernize what was the Conservation Improvement Program (CIP) to provide a more holistic approach to energy efficiency programming. Notable highlights of the ECO Act include:

² See Commission's November 8, 2024, Order in Docket No. G-008/M-24-43.

³https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?number=HF164&type=bill&version=2&session=ls92&session_year=2021&session_number=0

- Providing participating electric and natural gas utilities the opportunity to optimize energy use and delivery through the inclusion of load management⁴ and efficient fuel-switching (EFS) programs.⁵
- Raising the energy savings goals for the state's electric investor-owned utilities (IOUs).⁶
- More than doubling the low-income spending requirement for all IOUs.⁷
- Providing greater planning flexibility for participating municipal and cooperative utilities.⁸
- Including activities to improve energy efficiency for public schools.⁹

Minn. Stat. § 216B.241 (ECO Statute) provides the framework for IOU ECO programs that deliver energy savings, load management programs, and EFS measures. This includes annual savings goals, which are determined as a percentage of the most recent three-year average of gross retail sales after subtracting sales to ECO-exempt customers.¹⁰ 2024-2026 is the first program year period where requirements from the ECO Act take effect for the IOUs' ECO programs.

The ECO Statute grants jurisdiction to the Department over most of the state's ECO program regulatory activities. The Commission continues to have jurisdiction over two specific conservation items relevant to this proceeding: the Shared Savings DSM Financial Incentive and the recovery of ECO costs.

The Department has regulatory oversight in reviewing and approving utility plans and performance,¹¹ determining cost-effectiveness methodologies¹², and the overall administration of the ECO framework.¹³ Utilities are also allowed to recover costs incurred from delivering ECO programs approved by the Department,¹⁴ which are recovered through a tracker account reviewed and approved annually by the Commission.¹⁵ Finally, the Commission can approve incentive plans encouraging utility success through ECO programs provided the plans meet certain statutory requirements.¹⁶ The Commission has approved Shared Savings DSM Financial Incentive mechanisms for each three-year Triennial Plan since 2010 through Docket No. E,G-999/CI-08-133,¹⁷ and approves annual financial incentives through the ECO tracker account proceedings.¹⁸

⁴ Minn. Stat. § 216B.241, subd. 13.

⁵ Minn. Stat. § 216B.2403, subd. 8.

⁶ Minn. Stat. § 216B.241, subd. 1c(b).

⁷ Minn. Stat. § 216B.241, subd. 7(a).

⁸ Minn. Stat. § 216B.2403, subd. 3.

⁹ Minn. Stat. §§ 216B.2403, subd 3(j) and 216B.241, subd. 2(i).

¹⁰ Minn. Stat. § 216B.241, subd. 1c.

¹¹ Minn. Stat. § 216B.241 Subd. 2 et seq

¹² Minn. Stat. § 216B.241 Subd. 1c(e)

¹³ Minn. Stat. § 216B.241, 216B.2402, 216B,2403 and Minn. Rules 7690

¹⁴ Minn. Stat. § 216B.241, subd. 2b.

¹⁵ Minn. Stat. § 216B.16, subd. 6b.

¹⁶ Minn. Stat. § 216B.16, subd. 6c.

¹⁷ Commission Order Establishing Utility Performance Incentives for Energy Conservation, January 27, 2010, Docket Number E,G-999/CI-08-133.

¹⁸ See Commission Orders in Docket Numbers G-008/M-24-43, G-004/M-24-44, G-022/M-24-45, G-011/M-24-46, G-002/M-24-47, E-015/M-24-48, E-017/M-24-49, and E-002/M-24-50.

C. *PROPOSED 2024 SHARED SAVINGS FINANCIAL INCENTIVE*

C.1. *Key Parameters from the 2024-2026 Shared Savings DSM Financial Incentive Plan*

On January 25, 2024, the Commission’s Order approved the current Shared Savings DSM Financial Incentive Plan, which applies to investor-owned gas and electric utilities for savings achieved through ECO during the 2024–2026 Triennial.¹⁹ The Department’s review of the Petition’s proposed Shared Savings Financial Incentive was informed by the requirements included in the Commission’s January 25, 2024 Order.

The current incentive mechanism awards utilities a percentage of their portfolio-wide Minnesota Test net benefits depending on their first-year energy savings achievement. In 2024, the cost-effectiveness test used to calculate net benefits for purposes of the incentive mechanism switched from the Utility Cost Test to the newly developed Minnesota Test, which incorporates additional considerations when measuring cost-effectiveness, such as greenhouse gas emission reductions. The 2024–2026 incentive mechanism modified the previous 2021–2023 incentive mechanism by updating achievement goals for first-year energy savings and the corresponding percentages of net benefits awarded, partially to account for the change in cost-effectiveness tests.

Tables 1 and 2 show the range of annual first-year energy savings a utility can achieve during the 2024–2026 Triennial and the corresponding percentage of net benefits awarded for each level of first-year energy savings.

Table 1: 2024–2026 Natural Gas Incentive

First-Year Energy Savings Achievement (% of Retail Sales)	% of Net Benefits Awarded
0.7% (threshold) ²⁰	1.90%
0.8%	2.32%
0.9%	2.74%
1.0%	3.16%
1.1%	3.58%
1.2% (goal) ²¹	4.00% (cap)

¹⁹ Order Adopting Modifications to Shared Savings Demand-Side Management Financial Incentive Plan, January 25, 2024. Docket Number E,G-999/CI-08-133.

²⁰ The achievement threshold refers to the achievement level a utility must reach before they begin earning an incentive for a given metric.

²¹ The achievement goal refers to the achievement level that aligns with the maximum percentage of net benefits a utility can earn for a given metric.

Table 2: 2024–2026 Electric Incentive

First-Year Energy Savings Achievement (% of Retail Sales)	% of Net Benefits Awarded
1.5% (threshold)	1.30%
1.6%	1.90%
1.7%	2.50%
1.8%	3.10%
1.9%	3.70%
2.0%	4.30%
2.1%	4.90%
2.2% (goal)	5.50% (cap)

Incentive caps limit the total incentive each utility can earn. The 2024–2026 incentive mechanism includes two incentive caps for each utility, one based on net benefits (Net Benefits Cap) and one on portfolio expenditures (Expenditures Cap), with the incentive amount being limited to whichever cap is lower.²² For the 2024–2026 incentive, the gas Net Benefits Cap equals 4 percent of portfolio net benefits and the Expenditures Cap equals 20 percent of total portfolio expenditures. For electric utilities, the Net Benefits Cap equals 5.5 percent of portfolio net benefits and the Expenditures Cap equals 20 percent of total portfolio expenditures. For both gas and electric utilities, the Expenditures Cap increases from 20 to 25 percent if the utility achieves or surpasses the maximum first-year energy savings goal, which is 1.2 percent of average retail sales for gas utilities and 2.2 percent of average retail sales for electric utilities.

Under the ECO framework, gas utilities can include savings and net benefits from qualifying EFS programs when calculating their financial incentive, effectively treating EFS programs the same as traditional ECO programs, provided it has achieved energy savings from non-EFS programs at or above 1 percent of retail sales.²³ An electric utility cannot currently count savings or net benefits from EFS measures when calculating its overall Shared Savings DSM incentive, but a utility, the Department, or other stakeholder may propose a separate EFS incentive for approval by the Commission.²⁴

C.2. The Department’s Review of the Proposed Shared Savings DSM Financial Incentive

The Petition covers ECO activities occurring in program year 2024. The Company reported incentive-eligible total first-year energy savings of 1,890,592 Dth (approximately 1.29% of ECO-applicable retail sales), total expenditures of \$62,705,528, and net benefits of \$198,550,843. To calculate the financial incentive, the Company excluded the third-party EnerChange and Energy Smart Alternative ECO

²² Order Adopting Modifications to Shared Savings Demand-Side Management Financial Incentive Plan, January 25, 2024. Docket Number E,G-999/CI-08-133.

²³ Commission’s Order Adopting Modifications to Shared Savings Demand-Side Management Financial Incentive Plan, January 25, 2024, Docket Number E,G-999/CI-08-133.

²⁴ Minn. Stat. § 216B.16, subd. 6c

programs and excluded assessments under Minnesota Statute § 216B.241 from its financial incentive calculations.

Based on the terms and conditions of its approved Shared Savings DSM financial incentive plan, the Company requested recovery of a financial incentive of \$7,942,034. The Company's proposed incentive is equal to 4.00% (\$7,942,034/\$198,550,843) of the Company's 2024 calculated net benefits and 12.66% (\$7,942,034/\$62,705,528) of the Company's 2024 expenditures.

The Department's review indicates that the Company correctly calculated its financial incentive for 2024 ECO achievements and did not violate the Commission-approved caps. Therefore, the Department recommends that the Commission approve the Company's 2024 Shared Savings financial incentive of \$7,942,034.

Additionally, should the Commission find it helpful context, the Department also evaluated the broader ECO program achievements reported in the Company's Status Report. As mentioned earlier, since the Company's Status Report does not require Commission approval, this portion of the Petition has been assigned to a separate docket.²⁵ On June 23, 2025, the Department filed a Staff Proposed Decision. The Proposed Decision provides Staff's evaluation of the Status Report's compliance with Minnesota Statutes and Rules, and Staff's examination of the technical assumptions behind the Company's reported ECO performance to ensure that energy savings are cost-effective, measurable, and verifiable. On August 7, 2025, the Department's Assistant Commissioner approved the Company's Status Report achievements.

D. PROPOSED 2024 ECO TRACKER

In its Petition, the Company requested approval of its report on recoveries and expenditures included in the Company's ECO tracker account. This activity can be found in Section 3, page 81 of the utility's Petition and is summarized below in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of 2024 ECO Tracker Account

Line	Description	Time Period	Amount
1	Beginning Balance	Jan. 1, 2024	\$6,131,707
2	Total ECO Expenses ²⁶	Jan. 1, 2024 – Dec. 31, 2024	\$64,027,295
3	DSM Financial Incentive	Approved in 2024 for 2023 Activities	\$8,450,662
4	Carrying Charges	Jan. 1, 2024 – Dec. 31, 2024	(\$964)
5	ECO Expenses Subtotal [Line 1 + Line 2 + Line 3 + Line 4]	Jan. 1, 2024 – Dec. 31, 2024	\$78,608,700
6	CCRC Recovery	Jan. 1, 2024 – Dec. 31, 2024	(\$41,673,139)
7	CCRA Recovery	Jan. 1, 2024 – Dec. 31, 2024	(\$13,283,100)
8	ECO Revenues Subtotal [Line 6 + Line 7]	Jan. 1, 2024 – Dec. 31, 2024	(\$54,956,239)
9	Ending Balance [Line 5 + Line 8]	Dec. 31, 2024	\$23,652,462

²⁵ See Docket No. G008/CIP-23-95

²⁶ Includes \$767,858 in assessments and \$553,909 from alternative ECO program spending.

The Department reviewed Section 3 of the Petition and concludes that the Company correctly calculated its 2024 ECO Tracker account. Therefore, the Department recommends the Commission approve the Company's 2024 ECO tracker, resulting in a year-end balance of \$23,652,462.

E. PROPOSED CONSERVATION COST RECOVERY ADJUSTMENT

Minnesota Statutes 2016B.16., Subd. 6b(c) states that the Commission "may permit a public utility to file rate schedules providing for annual recovery of the costs of energy conservation improvements." This ECO recovery mechanism is generally referred to as the Conservation Cost Recovery Adjustment (CCRA).

E.1. CCRA Proposal

On November 8, 2024, the Commission approved CPE's request to implement the CCRA in the amount of \$0.1704 per Dth, which went into effect on December 1, 2024. The Company proposes to increase the CCRA to \$0.1885 per Dth (representing a \$0.0181 per Dth increase) beginning October 1, 2025.

As noted by the Company in Section 4, page 84 of the Petition:

In the event that Commission approval of the proposed adjustment is delayed beyond September 19, 2025 (in order to implement the rate change by October 1), the Company will continue to apply the current CCRA of \$0.1704 per Dth up to the first of the month following Commission approval of a revised factor. In this case, the Company may recalculate the CCRA.

The Company based the proposed CCRA factor on projected ECO spending and recovery for 2025 and 2026. CPE's projected ECO spending was based on the currently approved 2025 and 2026 budgets from CPE's 2024-2026 ECO Triennial Plan, as follows:²⁷

- 2025: Based on the currently approved total budget equal to \$60,869,188, except for January through March in 2025, which reflects actual spending.
- 2026: Based on the currently approved total budget equal to \$64,383,293.

As stated in Section 4, page 85 of the Petition, "The Company calculated carrying charges using the settlement short-term debt interest factor (0.39%) from the Company's 2021 rate case for the rest of 2025 and 2026."²⁸

²⁷ For CPE's currently approved 2025 and 2026 ECO budgets, see the "Assistant Commissioner's Decision in the Matter of CenterPoint Energy's February 7, 2025, ECO Triennial Plan Program Modification Request." March 27, 2025. Docket No. G008/CIP-23-95

²⁸ As approved by the Commission in In the Matter of the Application by CenterPoint Energy Resources Corp., d/b/a CenterPoint Energy Minnesota Gas (CPE) for Authority to Increase Natural Gas Utility Service in Minnesota, Docket No. G-008/GR-21-435, Order (Mar. 23, 2022).

If the proposed rate were to be effective beginning October 1, 2025, the Company's year-end 2026 tracker balance would be \$5,496, as shown in Table 4. Table 4 also provides details behind CPE's calculation of its proposed CCRA rate of \$0.1885 per Dth.

Table 4. Calculation of the Company's Proposed CCRA Rate²⁹

Line	Description	Time Period	Amount
1	Beginning Balance	October 1, 2025	(\$3,869)
2	ECO Expenses	October 2025-December 2026	\$88,748,034
3	2024 DSM Financial Incentive	Approved in 2025 for 2024 Activities	\$7,942,034
4	2025 DSM Financial Incentive	Approved in 2026 for 2025 Activities	\$6,600,000
5	Carrying Charges	October 2025-December 2026	(\$29,310)
6	ECO Expenses Subtotal [Line 1 + Line 2 + Line 3 + Line 4 + Line 5]	October 2025-December 2026	\$103,256,889
7	CCRC Recovery	October 2025-December 2026	(\$66,473,449)
8	Remaining Amount to be Recovered Through CCRA [Line 6 + Line 7]	October 2025-December 2026	\$36,783,440
9	Projected Sales (Dth)	October 2025-December 2026	195,108,454
10	Proposed CCRA Rate (\$/Dth) [Line 8/Line 9]	Effective October 1, 2025	\$0.1885
11	Forecasted Balance	December 31, 2026	\$5,496

CPE's CCRA would ideally be set at a rate that brings the Company's ECO tracker balance as close to zero as possible. Doing so avoids significant over or under recovery of ECO costs by the Company, thus minimizing carrying charges and stabilizing CCRA rates.

Reviewing the data in the Petition's Attachments C-1 and C-2, the Department concludes the proposed CCRA factor will bring the ECO tracker closer to zero by the end of 2026 and therefore is reasonable.

The Department reviewed the calculation of CPE's proposed CCRA rate of \$0.1885 per Dth and concludes it is accurate. The Department recommends the Commission approve the proposed CCRA of \$0.1885 per Dth to be effective October 1, 2025.

E.2. Customer Notification Method for the CCRA Proposal

In addition to updating the relevant tariff sheet, the Department recommends that the Commission approve the Company's proposed bill message in the billing month immediately following the date of the Commission's Order:

²⁹ Data in Table 4 retrieved from Petition, Attachment C-1 and C-2.

The PUC has approved a Conservation Cost Recovery Adjustment (CCRA) factor of \$0.01885 per therm. This charge will be used to fund energy conservation activities and has been added to your delivery charge. For more information, please call or visit our website.

As noted in Section 3, page 86 of the Petition, “a phone number and website address are not included in this bill message. If a customer has questions, the phone number and website address they should contact already appears near the bill message on the customer’s bill.”

F. *HISTORICAL ECO ACHIEVEMENTS AND SHARED SAVINGS INCENTIVES*

In Table 5, the Department examined energy savings, expenditures, and incentive values for select years. The Department observes that the Company’s energy savings and financial incentive decreased from 2023 to 2024 and also when comparing 2024 to the Company’s 2022-2024 average savings and incentive figures, but CPE’s expenditures increased.

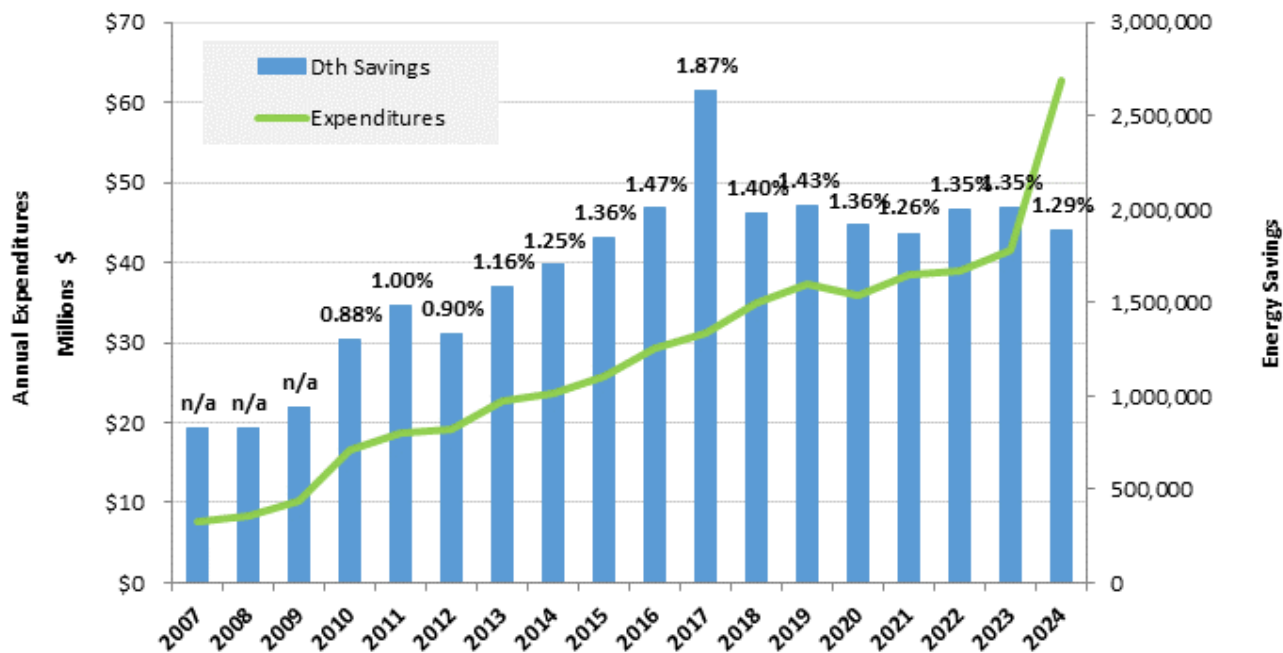
In Figure 1, the Department also provides a more comprehensive summary of the Company’s ECO performance over time. The Department finds that the Company continues to make impressive progress toward its ECO savings achievements.

Table 5: Savings, Expenditures, and Incentives for Select Years³⁰

	Energy Savings (Dth)	Expenditures	Shared Savings Incentive
2024	1,890,592	\$62,705,528	\$7,942,034
2023	2,009,051	\$41,484,184	\$8,450,662
2022	2,003,321	\$40,041,875	\$7,673,591
Average 2022-2024	1,967,655	\$48,077,196	\$8,022,096
Compare 2024 to 2023	-5.90%	51.16%	-6.02%
Compare 2024 to Avg 2022-2024	-3.92%	30.43%	-1.00%

³⁰ Data reflects savings and expenditures used to calculate the financial incentive and thus does not include savings and spending due to specific programs that were excluded from the financial incentive calculation.

Figure 1. Historical ECO Performance



IV. DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department reviewed the Company's Petition and concluded that it is generally reasonable. Based on analysis of the Petition and the information in the record, the Department has prepared recommendations, which are provided below. The Department is available to answer any questions the Commission may have.

A. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COMMISSION

- A.1. Approve a performance incentive of \$7,942,034 for 2024 ECO activities.
- A.2. Approve CPE's 2024 ECO tracker account, as summarized in Table 3 above, resulting in a December 31, 2024, tracker balance of \$23,652,462.
- A.3. Approve a Conservation Cost Recovery Adjustment rate of \$0.1885 per Dth to be effective October 1, 2025, or the first month following the Commission's Order in this proceeding.
- A.4. Approve the Company's proposed bill message in the billing month immediately following the date of the Commission's Order:

The PUC has approved a Conservation Cost Recovery Adjustment (CCRA) factor of \$0.01885 per therm. This charge will be used to fund energy conservation activities and has been added to your delivery charge. For more information, please call or visit our website.

- A.5. Require CPE to submit a compliance filing, within 10 days of the issue date of the Order in the present docket, with revised tariff sheets reflecting the Commission's determinations in this matter.