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Burlington County to review future of third-party energy program

By Brian Woods, staff writer 7 hrs ago

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PALMYRA — The Burlington County Energy Aggregation Program has three months left until the 14-month pilot program ends.

Leading up to the end of the term, the Burlington County Board of Freeholders will be meeting with its energy consultant to review possible savings opportunities to continue the program past October.

The Burlington County Bridge Commission met last week and extended the contract with the consultant, Concord Engineering Group, of Voorhees.

The advertisement features a dark blue header with the word "SIGNATURE" in white, topped with a crown icon. Below this is a corkboard-style background with the text "Celebrate dads with a Hallmark Signature card Sunday, June 18." A button labeled "FIND A STORE NEAR YOU" with a right-pointing arrow is positioned above a list of two store locations: "R.J. MARS" (1.4 MI) and "STERLING HALLMARK SHOPS" (10.5 MI). A small copyright notice "© HMK, LLC" is visible in the bottom right corner.

The group is contracted to monitor the energy market and consult with the county and bridge commission to determine if third-party energy rates are low enough to lead to savings compared with Public Service Electric & Gas, Atlantic City Electric and Jersey Central Power & Light rates.

Prior to the start of the program last September, officials said it cost nothing to the county.

The firm in charge of operating the program, Commercial Utility Consultants, was to be paid by the third-party supplier now providing energy to residents, TriEagle Energy of Texas.

While the county is not paying anything for the program, the bridge commission is.

The commission, supported largely by tolls at its Delaware River bridges, contracted with Concord in 2014 for \$115,000. The contract extension does not appropriate additional funds.

In 2014, the county designated the bridge commission to oversee the program by providing technical and support services. The commission in turn contracted with Commercial Utility Consultants to run the program, at no cost, and with Concord Engineering to monitor the energy market.

The commission owns and operates the Burlington-Bristol and Tacony-Palmyra bridges.

"It's the bridge commission making an investment in a program to save the residents money," county spokesman Eric Arpert said.

To continue the program past October, the county will have to go out to auction to see if a third-party supplier can provide a fixed rate lower than PSE&G, Atlantic City Electric and JCP&L.

The county will meet with the engineering group in a couple of weeks to determine where the energy market is and the program's future, Arpert said.

"We have to see what the consultants tell us, where the market is, so we can determine if we can recognize savings for our residents, because that's the point of the program," he said.

Ten municipalities participate in the energy aggregation program, which aims to save customers money on the supply portion of their energy bills, unless they were already part of a third-party supplier agreement. It was offered to all towns, with Burlington City, Cinnaminson, Florence, Lumberton, Moorestown, Palmyra, Riverside, Southampton, Woodland and Wrightstown deciding to participate.

The county held an auction in June for energy suppliers and selected TriEagle. It entered into a 14-month, fixed-rate agreement. The supply rate for TriEagle is \$0.119355 per kilowatt hour.

Towns that didn't participate in the 14-month pilot program can sign up in the next round if the county decides to continue the program.

Savings on the supply portion for the 14 months are expected to be 5 percent for PSE&G customers and about 10 percent for JCP&L and Atlantic City Electric customers, according to Arpert.

PSE&G savings are expected to be lower because its rates have been lower than JCP&L and Atlantic City Electric.

"As of the last update, we were on track with both estimates," Arpert said.

He did not have a monetary figure of what residents have saved so far.

The last time a total savings figure was provided was in January, four months into the program, and county officials estimated about \$90,000 in savings.

The program has been touted as a cost-savings guarantee, whereby if PSE&G, JCP&L or Atlantic City Electric rates ever fall below TriEagle's rate, customers will automatically be switched to the default rate, according to officials.

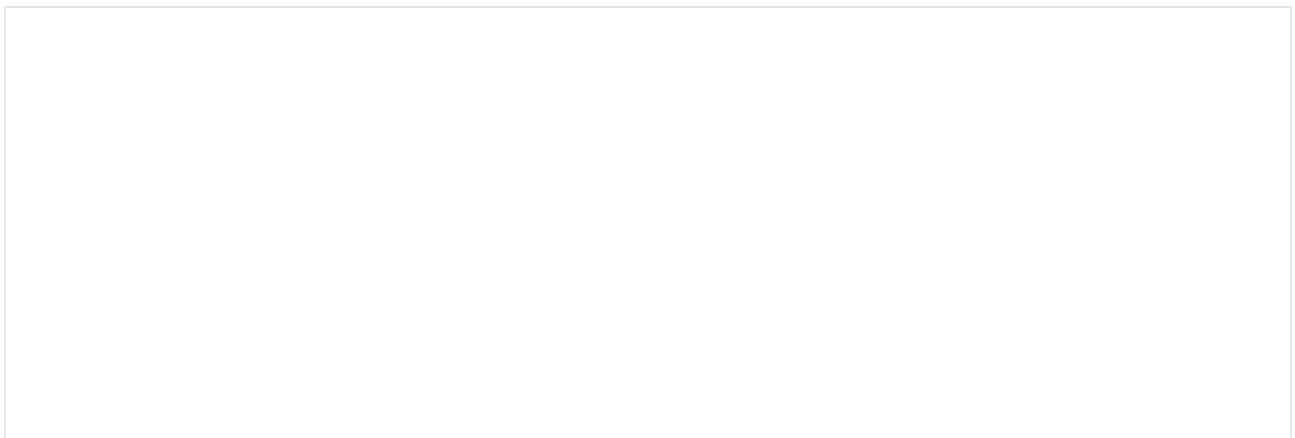
PSE&G, Atlantic City Electric and JCP&L still handle distribution as well as customer service issues, such as power outages.

Residents in the 10 participating towns were automatically opted in, but they can opt out in any month with no penalty.

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