

§ 62-159. Additional funding for natural gas expansion.

(a) In order to facilitate the construction of facilities in and the extension of natural gas service to unserved areas, the Commission may provide funding through appropriations from the General Assembly or the proceeds of general obligation bonds as provided in this section to either (i) an existing natural gas local distribution company; (ii) a person awarded a new franchise; or (iii) a gas district for the construction of natural gas facilities that it otherwise would not be economically feasible for the company, person, or gas district to construct.

(b) The use of funds provided under this section shall be pursuant to an order of the Commission after a public hearing. The Commission shall ensure that all projects for which funds are provided under this section are consistent with the intent of this section and G.S. 62-2(9). In determining whether to approve the use of funds for a particular project pursuant to this section, the Commission shall consider the scope of a proposed project, including the number of unserved counties and the number of anticipated customers that would be served, the total cost of the project, the extent to which the project is considered feasible, and other relevant factors affecting the public interest. In determining economic feasibility, the Commission shall employ the net present value method of analysis on a project specific basis. Only those projects with a negative net present value shall be determined to be economically infeasible for the company, person, or gas district to construct. In no event shall the Commission provide funding under this section of an amount greater than the negative net present value of any proposed project as determined by the Commission. If at any time a project is determined by the Commission to have become economically feasible, the Commission shall require the recipient of funding to remit to the Commission appropriate funds related to the project, and the Commission may order those funds to be returned with interest in a reasonable amount to be determined by the Commission. Funds returned, together with interest, shall be deposited with the State Treasurer to be used for other expansion projects pursuant to the provisions of this section. Utility plant acquired with expansion funds shall be included in the local distribution company's rate base at zero cost except to the extent such funds have been remitted by the company pursuant to order of the Commission. In the event a gas district wishes to sell or otherwise dispose of facilities financed with funds received under this section, it must first notify the Commission which shall determine the method of repayment or accounting for those funds.

(c) To the extent that one or more of the counties included in a proposed project to be funded pursuant to this section are counties affected by the loss of exclusive franchise rights provided for in G.S. 62-36A(b), the Commission may conclude that the public interest requires that the person obtaining the franchise or funding pursuant to this section be given an exclusive franchise and that the existing franchise be canceled. Any new exclusive franchise granted under this subsection shall be subject to the provisions of G.S. 62-36A(b). This subsection does not apply to gas districts formed under Article 28 of Chapter 160A of the General Statutes.

(d) The Commission, after hearing, shall adopt rules to implement this section as soon as practicable. (1998-132, s. 17; 1999-456, s. 17; 2011-291, s. 2.16; 2014-120, s. 10(c).)