

Powering Eastern North Carolina: A Financial and

Social Examination of Utilities

Peyton Cowin

East Carolina University Honors College

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Abstract

This paper examines the structure, operations, and community impact of electric utility providers in Eastern North Carolina, while focusing on the financial and social dynamics that surround municipally owned and electric cooperative utilities. Through the analysis of Greenville Utilities Commission (GUC), Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative (CHEC), and Tideland Electric Membership Corporation (Tideland EMC), the research provides information on how rate provision, operating margins, and purchase power costs influence factors of affordability and sustainability for customers and members. The research notes the key differences between the structure and models of municipally owned and cooperatives, highlighting that while both are not-for-profit entities, they maintain differences in ownership, funding, and investment strategies. The paper investigates the emergence of clean energy initiatives such as solar and wind projects that are being implemented within Eastern North Carolina communities. The corresponding community reactions including optimism, skepticism, and other concerns and impacts are mentioned. Finally, the analysis is wrapped up with the apprehension between affordability and sustainability in utility provision. The analysis reveals unpopularity within rate increases while pointing out their essential nature for the support of provision across Eastern North Carolina.

Introduction

Everyone uses electricity in their day-to-day lives. Electricity allows us to turn the lights on, heat our houses, and cool our houses, and keeps our daily lives running smoothly. The thing about electricity is that most people aren't even sure where their electricity comes from. Who provides it? How much does it cost? What are the incentives? These are questions that are broadly overlooked since electricity is seen as an essential function for the everyday person. Within North Carolina, there are 27 electric membership cooperatives and 76 municipally owned electric utilities that serve the state (NC Sustainable Energy Association). It is important to note differences between an electric cooperative and a municipally owned electric utility. An electric cooperative is owned and governed by its member-customers. Electric cooperatives operate on a democratic basis where members elect a board of directors to govern the cooperative. Although operated as a non-profit, any excess revenue is returned to the members as capital credits. This structure is aimed at eliminating the generation of profits for shareholders (Orcas Power & Light Co-Op, 2025). Whereas a municipally owned electric utility is owned and operated by the local government. Municipally owned utilities aim to make decisions with the community's best interest in mind. In comparison to cooperatives, municipal utilities' revenue is reinvested into the community for improvements and initiatives. To localize the financial impact of utility provision, I will look at Eastern North Carolina which is composed of 41 counties located east of Interstate 95. Within Eastern North Carolina utility provision is driven by the large impact of rate provision, electric initiatives, and community opinions.

Financial Analysis

Utility provision is driven by the large impact of rate distribution by utility companies to their customers. When discussing rate provision of utility companies in Eastern North Carolina it is important to know the difference between a generator and distributor of electricity. A generator of electricity is a company that creates electricity through the conversion of energy. While a distributor is a company that purchases electricity from generators and distributes it out to their customers. Why is this important to note? Within Eastern North Carolina there are two main companies that generate electricity for the counties, Duke Energy and Dominion Energy. Duke Energy and Dominion Energy are wholesale suppliers of electricity. The electric cooperatives and municipal utilities operate as distributors. The distributors are responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the physical infrastructure, such as poles and wires, that transport the energy. Since distributors purchase the electricity that is being provided to their customers, the purchase price of this energy highly impacts the rate customers pay to their utility company.

Pitt County: Greenville Utilities Commission

The local utility company within Pitt County is Greenville Utilities Commission (GUC). Greenville Utilities provides electric, sewer, water, and gas services to their customers. The commission purchases their electricity from Duke Energy and then provides it to their customers at the lowest possible rate. In fiscal year twenty-four, the commission budgeted \$136,930,058 for purchased power costs and their projected cost shifted to \$132,618,781 throughout the fiscal year demonstrating a positive variance of

\$4,311,277 (Greenville Utilities Commission, 2024–2025). This line item within the budget book represents the expected expenses for the purchase of electricity from Duke Energy. How does the commission decide the electricity rate? Each customer will select a meter arrangement, to which a rate will be assigned (Greenville Utilities Commission). For the purposes of this research, we will focus on residential customers. Greenville Utilities charges residential customers a flat rate of \$21.00 per month with an additional charge of \$0.09773 per kilowatt hour (kWh) used (Greenville Utilities Commission, 2024–2025). The average utility rate within the United States is \$0.1522 cents per kWh, and \$0.1155 cent per kWh within North Carolina (ElectricChoice, 2025). Exhibit One below demonstrates

$$1 - \left(\frac{0.09773}{0.1317} \times 100 \right) = 12.8\%$$

Exhibit 1

Greenville Utilities Commissions rate competitiveness within North Carolina. GUC demonstrates to be 12.8% lower than the state average, demonstrating the Commissions mission to provide the lowest utility rates. Within fiscal year 2024, the Commission budgeted \$176,563,019 in operating revenue within the line item of rates and charges. The commission received \$179,121,521 in operating revenue within the line item of rates and



Exhibit 2

charges which demonstrates a positive variance of \$2,558,502 (Greenville Utilities Commission, 2024–2025). Exhibit two above demonstrates a visual representation of the positive budget variances. The purchased power positive variance is composed of a lower actual expense than the initial budgeted expense, while the rates and fees positive variance demonstrates higher actual revenues than budgeted revenues. The profit earned between actual rates and charges and actual purchased power represents a difference of \$46,502,740. This profit however is not a true profit. The excess funds get reinvested into the operations of the commission. An indicator of purchased power allocation in regard to the purchase of power can be demonstrated through the calculation of Purchased Power Cost as a percentage of Operating Revenue. Exhibit three below computes the calculation

$$\frac{132,618,781}{179,121,521} \times 100 \approx 74.05\%$$

Exhibit 3

of purchased power costs as a percentage of operating revenue for GUC. The 74.05% figure represents that about three fourths of every dollar earned within revenue goes towards the purchase of wholesale power. This is additionally reflected within the Commissions operating Margin Ratio. The operating margin ratio is calculated through dividing overall operating income by total operating revenue. Exhibit four below computes GUC's operating

$$\frac{46,502,740}{179,121,521} \times 100 \approx 25.96\%$$

Exhibit 4

margin ratio as a percentage. The operating margin ratio of 25.96% represents revenue as operating margin after purchased power costs. This figure demonstrates cost management and additional revenues will be allocated to other operating costs. This can include compensation to employees, maintenance expenses, operating costs, etc. Since

Greenville Utilities Commission is a municipally owned utility company, after all operating costs are deducted if there is any additional profit made, this profit gets reinvested for community improvements.

Dare County: Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative

The next utility company analyzed is Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative (CHEC). As previously mentioned, a cooperative is a member-owned utility distributor. CHEC is a member of the North Carolina Electric Membership Corporation (NCEMC). This membership corporation provides power generation assets, transmission resources, energy projects initiatives, and purchases electricity through contracts (North Carolina's Electric Cooperatives). NCEMC purchases power from Dominion North Carolina Power and then provides it to the cooperative at cost. The cooperative delivers the electricity to its customers through 45 miles of 115kV transmission lines across the Basnight Bridge and 34.5kV that goes underwater for delivery to Ocracoke Island (The Coastland Times, 2023). Like Greenville Utilities Commission, Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative provides rates based on a meter arrangement. Based on meter selection a corresponding rate schedule will be applied. CHEC also applies a demand and off-peak adjustment for residential services with an electric vehicle. This adjustment aims to reduce costs for customers during hours of the day when the demand for electricity is not high so residents can charge their electric vehicles overnight. Additionally, the cooperative charges different rates during the summer and winter season based on electric consumption and the differences in heating and cooling costs. The base rate for residential customers purchasing electricity from the cooperative is \$30.00 per month (Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative). Exhibit five

| kWh Usage | Summer Rates (May-Oct) | Winter Rates (Nov-April) |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| First 1,000 kWh/month | 12.52¢/kWh | 12.52¢/kWh |
| All kWh over 1,000/month | 18.14¢/kWh | 11.63¢/kWh |

Exhibit 5

below demonstrates the residential rates per kWh. These rates became effective May 1st, 2025, and indicates an overall average rate increase of 6.37% (Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative). The CHEC determines rate increases based on the financial stability of the cooperative. This rate increase could be a result of increased expenses of operations. Since the cooperative is a not-for-profit, their goal is to break even. Since Cape Hatter Electric Cooperative is a private electric cooperative, they do not release an Annual Comprehensive Financial Report. Therefore, for the purposes of this research their 2021 annual report will be used. In fiscal year twenty-one, Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative had a line item of \$9,118,110 for purchase power (Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative, 2022). This line item represents the cost of purchased electricity from Dominion Energy. Additionally, since this is a private cooperative, their financial statements are different than most. The CHEC had an operating revenue of \$20,596,761, although exact figures of revenue from rates and charges are unavailable, they are included in this operating revenue figure (Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative, 2022). Their line item of “Patronage Capital and Operating Margins” represents the members’ ownership in excess funds and return of operating margins back to its members. This is considered a revenue for the cooperative as it will be credited back to the members, which run the cooperative. An important ratio for assessing operating

revenue is the Operating Margin Ratio. This is calculated by dividing the Operating Margin by the Total Revenue and then converting it into a percentage. Exhibit six below

$$\frac{3,294,750}{20,596,761} \times 100 \approx 16.0\%$$

Exhibit 6

demonstrates the Operating Margin Ratio for Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative. The 16.0% figure indicates that about 16% of CHEC revenue is retained after covering the costs of operations. This indicates financial health without generating excess profits. Another indicator of rates to operating revenue is a calculation of Purchased Power Cost as a Percentage of Revenue. This can be calculated by dividing the Purchased Power Expense by Total Revenue and converting into a percentage. Exhibit seven below demonstrates

$$\frac{9,118,110}{20,596,761} \times 100 \approx 44.3\%$$

Exhibit 7

Purchased Power Cost as a Percentage of Revenue. The 44.3% figure indicates that almost half of operating revenue is allocated to the purchase of wholesale power. This highlights the importance of setting accurate rates and charges to manage costs effectively.

Beaufort County: Tideland Electric Membership Corporation

The last electric cooperative that we will assess is the Tideland Electric Membership Corporation (Tideland EMC). The Tideland Electric Membership Corporation is located in Pantego, NC which is a part of Beaufort County. The corporation serves approximately 25,000 member accounts across coastal counties including Dare, Hyde, Beaufort, Washington, Pamlico, and Craven County (Tideland Electric Membership Corporation, 2025). Similar to other electric utilities we have discussed, Tideland EMC does not

generate their own electricity, they operate as a distributor. As a member of North Carolina Electric Membership Corporation, this is where Tideland EMC purchases and receives their wholesale power from. Additionally, Tideland provides a time-of-use rate schedule similar to that of the Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative. However, Tideland does not differentiate between residential service and other services, instead they differentiate through overhead and underground services with differing base facilities fees for each. Overhead services are categorized as services provided by overhead power lines and are charged a base facilities fee of \$27.50/month (Tideland Electric Membership Corporation, 2025). Underground service is categorized as electric services provided through power lines buried beneath the ground into residents' property and are charged a base facilities fee of \$29.80/month (Tideland Electric Membership Corporation, 2025). Another differentiator of Tideland EMC is they charge additional kilowatts during their time-of-use schedule on a day-to-day basis. Exhibit eight below demonstrates the rate schedule for Tideland EMC. It is important to

| Time | Charge |
|------------------------------------------|---------------|
| All Kilowatt Hours Year Round | 8.61¢ |
| Winter On-Peak Demand Charge (Nov-April) | \$10.06/kWd |
| Summer On-Peak Demand Charge (May-Oct) | \$11.01/kWd |

Exhibit 8

note as a membership corporation, they operate as a cooperative indicating a return of excess funds back to their members while also providing adequate services and

reasonable rates. For the purposes of this analysis, we will be using financials from fiscal year twenty-three for the corporation released by the platform Cause IQ. During fiscal year 2023, Tideland EMC reported a line item of \$52, 378,506 in operating revenue. The corporation also reported a line item of \$51,949,525 in total expenses (Cause IQ, 2024). The operating margin of the corporation can be calculated by subtracting all expenses from total revenues which is computed to be \$428,981. The important indicator of revenues to expenses is the operating margin ratio. Exhibit nine below computes the operating margin

$$\frac{428,981}{52,378,506} \times 100 \approx 0.82\%$$

Exhibit 9

ratio for Tideland EMC. The 0.82% figure represents that less than 1% of Tideland EMCs revenue was left after covering all expenses. This is an indicator of their not-for-profit status and their goal of break-even. Additionally, the corporation reported a line item for purchased wholesale power expense of \$28,432,588 (Cause IQ, 2024). This number can be computed into a portion of revenues to cover the cost of purchase power. Exhibit ten below computes the purchased power cost as a percent of revenue for Tideland EMC. The 54.3%

$$\frac{28,432,588}{52,378,506} \times 100 \approx 54.3\%$$

Exhibit 10

figure represents that a little over half of each revenue dollar goes towards the purchase of power from wholesale suppliers. This indicates a correlation between revenue, purchased power costs, and rates provided to customers. As the cost of power goes up, rates must increase to cover operating expenses, and therefore revenues will increase as rates increase. However, an incentive to the cooperative structure is that members could potentially receive a capital credit for years in which a profit is earned. Within fiscal year

2023, Tideland EMC reported a return of capital credits to its members as a total of \$1,396,506 (Cause IQ, 2024). These credits would come from profits or excess revenues from fiscal year twenty-two. This figure can be manipulated into credits returned on average per account. Exhibit eleven computes the capital credits returned per account for

$$\frac{1,396,506}{25,000} \approx 55.86$$

Exhibit 11

the members of Tideland EMC. The \$55.86 figure indicates on average about \$56 were returned to the \$25,000 account holders for Tideland EMC. This was a result of the cooperative's positive margins from fiscal year 2022.

Electric Initiatives: Clean Energy

As we advance further into the future, green and clean energy movements are emerging. The clean energy movement is a movement based on taking steps to eliminate carbon emissions in the process of energy production. These initiatives include the creation of an alternate energy source that does not use the burning of fossil fuels. In most cities that are taking the next step into clean energy this source for alternate energy is in the form of wind turbine farms and solar panel farms. In Eastern North Carolina we are seeing these initiatives being put into action by our local and surrounding communities. Duke Energy, an electricity provider for Eastern North Carolina, has pledged to reduce its carbon emissions by 70 percent by 2030 (North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association, 2022). According to the NC Electric Cooperatives, there are eleven cooperatives that have installed 19 community solar farms. These solar farms allow members to benefit from a low-cost, and low-risk way to benefit from solar technology (North Carolina's Electric

Cooperatives). Solar technology allows members to be provided a portion of clean electricity by their utilities but does not eliminate the need for another source of electricity. There are more and more clean energy structures being built all around Eastern North Carolina, as this is happening more and more people are forming their own opinions on the subject. The question is, what do our communities really think of this? Are we living in some sort of clean energy “nirvana”? What are the incentives to clean energy?

As clean energy structures are being built all around Eastern North Carolina, residents in these communities are beginning to form opinions on the subject. In the Greenville, North Carolina community their local utility company, Greenville Utilities Commission (GUC), is beginning construction of a solar panel farm in March 2025. A local Winterville resident, a neighboring town to which GUC supplies electricity, states “This type of forward thinking about renewables is important for the planet”. Residents who choose to opt in for the use of solar energy will have to pay an extra \$3 per panel payment on the solar energy being used. Each solar panel is only anticipated to generate 78.7 kilowatt hours (kWh), customers are able to subscribe to the use of up to five solar panels generating up to 394 kWh from solar energy. However, an average residential customer uses 1,000 kWh of electricity a month, which will equate to 39 percent of solar energy usage for a customer using the maximum number of panels (Livingston, 2024). Although the Greenville area is taking the step in the right direction for solar energy, the \$1.5 million dollar facility does not completely eliminate the reliance on a fossil fuel energy source. The community of Greenville and Winterville seem to be on board with the construction of the solar farm with another resident stating “Anything that helps people lessen their dependence on fossil

fuels and promote use of renewable energy is worth the \$3 extra payment” (Livingston, 2024). Additionally, in a summer 2025 newsletter sent out by the Commission they state that the solar project is “In direct response to our customers’ requests...53% of our customers said they were willing to pay a little extra to help reduce carbon emissions.” (Bockover, 2025).

Although some Pitt County residents are in favor of the step forward to green energy, not all Pitt County residents are feeling the same way. The residents of Grifton, North Carolina have voiced their opinions on the proposed plans to build a solar panel farm in the area. Residents are concerned that the construction of the solar panel farm will result in property devaluation as well as health and safety concerns. A Grifton resident, Patrick Phair, voices his concerns about his livestock and water quality of his nearby pond (Livingston, 2023). Significant amounts of lead within solar panels leave farmers concerned about runoff into ponds and other bodies of water found on their property. Additionally, this raises concern on the impact of runoff within bodies of water and the effect it will have on the farm animals that drink from these bodies of water.

This has also been a widely known problem for other counties within Eastern North Carolina. Construction of a solar panel farm was denied in Currituck County in 2015. In a Daily Reflector article on the subject a reporter states, “a number of residents complained that solar panels wouldn’t be compatible with nearby neighborhoods; there were drainage problems on the site; and home values might be adversely affected.” (Reflector Staff, 2018). Another heavily supported perspective of the residents is that the solar panel farm will make the area “less attractive” leaving no appeal for growth of the area. Another Grifton

resident, Troy Wilkie, states in a Daily Reflector article that the project is an “eyesore” that will last in the area for two generations (Livingston, 2023). Solar panels are constructed of a tempered glass that reflect the light of the sun when hit, this therefore creates a reflection or a glare for people looking directly at them. If placed near a highway or road, this may cause drivers to have disrupted vision when driving, resulting in dangerous driving conditions. Differing opinions on solar energy and panel farms are leaving communities questioning what is the right solution to the green energy movement?

Other Eastern North Carolina counties are looking towards wind energy as their step towards green energy. Wind energy is typically generated through the construction of wind turbines and windmill farms. Wind turbines are a tall structure averaging over 320 feet tall, and with blades averaging at 210 feet long. Wind farms can consist of as few as five turbines or as many as 150 turbines. Chowan County is experiencing the growth of wind energy with the opening of the Timbermill Wind Project. The landowners of the land being used for the project have received contracts that allow their property to be leased at a higher value, since it is being leased out for the purpose of clean energy generation in addition to farming (Apex Clean Energy, 2024). Chowan County houses a lot of farming land as well as farmers who tend this land for crops. At a celebrative opening event, a retired farmer from Belhaven states “that most farmers who grow crops such as soybeans, corn, cotton or wheat at the site are pleased with the project because they can still farm around the turbines, while also collecting regular payments” (Kozak, 2024). This not only allows residents leasing farmland a permanent source of income but allows additional profit for the selling and cultivation of crops still being grown on the land. Residents are also being

pleasantly surprised with the project stating, “In the beginning, they were talking about the bird killings, the noise that it would make. This is nothing like that. The science behind it. It’s more efficient. This is an alternate source of energy and we need to take advantage of it” (Kozak, 2024). The project has brought lots of positive attention and is becoming a major advantage for most residents.

However, some residents are getting disturbed by the presentation of the new wind turbine farm. For wind turbines, that standing 200 feet or more in height, are required to contain flashing red lights as a safety measure to warn pilots and other potential aircraft obstacles of the farm (American Clean Power Association, 2022). During the day this may not seem too bad or recognizable to citizens but during the night this can become a problem to nearby residents. In an issue of The Perquimans Weekly, staff writer John Foley states, “the flashing red lights on top of the wind project’s towering turbines at night are casting a glow into homes up and down the Bertie County side of the river” (Foley, 2024). For residents this could disturb sleeping patterns and interrupt day to day functions. This brings up a point related to clean energy when it could affect the comfort of users and nearby residents; Do the advantages of clean energy outweigh the disruption in comfort? As technology advances, we could see a decrease in some of the cosmetic problems and disturbances, however for the time being we beg to question; What are we willing to give up? This brings us to a clean energy “nirvana”, the idea that people are willing to take the step towards clean energy but are not willing to deal with the potential problems and discomforts clean energy may bring to their lifestyle. So, what do you think? Are we living in a clean energy “nirvana” or is this a feasible option to our carbon emission epidemic?

Not only does the introduction of clean energy initiatives bring betterment for the environment, but it can bring economic growth into a community. Solar panels and wind farms can be used to collect large amounts of for the community. Tax revenue is a revenue account that is used to support advances and improvements within areas such as education, infrastructure, public health, and public safety. In the case of Currituck County, the opportunity for solar development is slow moving. The counties tax revenue shows to be substantial, so to incentivize solar development citizens are granted an 80 percent property tax exemption to encourage solar development. This push is to show the revenue opportunities in parts of the state where farming and traditional industries have declined (Carrington, 2017). Although citizens have been presented with these options, residents are not seeing a greater benefit for the cost. Similar trends have been seen within the proposed idea for a solar farm in the Grifton, NC area. It is estimated that the project will generate \$7.4 million in tax revenue for Pitt County over the course of its operation (Gruner, 2025). Additionally, Pitt County is expecting the opening of a solar panel manufacturing facility, Boviet Solar, in the near future. This facility is expected to create more than 900 jobs through 2028 (Gruner, 2025). As more people are migrating into the Greenville-Pitt County area we will see an increase in consumer spending, tax revenue, housing developments, and overall growth within the area.

Community Opinions

The introduction of initiatives for renewable energy and ongoing rate adjustments across Eastern North Carolina has raised a wide range of community opinions, ranging from optimism and skepticism toward the role of utility companies and cooperatives. The

discussions from the community have become central topics about affordability, sustainability, and community accountability. Not only are we seeing a rise in discussion by community members but also, we are seeing discussion raised by the companies themselves.

Across Eastern North Carolina, residents have expressed that electricity rates are a significant concern. In 2024, residents responded to an electric power rate increase from Greenville Utilities Commission. The increase was due to an additional charge from the commissions power provider, Duke Energy. Jennifer Summerlin, a local resident of the Pitt County area, responded to the increase stating “I do not like it, I mean, everything is increasing. Food is increasing, gas is increasing, rent is increasing, now they want to increase the light bill” (WNCT, 2024). The commission is stating that the increase will not be permanent and is a reflection of higher energy costs that occurred in 2022. The commissions communications manager, Steve Hawley, states “It’s going to take us two years to recover, so we’re going to have to increase our bills for the next two years.” (WNCT, 2024). The commission has stated previously they do their best to keep rates as low as possible, however it is up to community members to decide if it is reasonable that rates increase as the country is faced with inflation.

However, 2024 was not the only year the commission was faced with backlash over the rates of their utilities. In 2023 the community raised concern about the rates that the commission was charging stating “Greenville Utilities Commission is the only game in town, so they can charge whatever they want,” (Mayfield, 2023). Although this may be a true statement, residents may not be aware that the commission is a not-for-profit entity. The

rates the commission charges are based on the costs of purchased power. Even though rates may be high, this is not a direct reflection on the commission. In response to such concerns, the commission has offered to provide assistance to community members. Steve Hawley states, “If you have serious problems and you need some help from us, we ask the folks reach out to us and we'll work with them on an individual basis” (Mayfield, 2024). This exemplifies the commissions commitment to provide to their community, whereas this may not be the case for other communities. Additionally, customers can request audits on their energy systems at no cost. Through this process any issues within an energy system can be pin-pointed and resolved, helping lower utility bills.

However, not just commission employees are responding to customer concerns, so is the general manager of the commission. In an article posted by The Daily Reflector, an Eastern North Carolina newspaper, General Manager Anthony Cannon states “I never want to present a rate increase to you. The fact is, we’ve been in a rising cost environment for a long time” (Livingston, 2025). Even though customers may not support a rate increase, it is viable for the continued operations of the commission. Cannon follows up his original statement stating that the rate increase is to support the sustainability of the commission. He explains what sustainability means stating “What sustainability means is we are here today and we’re going to be here tomorrow. In order for us to be here tomorrow, we have to be affordable. That’s what we are working to do” (Livingston, 2025). In reality customers have a tendency to hyper fixate on rate increases while taking for granted what life would look like if their local utility company was not in operation. Not only do they run the

potential for an absence of utilities and electricity, but also comparably higher rates from other providers.

While in Cape Hatteras the Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative (CHEC) is also experiencing a rate increase. The Coastland Times reports that CHEC held their annual meeting where they announced a new rate increase based on a recent cost of service study. Susan Flythe, Executive Vice President/General Manager of CHEC, states “Beginning May 1, 2025, CHEC will implement an average increase of 6.37%. The overall average rate increase is 9.79% however, by instituting a wholesale power cost adjustment (WPCA) credit in the amount of (.005) ¢ per kWh, the effective change to member’s bills will be an average of 6.37%” (Goodloe-Murphy, 2025). Greenville Utilities Commission is not the only electric company having to raise rates in response to the price increases of service, most utility companies are.

However, many customers of the CHEC are concerned that their rates are being increased to support community programs for those in need. A question asked within the CHEC “2025 Rate Increase Frequently Asked Questions” on their website a customer asks “I understand that CHEC has a program to help those in need in the community; are my rates being increased to support this program?”. The CHEC responded to the question by explaining that contributions to these programs come from members who voluntarily round up their monthly electric bill (Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative, 2025). Additionally, customers wonder if capital credits that are returned to members can be kept by the CHEC to combat rate increases. Within frequently asked questions a member asks, “Each year capital credits are returned to members; can CHEC keep those monies instead of

increasing rate?”. The CHEC responded stating “In order for the cooperative to comply with loan covenants established by our lenders, RUS & CFC, rates must generate sufficient margins (profits) to make both the principal and interest payments on our debt. Our not-for-profit status mandates that any net margins made by the cooperative must be allocated to the membership in the form of capital credits.” (Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative, 2025). Evidence shows that rate increases are unfavorable within the community and consumers will do anything to get around them, but in the end, they are inevitable given rising costs within the economy.

Ongoing discussions surrounding utility rate increases across Eastern North Carolina reveal the balance between affordability for consumers, sustainability, and effective operations. While residents and consumers voice frustrations over rising energy costs, utility providers emphasize that rate adjustments are imperative to maintain reliable service provision and meeting financial requirements within the rising economic climate. Organizations demonstrate transparency through explaining rate changes and offering assistance to those in need. Ultimately, rate increases are unpopular but they are necessary to ensure utilities can serve their communities effectively, sustainably, and equitably.

Conclusion

Electricity plays a vital role in everyday life, yet it is still something that many individuals take for granted and are unaware of where their power originates and how rates are determined. The analysis of Greenville Utilities Commission, Cape Hatteras Electric

Cooperative, and Tideland Electric Membership Corporation within this paper demonstrates the relational balance between rate provision and sustainability within Eastern North Carolina utilities. Municipal and cooperative utilities share the main goal of providing utilities reliably, cost effectively, while also maintaining their financial structures and models. However, the research highlights that purchased power and inflationary costs inevitably drive rates which raises community concerns over the fairness and transparency of rates being provided.

With the emergence of clean energy initiatives, there is an evident shift towards sustainability. This ultimately exposes tensions between environmental standards and acceptance from community members. While some residents view this initiative as an investment in the future, others view this as an unrealistic attack on their community. The differing perspectives discussed within this paper emphasize that clean energy initiatives must consider costs, public trust, and environmental impacts aside from carbon emissions.

The provision of utilities within Eastern North Carolina demonstrates a dynamic relationship between utility provision and the members and community that is being served. Long-term success requires balances between factors such as affordability, innovation, sustainably, and maintainability. Although everyone cannot be pleased, it is important utilities continue their impact within their communities and work towards more efficient and effective provision.

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