

Seattle City Light

R e s i d e n t i a l C u s t o m e r S a t i s f a c t i o n R e s e a r c h R e p o r t



J a n u a r y 2 , 2 0 0 7

Seattle, WA

600 Stewart Street, Suite 1300

Seattle, WA 98101

t: 206.443.8346

Anchorage, Alaska

880 H Street, Suite 208

Anchorage, AK 99501

t: 907.279.3982

f: 907.279.0321

Washington DC

jcraciun@crgresearch.com

C O N T E N T S

Background & Research Methods	3
Research Findings	5
A. Long-Time Residential Seattle City Light Customers	5
B. Short-Term Residential Seattle City Light Customers.....	17
C. South Suburban Residential Seattle City Light Customers.....	28
Appendix: Discussion Guide	35

Copyright © 2007, Craciun Research Group, Inc. All rights reserved.

B A C K G R O U N D & R E S E A R C H M E T H O D S

CRG Research was hired to conduct a customer satisfaction research project. The primary purpose of the research was to understand residential customer satisfaction including attitudes, opinions and perceptions of the service received from Seattle City Light.

Qualitative research, in the form of two focus groups, was conducted December 5 at The Gilmore Research Group facility in Eastlake and one focus group session held at Consumer Opinion Services, in Burien Washington, intentionally South of Seattle. Interviewers recruited the participants using a screener instrument to ensure group members met established requirements and represented selected key segments. The specific screener questions and breakdown of the groups is as follows.

The first focus group conducted on December 5, 2006, was comprised of a group of Short-Term Residential Customers and they lived in Seattle one to four years. The second focus group conducted the evening of December 5, was made up of Long-Term Residential Customers who had lived in Seattle ten years or more.

The third focus group conducted on Dec 7, was South Suburban Residential Customers who had lived south of Seattle for more than one year.

Participants for the focus groups were recruited from a list approved by our client inclusive of Seattle City Light service boundaries. Ms. Craciun moderated these focus groups; she holds a Master's degree in Sociology from Cleveland State University and has completed course work on a doctoral degree in Human Resources Education from Boston University (ABD). She is currently serving on the national board for Qualitative Research Consultants Association (QRCA).

RESEARCH METHOD

Focus group research by design provides quality controls on data collection in that participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other, which weed out false or extreme views. The group dynamics typically contribute to focusing on the most important topics and issues being discussed. Trained qualitative analysts can assess the extent to which there is a relatively consistent, shared view of the discussion topics among the participants. ¹

¹ Patton, Michael Quinn, How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation, Sage Publications, November 1987

The focus group interview is an information gathering process that seeks to discover the perceptions, feelings, and experiences of the selected participants about a particular topic. Focus Groups help to determine the ways that participants structure their world around the particular topic. The focus group participants respond to the questions in their own words and trained observers can learn much from the group interview. The unit of analysis for this type of research is “the group” and not the individual. From the focus group interview we learn how people view the particular topic or experience, hear their terminology and capture the complexities of the individual experiences in a group interview environment. ²

A focus group study is a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. A trained professional moderator conducts each group with six to eight people. The discussions are relaxed, and often participants enjoy sharing their ideas and perceptions. And [Ideally] you don’t do just one focus group. The group discussion is conducted several times with carefully selected participants so the researcher can identify trends and patterns.³

NOTE TO READER:

This research project was conducted prior to the December 2006 storms and power outages in the Seattle area.

In this report, statements from individuals within each focus group are offered in order to exemplify the feelings and opinions of the participants. These statements are indented rather than contained in quotation marks. A bracket “{“ leading off an indented statement indicates consecutive statements from two or more focus group participants.

² Gredler, Margaret E., Program Evaluation, Prentice Hall, September 1995.

³ Krueger, Richard A., Casey, Mary Anne, Focus Groups 3rd Edition - A Practical Guide for Applied Research, Sage Publication, Inc. 2000

A. LONG-TIME RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMERS FOCUS GROUP

Conserve Energy

The participants of the long-time residential customers' focus group were especially interested in finding ways to conserve electricity. They feel that "it matters very much" that Seattle City Light is nationally recognized in energy efficiency and environmental stewardship and are "really happy about it." Some wanted to know how to lower their bills and others were more concerned about saving environmental resources. All feel that Seattle City Light could serve customers better by providing information to residents about ways to decrease energy usage. At the end of the focus group when the moderator asked for advice from each participant, prompting them to summarize their most important concern, members indicated a primary interest in conserving energy.

[Moderator]: as a public utility, the community owns Seattle City Light. Its Website states, that it is nationally recognized in energy efficiency and environmental stewardship. I was wondering, how do you feel about that? Does that matter to you?

{Oh, it matters, yeah, it matters very much.

{I'm really happy about it... We need to conserve and need to pay attention to what we're doing in energy.

I look at it as being a real asset if they really are more environmentally conscious and I think that the power companies are going to be pushed that way in the future and it's going to cost them a lot more money if they haven't already taken those steps voluntarily.

{I totally agree. I know they just passed the initiative that required all public utilities to expand their alternative sources of energy.

I believe it sounds like we're all saying, "Educate us. Tell us how we can save money. Bottom line."

I would say, emphasize the conservation of energy but for all homeowners and all renters on everything. How important that is.

I'd say help us figure out how we can conserve more in our particular houses.

I agree with everything today on conservation and how to save money.

Energy efficiency and environmental stewardship is a high priority.

I'm like totally into conservation—everything you can do to make your house more energy efficient. I think whatever help the Utility can give to you would be wonderful. But I also think it's ultimately up to you to deal with the situation.

I had a tenant that had a two-bedroom, and she was always complaining about her electric bill. We really did a lot to try to figure it out. And then she left and the bill dropped down to seventeen dollars a month. Nobody's in the house now, and so that's just for maintaining. She took something out of there that stopped it. That's the part that's such a mystery to people. It's like, "What causes the extra energy to be used in your house?"

Offer Audits, Monitoring and Trouble Shooting

The long-term residential customers' focus group expressed concern about some property owners who do not care about the high bills that their tenants may be paying, so they do not bother to fix a faulty furnace, replace an appliance, or make their building more energy efficient. All of them approved of the group participant who has renters because she works with Seattle City Light to find ways to help her renters reduce their electric bills. The members of the long-term residential customers' focus group were intrigued by the idea of having special meters installed inside homes that would help customers monitor their own energy use in terms of dollars rather than kilowatts.

My bills are no less than three to five hundred dollars.

{Oh, my gosh!

{It's ridiculous. And I don't know if it's the neighborhood I live in or what it is.

{It sounds to me like you ought to have an energy audit. There's just something wrong.

{I told them, I think something's wrong. At first I thought it was...

{Ridiculous. [upset, overlapping voices.]

{... electricity surging or something. They said that wasn't it.

{And you've been complaining and you've said, "O.K. something's wrong out here. I'm paying this big bill." And they're going, "Nothing's wrong, lady."

{I used to work for a small group that did energy audits, and the thing that you notice is that the people with the highest energy bills are the ones that are living in rental properties where the landlord doesn't really care about how much they're paying for utilities. So your landlord isn't going to benefit if he insulates your house or fixes your furnace or does whatever it is that's wrong. Because something is wrong in your house. That is not right. But you're the one that pays the bills, not your landlord.

{I've had countless people tell me something's wrong.

{It sounds to me like you need an auditor to come out there and just really look at your place.

I think it's just hard. The information is just not in one place. I'm thinking of it as a rental, as somebody that has a rental, what you can do to help. I don't want my tenants to leave and have these high bills. But I think it's hard to find what are the energy-saving things that make sense.

I was on an island in Alaska and they had installed these little meters inside the house so you could actually see minute-by-minute what your energy usage was, and I think it was read off in dollars. I mean, who the hell knows what kilowatts are? But it really helped the people understand how much energy they used.. They could flip on a television and see how much difference it made. Or if they want a refrigerator or something on, they could see how much electricity it was burning. But you have no direct feedback right now. I'd go out and look at that little wheel turning around on my [group laughter]. It's turning! But if it would say, "You're going twenty cents a minute" or "Two dollars an hour" or something like that, then I'd go, "Wow!"

I would like to see them have a committee that can be like a troubleshooting committee where people who have large bills to investigate, to see exactly what's going on in the house or apartment, to see why the bill is as expensive as it is.

Just a couple of years ago my husband and I were both out of work. They had this program to kind of help out people like that. And they came through, and they wanted you to do energy conservation, so they put the insulation underneath our house, in the attic, it was great. And we had the energy efficient windows and stuff like that. But I was really impressed with those services that were out there. It helps them save money too.

I would like to see there be some pressure that City Light put on people whose houses are...whether if for the poor people or like kids rent. They're just upset because they have these huge bills but there's not much they can do about them except shiver.

Provide Energy Education

Members of the long-time residential customers' focus group would like Seattle City Light to serve as a clearinghouse for information about the latest technology to reduce energy use. They want Seattle City Light to provide a showroom or a store that displays solar panels and other energy-saving devices. They suggest a Seattle City Light Website that describes specific ways for customers to reduce energy use that includes links to corporate Websites showing which brands of appliances use less electricity. They suggested that Seattle City Light conduct programs at the public schools to teach children about energy conservation.

I think continued education, like saying, “This is how much your dryer uses energy-wise” and comparing it to the energy-efficient ones too. That might help people realize [how to conserve].

Do they do education in the schools? The little kids? They should. Going into the schools. Let’s get the kids. Educating them about turning off lights. About basic electricity education.

If there was a shop or some place like a store you could go to that would have the solar panels, it would have all of it in one spot. It’s hard for people to figure out who’s got this stuff.

What if they just had a clearinghouse on line of what was available? Because they get all that information. Somebody’s reading all that stuff and correlating all the stuff.

{Exactly. And they could have it available. It’s a lot to figure out who’s doing what. If they had the sources, then we could go on line and get a link to whose got what we want.

Like I know some heaters that I found that I think take half the amount of all these electric wallboards. But [the information] is just not out there for people. So if City Light had a showroom, a store, something where people could go through and then the person in the store tells you what would work or not work. Because I think now it’s all disconnected information.

Especially the heaters, the little heaters, they take up so much [electricity]. I think City Light can do so much research and come up and let people know about these alternatives to wall heaters that are in a lot of rentals.

Offer Deals on Energy Saving Appliances

The long-time residential customers focus group are interested in saving money by purchasing energy saving devices and appliances. They suggested that Seattle City Light could make volume purchases and sell products cheaply to their customers.

Another good thing would be electric-sensored lights so that when you came into the room, the light would go on rather than having to flip a switch.

What about those LED lights? I think there’s some new technology, I bet it’s hard to...it’s expensive for people but if they went in and started pushing this stuff... If City Light got it, in volume, and then offered it to their customers...

The problem with the tankless water heaters is they’re so new, there’s not enough of a demand yet. So that’s what keeps the prices so high. I’m putting one in and it’s pretty good. You can run three faucets and four hundred gallons. Seattle City Light could help customers. If they could broker a deal to say, “We’re bringing in X amount of water heaters,” then they can drive the price down for us.

I like how they pass [conservation] ideas on to us, the customers. I like the fact that they have the energy-saving light bulbs that you can exchange.

I think they have started to do a pretty good job of that but I think they could push it more, like instant water heaters on demand.

Didn't they at one time supply water heaters, at a cost, I'm sure.

I'd like to see more emphasis on the lighting and how important to be using those new bulbs that came out. I bought one not too long ago and it was so dim; I didn't buy the right kind apparently. They're selling them now. Because I want a lighter one over a special place where I'm sewing or reading and I want a brighter one, but I don't want to use...I'm so conscious of energy now, especially with my grandkids, it's appalling how they leave lights on. I was brought up to turn off lights.

Continue Newsletter As Is

During the opening discussion of the long-time residential customers focus group, one of the participants spontaneously mentioned the Seattle City Light newsletter. She likes that the Utility promoted recycling and appreciates the graphs about energy use. Another group participant indicated that she "loves" the newsletter. At that time the moderator requested a show of hands of those who read it, and half of the participants raised their hand. Later in the discussion, the moderator returned to the newsletter as a discussion topic. She determined that half of them had read the most recent issue of *Light Reading*. The focus group participants generally agreed that the newsletter "teases" people with a few subjects that are touched on lightly. Rather than change the newsletter format, they would like it to introduce subjects and indicate where they could learn more about each topic if they are interested. They suggested that the newsletter with its headlines can introduce a subject and provide links to the Internet where there is in-depth information available. They discussed and discarded the idea of having a community newsletter filled with human interest stories. All of the participants agreed that they like the newsletter and that it should be continued in the current format. Even those who do not read it admit that they glance at the headlines, and all participants appreciate that the newsletter is available.

I live in an apartment building. I've lived there for 21 years now on Queen Anne, which has been a long time to live in an apartment. I was appalled that we didn't have recycling. The [Seattle City Light] had in their monthly little newsletter a lot about recycling. And that's one of the things that they emphasized, and also the fact that you use so much energy from time to time at different months, the graphs.

{I love their newsletter.

[Moderator:] Does anyone else love the newsletter? I'm going to ask you about it a little bit later. So but just during this introductory part of the focus group, who reads it?

{I do.

[Moderator, looking at show of hands.] Well, about half read them.

I get auto pay. It is simple. I prefer just having them automatically take out, which they do. They just take it out of my account but they still send me a little notice and that's when I read whatever is in the newsletter.

I think [the newsletter] is good, but I feel a lot of times like it's a spin doctor kind of thing. It's like a glob of this and a glob of that and a glob of something else. But there's nothing really as concrete as if they had an on-line source where you could go and really research information and find out more about things. It teases you. [Many agree.]

I read it but it doesn't give enough information or direct me where you need to go.

I think the newsletter just kind of gives a face to City Light.

{That's what I said. It's a spin.

I have enough things to read already [group laughter] as it is. It would have to be brief and it would have to be something that like...if I saw the headline and thought, "That's interesting," great. I'll read it. Otherwise I won't read it.

I don't read it. I don't think I ever have, but I think it should continue. I think it is of value. [All agree.]

I do like the newsletter. I like the little blurbs, and I kind of skim it as well. I don't read the whole thing but if there's ways to save me money, here's some ways and tips. And "If you want more information, go to our Website, there's more information on this."

People just want to save money and be proactive. That's what I hear people saying. And tapping the energy-saving tips in the newsletter. [All agree.]

Make Radio Announcements About Power Outages

The residential customers focus group was conducted before the December 2006 storms and power failures in the Seattle area.

Unsolicited Comments about Power Outages. When the moderator was requesting general opinions about Seattle City Light, one of the participants stated (without probing about outages) that power failures are handled quickly. All of the participants agreed. When asked who read the current issue of *Light Reading*, one participant said she had glanced at the headlines, saw that it was about outages, and set it aside because she "never" experiences power failures. As the discussion was directed toward customer service, one of the focus group participants was pleased to report that when there was a power outage she could report it automatically by phone and did not have to wait a long time to talk with a customer service representative. The group offered unsolicited, positive opinions about the way that Seattle City Light handles power outages.

I'm always impressed with the fact that whenever there's a power failure or anything, it very quickly comes back on. [Assenting voice.] Very quickly. [All agree.]

I didn't read it because of the headline "power outages;" I never have power outages.

Solicited Comments about Power Outages. When the moderator turned the discussion to focus on power outages, these long-time residential customers indicated that they do not need to talk to a customer service representative, but they do want to be informed about outages when they occur. They prefer to receive information from Seattle City Light through radio announcements, pointing out that most modes of communication would not be available with the electricity out, but that most people have battery-powered radios. One person was concerned about power surges, which she experienced after a brief outage. (The surge defrosted the food in her freezer.) She asked that Seattle City Light be cognizant of that problem. The following is a slightly edited verbatim rendition of the focus group discussion on this subject.

[Moderator:] If you had an outage and you wanted to report an outage, what do you do now?

I've never had to report one.

I've had them but they usually come back on.

What about power surges? I would like them to be on the lookout for a power surge. Because sometimes the outage is very brief, but I've had my whole freezer melt from a power surge. Believe me, when you've got a freezer full of food, that's kind of a pain.

[Moderator:] So the question I have, the frequency and duration of outages. Good? Bad?

About one in twenty years.

I think the only time we had one was when we had a severe earthquake and there was nothing anybody could do about it. You just had to deal with it yourself.

[Moderator:] But we have to be preparing now, right? So how would you like them to inform you about an outage? Do you want them to phone, e-mail, Web, fax, US mail, radio, TV, put door tags on your house to say, "We're dealing with an outage."

Radio would probably be the only way because you'd have a portable radio. If there's a power outage, you wouldn't have a portable T.V. in most cases. Telephone too. And you wouldn't have your computer unless you were wireless. So it would have to be by radio.

[Moderator:] O.K.. So outage.

Well, you'd have a telephone...

[Moderator:] Unless it was electrical, plugged in. A plug-in phone.

We're all attached to the cell phones.

[Moderator:] So...O.K.. Do we feel prepared for a bad outage?

{A bad one? No.

[Moderator:] Are we prepared? I'm just wondering. I'm asking whether we're prepared. Are we, the customers of City Light feeling prepared if we have a bad outage?

We have candles.

We should be because we're supposed to be prepared for earthquakes.

Earthquakes or terrorists...

[Moderator:] I'm just asking if we feel prepared?

No. [She laughs.]

[Moderator:] Who doesn't? Who doesn't feel prepared for an outage? A bad one.

What do you mean by bad? Do you mean like several days?

[Moderator:] Something that might happen that we don't expect.

Three to five days.

We have a generator so we could generate our own electricity if we needed to.

[Moderator:] But it's not a problem now. But in the future and as things are changing.

Are they going to give us hints on the newsletter? [She chuckles.]

Provide Easy Phone Access to Customer Service Representative

One participant of the long-time residential customers focus group reports she is on a "fixed income" with electric bills as high as five-hundred dollars. She reports that sometimes when she calls Seattle City Light about her bill, the customer service representative is rude to her. One other participant said she had a similar problem with rudeness. Several indicated that they had to wait for long periods of time or had trouble getting to a real person. They would like the Utility to make it easier for them to get to a person on the phone more quickly. Others in the focus group report positive experiences with customer service. The following are responses to the question asked by the moderator, "What does good customer service look like to you in terms of your relationship to City Light?"

With customer service for me, them being more polite, because a lot of them can be very rude, and I've had situations where I had to ask to speak to someone else. The reason why I said that they can be rude is because I'm on a fixed income, and now that I'm on a fixed income, I have to call them more to make arrangements with them, and just trying to make arrangements with them sometimes can be very hard. Especially when you're talking to somebody rude already. They're very rude. Well, not all the time, but they can be rude.

I'm good at computer trees. I'm good at phone trees and that sort of thing. But I think sometimes it would really be nice to have a zero where you could get a real live person right away. Because sometimes you really do need to get to someone real.

When I've called regarding our rentals, for instance, I've been put on hold for probably twenty minutes before I could finally get to a real person. And that usually happens, usually the first part of the week rather than the last part of the week, but that's usually when I have had time to call because I have Mondays off and, like she said, it would be nice just to be able to say, "Enter your phone number and we'll call you back," or something to that effect, that would help to facilitate that long waiting time.

I wanted to find out about the energy usage for a certain appliance or how to calculate it for a tenant. And they had all the information right there. And then they sent it to me right away. So I got it back pretty fast.

I like them, because you never have to call them. I call them once in 20 years and that's only to give me an automatic payment. I don't like having to write checks anymore.

I've never had a problem that I can think of with City Light.

Continue Billing Bi-Monthly

Two participants of the long-time residential customers focus group have moved from large homes to apartments in their retirement years. They are delighted with their bills from Seattle City Light for nineteen or twenty dollars. Others have higher bills for large homes, greenhouses, and medical equipment. Although they are not so pleased as the two with lower bills, they see a connection between their use and the amounts they pay. All of the participants of this focus group are interested in conserving energy to keep their bills as low as possible. They like that they are billed every two months and that it alternates with the water bills, so each month year round they are paying about the same amount—more water in the summer and more electricity in the winter months. They like their statements that provide a comparison from one year to the next about energy use in their homes. The following are responses to a question asked by the moderator, "Now could all of you right now think back to the last time you paid your bill. I want you to go there. You're at home wherever you write your bills, whether it's electronically or whatever. What does it feel like when you pay that bill every sixty days? Is there a feeling?"

I'd like to take my money and go shopping. [Group laughter.] I have my payment in my purse right now that I have to make to them. And it's around Christmastime, and I'd like to go shopping with it, but I know I gotta pay them.

I actually enjoy it because my bill is so small [She laughs]. It's kind of like, all right! Twenty bucks, you know, for two months!

{That's almost exactly almost what I pay, nineteen or twenty dollars. It's such a source of bragging rights. All my friends that have big homes and I did too. I used to pay a lot more.

It's a seasonal thing for me. In the summer months it's lower; in the winter months it's higher because you need more light.

I like how they show it, what your usage was last year and this year. Compare it.

{Oh, I love that.

I'm just glad I got the money to pay it.

I approve of the fact that they have different rates, they have the summer rates and the winter rates too, which I don't know if it really affects people's usage or not because most people conserve as much as they can probably. But I think it kind of brings home to you the cost of your power and when it's easily available and when it isn't. Because most of it is hydroelectric here.

We have a problem because of health issues that we have to have things running twenty-four seven, and I wish that there was some sort of a subsidy program for medical use that it would be a lower rate or a discount or something like that.

I have a little greenhouse. I would like to find some other way to heat it. Because this is killing me. It does go up a lot; in the summertime because I have a yard, the utility bill goes up. In the wintertime the (unclear) goes up. But either way I'm paying over two hundred dollars a month.

That's why I call in to say, "How can I figure out exactly where the usage is coming from?" So that if there is something I can do about it.

Save Money: Energy Rebates, Peak Hours, Interruptible Power

At the beginning of the focus group session, the moderator asked for general impressions about Seattle City Light, and received an unsolicited response about the “energy rebate.” They expressed confusion about energy rebates, but they would like to know more and partake of any program that would save them money on their electric bills. Later in the focus group discussion, the moderator probed for “products and services” that the Utility could provide that goes beyond the usual request for wind and solar power. They discussed the possibility of getting a rebate if they use their washing machines and other appliances during off-peak hours to free up power for commercial customers using electricity during peak times. They also discussed qualifying for rebates for “interruptible power.” The following are slightly edited verbatim renditions of two separate discussions on these subjects.

I like the energy rebate.

[Moderator:] The energy rebate? O.K..

Like the washing machines. I wish they would do more of that.

[Moderator:] Jay doesn't know about it?

No, I knew about it but I also know that I didn't get one when I bought my home, so I'm not sure how they work.

[Moderator:] How the rebates work? There's some confusion on the rebates? [Assenting voices.] O.K.. Let's hear the confusion on the rebates, how many people do not understand rebates?

I don't know anything about it.

I don't know much about it.

[Moderator:] Four, five that say there's some confusion. The others don't seem to know. What were you going to say, Jane?

I was just going to say that I agree with Tom, like when they gave the energy-saving light bulbs.

Moderator:] So go further. Those are typical things you hear about. Solar, wind. O.K.. Something different. Bigger. What other products or services could City Light be getting involved in? It doesn't just have to stay just stay electric.

Patti mentioned earlier that there was something about using your washer and dishwasher at certain periods.

[Moderator:] Do they tell you that?

I wish they would.

They say, “Hey, use this”—maybe a clock or something—saying, “This is the best time to use your dishwasher.”

I think I’ve seen that in the past.

I’m just wondering what difference the hour of the day makes whether you do the laundry or whatever?

How much demand there is. The demand for it is so high...

Yeah, but I mean as far as it affecting your bill?

It does, and that’s why nobody will do it. [Group laughter.]

If I was told that if I did all my wash at night, it would save power for the commercial people during the day and I got a rebate, I would do my laundry at night.

[Moderator:] If the electric utility company told you customers, “Do things this way and you’ll save some money,” you would do that? [All agree.]

I don’t live in a big house anymore but somehow I learned...I heard somebody out there saying, “Do they have interruptible power?” I’ve heard of that where they’ll put a special meter to your house and they’ll say, “If we have a need for more power, we’ll cut off your power to like, say, your water heater or something like that, in the middle of the day that you don’t need it anyway.” A factory that’s operating in the middle of the day, say, for example, and they have a high demand, so I don’t know if they have it available, but I think that they do, but if they don’t, I think they should.

B. SHORT-TERM RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMERS FOCUS GROUP

Provide Easy Phone Access to Customer Service Representative

The members of the short-term residential customers' focus group agreed that if they are having problems related to Seattle City Light, they want to talk with "a real live person" on the phone. Most of the focus group participants want a person to answer "Hello, Seattle City Light," while another indicated that he would go to the Web first. But if the problem could not be solved readily on line within a few minutes of searching, he would want to be able to make a phone call and talk with a customer service representative immediately. The following is a slightly edited verbatim rendition of two separate discussions held on this subject during this focus group session.

[Moderator:] O.K.. She wants things easy online, on the phone. What does good customer service look like to the rest of you?

Talking to a real live person rather than a recording.

Amen.

Yes.

[Moderator:] Do we all want to have a live person. Show of hands real quick? Everybody? Not Joe. O.K.. What's up, Joe?

Honestly, I would prefer to do my account research, everything like that on line. I would rather see everything in front of me on line when I can look at it at eleven o'clock at night or Saturday morning at one.

[Moderator:] O.K.. This is the one of those cases where we're all like, "Yeah, we want a live person, we hate those automated." But then Joe brings up a point.

Well, I think they go hand in hand because there's certain things that you can do on line now that's really convenient to access at any hour, but then there's things like when there's something really wrong with your bill and you can't ask the computer that. It's not to say that I don't want to, if I have a problem, get a hold of a live person, but my preference to pay a bill, to connect or disconnect, to accomplish easy tasks is not to sit on the phone and wait or find a phone number or any of that. I would prefer to go through the Internet and do it on line.

[Moderator:] How about someone else? What is the relationship there?

To disconnect, connect, move, that type of thing, that's great to do on line. But when you actually have a problem with your bill like kilowatts, well, you're on vacation for three months and all of a sudden your bill comes in and it's ridiculously high and you know that your thermostat was turned down, so what's going on? See, that happened to me because I travel quite a bit and that happened to me. So that was a big problem.

[Moderator:] So what did you do right when that happened?

I actually contacted customer service, spoke with someone. I live in a condominium and so I got a hold of the caretaker, went upstairs, looked at my meter, wrote it down, came back downstairs, called her in, and we went through it step by step.

[Moderator:] Now how was that experience overall? Was that a good...

That was a good experience for me. Yes, it was.

[Moderator:] If you have a problem, what do you want to do? What is your preferred method to communicate with City Light? Do you want phone, voice mail, e-mail?

I want to talk to a person.

I'd want to talk to a person.

[Moderator:] So with a problem, we want to get a person.

I would use e-mail as well. The only reason why I would use e-mail is just to document it; like if it were really a problem.

Well, just to say that sometimes a Website is the quickest way to get the solution, but sometimes talking to a person is the quickest way to get to a solution.

[Moderator:] And so what's your feeling about City Light? Which is it?

Well, this generic six-eight-four-three-thousand number that you call for everything? It can take a while but I usually just keep pressing zero until I can talk to a person. [Group laughter.]

I'd want to talk to a person immediately. I'd want to have somebody that would say "Hello, Seattle City Light," and direct me to where I needed to go without having...

[Moderator:] Who's with Don? O.K.. That's all of you.

But I will say that I hope that doesn't put fear into City Light that they're going to have staff their phones with teams of people because I think sometimes I agree that the Website is usually the first visit I make, but sometimes if it's not in the frequently asked questions or if it's not right there, if I don't find it in probably three minutes, I want to make a phone call.

[Moderator:] Right. And that's what they're wondering. Will people go to the Website?

I would go to the Website to find a phone number. [Group laughter.]

Make Radio Announcements During Outages

The residential focus groups were conducted before the December 2006 outage. The members of the short-term residential customers' focus group were not concerned about power failure. When the moderator probed about preparations for an outage, they responded nonchalantly, pointing out that they live in a temperate climate so they are not likely to freeze and that they can "survive pretty well without power." One participant pointed out that because they live in an urban area, "most people don't think about those things till it happens." They reviewed the options for communication with Seattle City Light in case of an outage. After much discussion about the deleterious effects of power failures on cell phones and phone machines, they settled on a two-fold approach. They would want Seattle City Light to put a recording on a hotline that gives updates about the outage. And because most people have battery-powered radios, they think that radio announcements would be important, as well, to keep people apprised of the timeline for return of power.

[Moderator:] How should City Light keep you informed in an outage?

By having a recorded announcement as soon as they know.

Radio and telephone to be able to call and have a message updated as soon as possible and to be putting out regular updates on the radio.

If it's going to be an extended outage, I want to know so I don't open my freezer door.

I think the door tag bit would be too slow. By the time they hang the door tags, you could be back on power.

I was in New York for the blackout. You couldn't use your cell phones. You couldn't use a pay phone telephone. You couldn't pick up your messages.

The last time we had a blackout, I just called them and they had a recording and it told me everything I needed to know and I was satisfied.

Allow Payments with Credit Card

The participants of the short-term residential customers' focus group would like to have the option to pick up the telephone or go to the Internet and pay their bill on an *ad hoc* basis with their credit cards.

One particular person new I was coming, so she asked me to mention what she would like from Seattle City Light. I guess she has pretty high electric bills, and she said there are times that she'd like to pay her electric bill with a credit card, a Visa or MasterCard, and she can't do that.

[Moderator:] Like call up on the telephone? I heard that in an earlier group. Does anybody in this group like that, where you could actually pay your bill by calling or by paying on line? [Assenting voices.]

I'd like the option.

I'm going to keep it simple and say update your Website with the on line bill pay, bill information, current information, wattage use, yeah.

Expand Capacity to Compare Energy Usage Over Time

The members of the short-term residential customers' focus group appreciate the opportunity to compare their use of energy over a period of time and look at the tables provided in their bills. They want Seattle City Light to continue providing this service and to expand it to include access to past-use information on the Internet.

[Moderator:] Who does the comparison thing? About three or four of you. O.K.. Because I'm wondering how detailed people are getting into this. I mean, it's like half the group is really paying attention to these details.

Does that mean like on the paper bill?

I was just going to say that what I've noticed is the bill includes a month by month per year...

[Moderator:] But I'm asking do you guys pay attention to that?

Yeah. I look at how my usage habits change by season.

[Moderator:] By season, O.K..

And year to year I check.

Yeah.

[Moderator:] And Tony? Year to year? O.K. That's almost everybody.

Look Ahead for Alternative Energy Sources

When the members of the short-term residential customers' focus group were asked to give their single most important piece of advice to go to the administrators of Seattle City Light, they responded with bigger-picture suggestions that included looking to the future, continuing ethical business practices, and investing in research and development. The following is an edited verbatim rendition of their final discussion.

[Moderator:] O.K.. Last question. Final comment and everybody gets a chance to give me one. Seattle City Light has a mission to provide customers with affordable, reliable service and environmentally sound power for Seattle. After this discussion today, what is your single most important piece of advice for Seattle City Light management? What's your one thing that you want them to make sure to do as they listen to you customers and your issues and concerns? One piece of advice. Anyone?

I think their mission statement is great. They should continue working towards that and providing affordable energy, and I think in terms of everything we've talked about, I'd love to see them implementing even more alternative energy sources and sustainable energy sources.

[Moderator:] O.K.. Thanks. Jeff?

To be thinking fifty years down the road.

[Moderator:] O.K.. That's a good piece of advice. Somebody else? Final piece of advice? Your thoughts to the management of Seattle City Light, who will read this report? Yes, Judy?

It goes beyond Seattle and I think we have to start looking at it on a world level, where our energy's going, where our crises are going and whatever we talked about in this room, about alternative energy and not just saving the customer money but it's on a government level and a public level. Yeah, definitely...

[Moderator:] The global thing?

...investigating that alternative energy.

Be as energy efficient as possible. Stay in the forefront of serving the customer by informing them of what decisions will end up costing the customer less money. It's all about money because money is all about energy used. The less energy used, the better off we are. And continue to put every effort possible into looking for cutting-edge energy sources that are not presently used that could be researched and gradually brought on line as they become cost effective, i.e., don't jump into hydrogen; it's a big mistake.

I would agree. I wouldn't rule out hydrogen but I would continue to put a lot of money into research and development of alternative energy.

I would say that they should continue to be ethical because there's so much discussion around...just continue to be ethical and do the right thing for the public. I think ethical is a big issue.

Buy in Bulk; Sell at Reduced Prices to Customers

The members of the short-term residential customers' focus group would like Seattle City Light to put information on their Website about alternative forms of sustainable energy. They want City Light to purchase solar panels and other similar products in bulk and pass the savings on to their customers. They like the idea of residents' creating their own energy and selling it to the Utility. The following is an edited verbatim rendition of the discussion on this subject.

Mayor Nichols has set this goal of achieving certain percentage of sustainable energy. So I would like to know what it would take to get solar panels on a house? I don't want to go out and investigate and do all the on line research; I'd like them to make it easier for homeowners to do it themselves.

[Moderator:] So, some way for City Light to let you know that this is possible and you could do it or not do it.

Right. Exactly.

[Moderator:] And help you do that. Educate you about that.

Because right now that's a private enterprise.

But you can save money. You can sell energy to the City that way.

Yeah. I know someone who just did that.

They need to have some sort of program where they were buying solar panels in bulk so that consumers could get wholesale pricing.

If we did it as an individual, it would cost a lot, but if they do it as a bulk, a big organization and then offer it to us as customers that would save money and energy.

Someone that I know just did the whole solar panel thing since the summer. She saves a lot of energy. She spent a lot of money on this stuff, and a lot of people are interested in it, they keep asking her what are the costs to install and everything else and, of course, it comes up to this exorbitant price. But at the end, she saves money; I can't remember the percentage; and then it's all hers. The electricity that she didn't use goes back to the grid. Which is like a wonderful idea if the City could get more of that.

Because it is publicly owned, then we're all like sharing in the savings anyway. But she had to make a major investment first.

Continue Newsletter As Is

One of the members of the short-term residential customers' focus group spontaneously offered the information that she likes "those newsletters they put out with the bills." The group immediately discussed the newsletters. Although most of them only glance at the headlines and skim the articles, all of the group participants agreed that the newsletters should be continued in the current format. They are pleased that the clip art is not professionally rendered, because it shows that very little money was used to produce it. They appreciate that the information is there for them if they want it, and that it gives references to where more information may be obtained on the topics.

I like those newsletters they put out with the bills.

You look at the headlines and skim it.

"Meeting Our Future Energy Needs." That says something right there.

I got one from yesterday that I'm going to read when I get home.

I figure it doesn't cost anything. I know there's paper and what not, but the stamp is the same.

[Moderator:] So we like this. [All agree.]

It's informative.

Even though I don't read them every time, I do read them on occasion, and I like the tips. I like just having those reminders of how to conserve energy...

The recycling company sends out what has been added to the recycling.

I save mine. I don't throw them away but I don't always have the chance to do all my reading either.

[Moderator:] So should they do anything different in this newsletter for those that have periodically perused it? Anything different?

{Dump the graphics.

[Moderator:] So is there too much visual stimulation here?

{You gotta break it up somehow, guys, come on.

[Moderator:] You mean lighten it up? What do you mean? Like make it cooler? Is it not cool enough? Come on, you're kind of a hip group here. So is this not cool enough? Is that the problem?

{If they were trying to be really hip with their graphic design, I would worry about how they were spending their resources as well. You know they didn't spend any money on that.

I do like that they're bulleted usually, and the articles are short and to the point.
[Assenting voices.]

[Moderator:] So we don't want any more than this, right? But we want to keep getting them. [All agreed.]

If there's just enough on there, a few points for me to go, "Oh, yeah, I am going to buy a new water heater."

[Moderator:] I've heard that a couple of times. Would you look at this to be directed to the Website? (Assenting voices)

{Or to a telephone number where you can call for more information and detail.

Provide Cable and Wi-Fi Hookups to Residents

The participants of the short-term residential customers' focus group expressed enthusiasm about the idea of Seattle City Light expanding services to include cable and wi-fi hookups in homes. They liked the idea of the City Light helping to bring prices down by competing with telephone and cable companies. There was some concern that City Light might drive startup companies out of business, which would not be good for the general economy, but then they decided that they could offer subcontracts which would provide greater stabilities to small companies in this field. The following is an edited verbatim rendition of their discussion on this subject.

They've got the poles and everybody hangs their stuff on the poles. The cable companies, the telephone companies, everybody. So why shouldn't City Light be able to hang their stuff on the pole and take some of that dark fiber and use it for our benefit? There is a couple of cities around the country that does it.

It's not a big deal. They're not putting in any of those other cable companies out of business or anything but they're offering wi-fi and they're offering hookups, modems, right into your home.

[Moderator:] This is what I was asking. Group, are you into that? [Assenting voices.]

I would subscribe to the City.

[Moderator:] Do you want them to get into this other stuff or just stay in the business they're in? It's this whole issue: Do what you do well or expand? I'm asking you folks, should they do this new stuff or not?

If it's not going to compromise what they're already doing. [Agreement from group.]

I don't think I'd want them competing with people who are trying to start up companies that are centered around sustainable energy just because I think the market forces that needs to be getting there could wipe them out.

That business provides a public good as well as a private good. Whereas a telephone company or a cable operator is really just a private good. They got the efficiency; they want to make their money. If City Light wants to compete with that sort of business and bring the prices down, that would be good.

I'll second that. [All agree..]

I do think that you don't want to punish the people that are out there initially trying to get this sustain energy going with the solar panels and stuff.

But in a lot of cases, it's not an either/or because a huge contract from the City to an alternative energy manufacturer could be a lot bigger deal than a few people buying energy from them.

Yeah. So they buy the services that are coming up, the energy because it brings production costs down. Or subcontract.

Provide Specified Services

During the course of the short-term residential customers' focus group, the group participants mentioned a variety of services that they would like to see provided by Seattle City Light. They want the Utility to offer them the opportunity to save money by running household machines off peak hours. They would like to see their usage history online. They think it would be a useful to have a way to connect to the Internet so they can track their household usage of power on a day-to-day basis. They would like the wires buried for new construction. They suggested that Seattle City Light have hot water heaters designed and produced that puts the "blanket" insulation inside the cover of the water heaters. The energy efficient heaters should then be bought in bulk and sold to customers at a reduced rate. Below are verbatim renditions of short interchanges one each topic.

[Moderator:] Now you reminded me of something the earlier group said. Would you be willing to change your behavior of how you do things like, wash your clothes, if they said you could save money by doing it at this time instead that time. (Assenting voices) Everybody? [Assenting voices.] Show of hands. Everybody!.

{ You could save all kinds of money.

There are some credit card companies that you can see your daily activity on line. American Express is one of them. That's great.

[Moderator:] Would you like to do that? [All indicate yes.]

[Moderator:] In another group they were talking about a meter to watch how much electricity is being used in their houses. Do people want to know about that? Who wants to know about stuff like that?

{Obviously that would help. It gives you a little bit more tangible information rather than looking at a monthly bill or at a bimonthly bill, you know, two months later you're looking at what happened back in October. That means nothing to you because you can barely remember.

[Moderator:] So this needs to be done on line obviously because it's got to be in real time.

{Yeah. If you could see what your habits are.

I just want to get this in. I'm sure there's all kinds of details to be considered, but I would love it if for new construction, they would give serious consideration to burying those utility lines.

When I moved here from New England, they did that back East. And when we moved here, it was fifteen years ago, there was no such program. I even asked, "My house doesn't have a blanket for the hot water tank. Where can I get one?" They stopped doing it. They said it was bad for the water heaters and they don't do it anymore.

[Moderator:] So you guys are saying, bring it back. The group earlier wanted to bring it back too.

Well, maybe we ought to get the manufacturers to make a City Light water heater that's got twice as much insulation in it and sell them at scale so it costs us less that way. Then you put the insulation on the inside wall and not on the outside where it causes sweating and early death of the water heater.

Turn on Street Lights in Arboretum and Other Dark Roads

Several people in the short-term residential customers' focus group expressed concern that street lights in some areas, such as the Arboretum, are turned off at night causing safety problems for pedestrians and drivers. They suggest to the City of Seattle and Seattle City Light that they find ways to assure that these lights are providing enough light to assure the safety of the people. The following is an edited verbatim rendition of the discussion on this subject.

Since it is a public utility and it's affiliated with the City of Seattle, one thing I have a problem with is the lighting around the city on certain streets? It's not enough lighting in a lot of areas. As opposed to when I was a child, all the lights were on. And now in the last few years, probably like the last ten, you'll go through the Arboretum, completely dark, maybe one light, you know, certain parts. I'm from Capital Hill, certain parts of Capital Hill, you know, there's only like one light on that whole street.

[Moderator:] Has anyone else noticed that?

I know they alternate. They turn off to save energy, maybe it'll turn back on again so the bulbs last longer, I think.

Energy savings.

I think it's a safety issue personally. I don't think it's a good thing.

As a woman.

For anything. Not just a woman. For cars. People are unfamiliar with the area.

The Arboretum has a lot of twists in it and for safety, you need a certain amount of street lighting in there.

[Moderator:] Is there anything else that's kind of a strange thing that someone's observed that they're doing or not doing?

I wish there were less street lights personally. (overlapping voices)

They shine into my window at night and it's really bothersome and I just think that...actually I live on Capital Hill too. I think it's over lit where I live at least.

I would want the lights on. Especially at night.

And it's not just occasionally. This has been going on for quite a while.

[Moderator:] Got it. Got it. Very good. Something else? What else is going on like that? Are there other things?

In my area, which fairly recently went into its own city but still served by City Light, the street lighting was paid for by the individuals on the block involved. It was only on the ritzy side of town, east...

[Moderator:] How does that fit into our discussion? Help me out here. A good or bad thing that City Light did it that way? Should they do it that way or not do it that way?

I think that it should not be in the individual owner's hand to try and collect money from his neighbors in the immediate area to pay for the bill. It ought to be done by City Light as the cost of doing business and rolled into the rates.

The public area lighting.

[Moderator:] O.K..

Because everybody benefits.

C. SOUTH SUBURBAN RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMERS FOCUS GROUP

Foster Savings During Off-Peak Hours

The participants of the south suburban residential customers' focus group initiated discussion about off-peak savings. Some are already using their appliance, such as dishwashers and washing machines, during off-peak hours, but they are uncertain about the hours for peak and off-peak. They would like more feedback from Seattle City Light in their statements about when they can save money and how much they are saving. The following is a slightly edited verbatim rendition of the discussion on this subject.

Actually there is one thing I was thinking about and I don't know if we're going to be talking about this later on, but when they have your two usages, the peak and off-peak time, there is one thing that I would really like to know, as a consumer. I have two young daughters at home and do a lot of laundry and run my dishwasher quite a bit, and I would like to know when the off-peak time is. That's not clear on the bill. I've heard it's like eight o'clock in the evening. And I want to know.

[Moderator:] Let me ask you this. Because in all the groups, this is the third group I've done with residents, people talked about this. I'm going to ask you the same thing I asked them. Would you actually change your behavior in order to save money by washing this or that or doing laundry or running your dishwasher during non-peak hours?

Absolutely. [Assenting voices.]

[Moderator:] Show of hands?

Possibly, yes. To some extent.

Because the dishwasher can be...that's like...

Yeah. It's sitting...[overlapping voices] you can turn it on at...

Any hour.

Yeah, absolutely.

It's similar to your cell phone. With peak time and we change behavior that way too.

That's actually my one big complaint about my bill is that it does not make it clear. It should say right next to where the usage time is, if it's seven a.m. to eight p.m. for peak and, I believe it's weekends, something Friday evening to Sunday evening is the whole weekend, I believe, is the off-peak time. And sometimes I will wait and do my laundry, you know, seven loads, all on Saturday because it's quite a saving.

Use Radio Announcements During Outages

The residential focus groups were conducted before the December 2006 outage. Participants of the south suburban residential customers' focus group pointed out that Seattle City Light is fast at restoring electricity when there is a blackout, and Seattle has such a mild climate that freezing lines and outages are not a problem. In response to prompting by the moderator, the focus group members agreed that contact by a radio station is the best way because customers can use their car radios to get the information about when power will be restored.

In Seattle blackouts are a rare occurrence. If they've got something, they've got people out working on it.

I've observed City Light employees many times during blackouts, and not just in my area. But wherever I am, and they're working, they're not sitting around doing nothing. So from that observation, I'm impressed by that phase of the operation.

We're also lucky about that, though, that we live in such a mild climate. We don't have to deal with freezing power lines and flooding within the City of Seattle. It's pretty easy for them, I think, in comparison to other parts of the Country that way. So when there's a problem, they are not taxed so much on their time.

[Moderator:] How should they keep you informed during an outage? I mean, if there was like a big, bad, old outage that happened, and you haven't experienced much of those, how should they communicate with you about it?

Radio. We just got a hand-crank radio where you crank the radio to make the battery. They should have information by those so that they can transmit information that way. I'm not sure how else you get information to several million people.

You can't have people running around putting on door tags.

I'm thinking about what happened up North. And as far as I heard, they didn't communicate to the people.

Maybe they could have neighborhood contacts. I think actually in my neighborhood in Maple Leaf they do have that. They have a group of citizens in a neighborhood who are sort of the contact, and they sort of disperse the information within your area. Even people walking around possibly. And like at local schools.

{It sounds like a good idea but I've never heard about it through City Light.

Seattle City Light can announce through A.M. stations like seven-ten-thousand to pick up any information if you're out of electricity, because you can run out and get in your car, run to the store to pick up supplies.

Continue Newsletter As Is

The members of the south suburban residential customers' focus group like the newsletter because it is informative and "you learn something." Half of the group reads the newsletter, but all of them approve of it. Some read the headlines and skim the topics of interest. They think on page is a good for the newsletter. One collects them in case she wants to refer to the information in them. Another thinks that they should be sent by email to save on the printing costs.

They do a real good job on the bills, sending you a flyer of your use this year and use last year, the same time frame. They also send different things, telling you what they're doing and how you can conserve. It's like you learn something.

I just read mine yesterday.

I usually read them.

I always at least check the headlines.

I think that's what they're doing, communicating with customers. .

It may not be perfect but they're making the attempt to communicate and pass on information.

I think one page is good.

I just actually read mine yesterday about what to do in power outages. I think that's a good thing, you know, telling people how to stock up on certain items and just giving some good consumer information. I think it was today in the paper too they talked about what to do in emergencies, and I think that's also valuable. I think it's a good thing.

I collect them. I have a certain spot I stick them because it has information in there. I think, "Oh, someday I might need that."

I actually do read it in my bill but I'd just as soon read it on e-mail and then you don't have the printing costs.

Provide Easy Phone Access to Customer Service Representative

The south suburban residential customers' focus group wants to be able to contact a customer's service representative by telephone if they have a problem that requires communication with Seattle City Light. They are not fond of the menus on phones that require pressing buttons before they can get a person on the phone. The following is a slightly edited verbatim rendition of their discussion on this topic.

[Moderator:] So let's say you're experiencing a problem with your electricity in some way, shape, or form. What is your preferred method to communicate with City Light?

{Telephone.

[Moderator:] Telephone? That's it. Give them a call. Talk to a person?

Person.

[Moderator:] Person. O.K.. Does anybody want to e-mail?

If it's responsive and you don't just send an e-mail out into the ether somewhere and never get a reply back, I think that would be useful.

I prefer calling, person-to-person contact and response right away. I don't mind sending e-mail but I have to make sure it's getting somewhere and how long the response will be?

[Moderator:] So you like a phone call right then and talk to somebody. O.K.. Somebody else. Is that about right for everybody? [Assenting voices]

I don't want to wait for five minutes on the phone to get a person. don't want to push a lot of buttons to get to a customer service representative.

I'm with you on that one. I just think that after ten seconds of hearing some choices, fifteen seconds, I should be able to get a live body.

[Moderator:] Do people want to talk to a live body? [Assenting voices]

Provide Rebate Program and Insulation for Water Heaters

All of the members of the south suburban residential customers' focus group want Seattle City Light to offer rebates on purchases for energy-efficient appliances. They mentioned free insulation on water heaters as well.

One thing I like about Seattle Light is they give us free insulation on our water heaters. That creates real goodwill for the company as well as helping save electricity.

They used to give you a rebate for buying energy-efficient water heaters too.

Rebates and the washing machines as well, the high-efficiency washing machines.

[Moderator:] Do we like incentives to choose energy-efficient appliances? [Assenting voices] Everybody's nodding, I see that. O.K..

[Moderator:] Coming from City Light, if you get a good customer service experience, what is that?

A tree across the street grew into the high-tension lines. The high-tension lines are the three lines that run cross every telephone pole. They're the top lines, they're the hot lines. They have to be put in the transformer before you get...the little can is the transformer...the tree across the street was lightning and arcing into that, those lines, so we had a fire for a while. Then it went out. Then we had a fire again and it went out. After they were contacted, three guys came down that were supervisors and figured out what they were going to need to fix it, and within two more hours it was all done. So that's customer service...so that's customer service happening right now.

{Promptness.

Expand Payment Options

The members of the south suburban residential customers' focus group are aware of the service centers throughout Seattle. Several use them to pay their bills, but do not think that the service centers reach sufficient number of people to use them as a means to receive information from Seattle City Light. They want to have the option to pay their Utility bills by credit card. They did not feel strongly one way or another about monthly or bi-monthly statements. One group member mentioned that she likes the larger print on the statements.

I was just thinking about the statement. I think at one time the print was very small and as I remember it lately, it's a little bit larger, and I like that larger print even though it takes up a little more space, I like larger print.

I had an experience when I first started my account here and I wanted to pay the bills through the phone by just debit card. They won't accept it. At least two years ago.

Oh, that's very frustrating. And you have to mail it in and dah, dah, dah.

I want to pay right away. I don't mind paying right away but then you ask me to do all such stuff and compared with now-a-day efficiency, everything has to go, go, go. So that's very frustrating.

Service centers are a good idea.

[Moderator:] The service centers? Who's been to the community service centers? What are some of the reasons that we've gone there?

{Paying our bills. Water bill. Sewer. Garbage.

{Convenient.

It's your contact in your neighborhood. You don't have to go downtown. They're in your neighborhood. We know it done. You have an automatic receipt right there in your hand, knowing that, O.K., it's taken care of. You don't have to worry about it anymore.

Very rarely is there a line, and if there is a line, there's usually two people working. So I don't know how they know when there's going to be a lot of people, but they do, it seems like.

[Moderator:] Now if City Light wanted to let you know about something, would the community service center be a place where they should post some pamphlets? Would you pay attention to that there?

I go very seldom, but if you were there, there'd probably be better ways for me to get information.

Keep Up with Innovations

When the moderator asked the south suburban residential consumers focus group about new products or innovations they would like to see from Seattle City Light, they mentioned a new grid efficiency to transport electricity, cold conductors, a rebate program for home insulation, solar panels, wind energy, and underground wires. The following is an edited verbatim rendition of their discussion on this topic.

[Moderator:] I was wondering if there were any kind of add-ons and value-added ideas that you think a utility company could do or even maybe heard of a utility company doing. Just some creative idea.

Two days ago I heard on T.V. that MIT has come out with a new grid efficiency to transport electricity. So I don't know all the technicalities, of it but I just heard that blurb on there. And I'm wondering if Seattle Light is on top of these different inventions that are...improvements in technology. Then they had the cold conductors, two things that MIT had come up with that increase the efficiency of energy transmission.

[Moderator:] And so you would like them to stay on top of that kind of stuff?

Of all that kind of technology.

I would like to see, in terms of the rebate program, like also insulation, for example, when you purchase bales of insulation, you know.

I'd like to know if City Electric is using wind energy.

Yeah, they are.

[Moderator:] I don't have any idea, but would you like them to?

{Yeah.

I'd also like more information about if they do a program where they'll buy back electricity if you generate it yourself through solar panels.

I actually just read in Time magazine one of the best inventions, they said, was a personal wind generator for your yard. It cost ten thousand dollars and you can put one in there and it said it would provide like six hundred dollars' worth of electricity for your house a year.

That's what I would love for City Light to do. Put all the wires underground. And I would pay for it for sure, get the wires out because if you ever drive to a neighborhood, that a difference having underground wiring. What a difference.

Provide Ways to Monitor Household Power Usage

This residential customer's focus group was interested in monitoring their own power usage in their homes. One person described a T.V. program he had seen and others in the group thought it would be a good idea.

I was watching television a while back; I'm not sure what city it was in, but they had a monitor similar to the meter, but it was much smaller and it allowed people to show, and specifically kids, that each time you turned off an appliance or turned on, it would show you on some kind of meter how much electricity was actually being used. And I thought that you could get a visual, some kind of visual on, "Yeah, it does make a difference to turn off that bathroom light or to turn off a radio in the bedroom when we're downstairs."

And find out that something that's continually on that shouldn't be on?

And it's continually on and running that you don't know about?

And costing us money. Yeah. That's a great idea.

[Moderator:] You like that idea?

And especially for kids but for me too, for adults.

Seattle City Light Discussion Guide

Residential Sessions December 5 & 7, 2006

Customer Satisfaction Project

[TARGET SEGMENT: All residential customers who pay the utility bill. December 5 @ 6pm residents who have lived in Seattle 10+ years; December 5 @ 8pm residents 12 months to 4 years; December 7 @ 6pm residents who live South of Seattle and have lived here more than 1 year.]

I. INTRODUCTION: Today we are here to gain a better understanding regarding your attitudes and opinions about your publicly owned electric power utility. **We are going to ask you what good customer service looks like, what other services you might want City Light to offer you, and how best to communicate with customers ongoing.** We would appreciate learning from your experiences, we know you are seeing and reading a lot these days about utilities and that it is an essential service for you and your family now and into the future – thank you for all your comments today--individually and collectively.

II. WARM-UP: Utility Awareness by Residents

Let's begin with the big picture. We really do not need any detail at this time, but rather general comments.

1. Generally speaking, how do you think Seattle electrical rates compare with those of other US cities of the same size----higher, about the same or lower?
2. As a public utility Seattle City Light is owned by the community, its website states that they are nationally recognized in energy efficiency and environmental stewardship. How does that make you feel as an owner of this utility?
3. Is there increased complications because City Light is owned by the City of Seattle?

III. IN-DEPTH: Customer Satisfaction and Services

1. Considering the service and the electric power you receive, what is most important to you about the relationship with Seattle City Light?
2. Most focus groups mention lower rates, reliability, improved technology and better customer service. What does a good customer service experience look like, coming from City Light?
3. Could we all right now, **THINK BACK** to the last time you paid your electric utility bill, what does it feel like when you pay that every 60days? **PROBE:**
 - a. Was it a bad feeling based on an experience with the utility?
 - b. Can anyone say what would make them feel better about paying for this service?

To meet your need for better products and services; what kinds of add-ons or value-added ideas has anyone even heard of that a utility company could provide?

Let's be creative here!

[WATCH FOR: Entrepreneurial ideas like insurance on side sewer lines or upgrading home electrical switches?]

4. What do you want City Light to consider offering now and into the future?

Discussion:

a. Sign you up for telephone service?

b. More high tech procedures like seeing your bill online?

c. Help you find some city or community service?

d. Would a monthly bill be better for anyone? Rather than every 60 days?

5. What other changes would you like to see City Light make in the next few years to meet your needs. Or what would you like to see them continue doing?

[WATCH FOR: Green Power/Project Share/Outage notification/community involvement/City agency issues-more responsive? Customer service related? Lower rates? Technology related?]

IV. IN-DEPTH: Communication Effectiveness & Outages

Finally, let's talk about communication with Seattle City Light.

1. Does anyone read the newsletter "Light Reading?" What do you like best about it and what do you think they should do differently with it? [SHOW EXAMPLES]

2. Let's say you're experiencing a problem, what is your preferred method of communicating with City Light? Phone-Voicemail-Email...what have you done in the past? Has that worked best for you?

3. How should City Light keep you informed in an outage? Phone-Voice Mail-Email-Website-Fax-By US MAIL or Radio and TV? Is a Door Tag acceptable? Generally, how are they doing with frequency and duration of these outages?

V. WRAP - UP

And finally, Seattle City Light has a mission is to provide customers with affordable, reliable service and to be an environmentally sound electric power for Seattle. After this discussion today what is your single most important piece of advice for City Light management?

[As time allows mention rate decrease in 2007]