

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
1989 SESSION

CHAPTER 962
HOUSE BILL 2227

AN ACT TO PROVIDE FOR ACQUISITION OF RIGHT-OF-WAY BY THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION FOR LOCATION AND RELOCATION OF UTILITY INFRASTRUCTURE AND TO CLARIFY THE REGULATORY AUTHORITY OF THE UTILITIES COMMISSION WITH REGARD TO NATURAL GAS.

Whereas, many citizens of the State are not served with utilities necessary for their health, safety and welfare, such as natural gas, water and sewerage; and

Whereas, the State owns or controls rights-of-way for roads, and will be acquiring significant additional rights-of-way in the future, and such rights-of-way can form natural and economical corridors for the location or relocation of essential utilities; and

Whereas, the power to acquire rights-of-way presently vested in the Department of Transportation is restricted to acquisition of the amount needed for road construction and maintenance, which in some cases is not adequate to accommodate utilities; Now, therefore,

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

Section 1. G.S. 136-18 reads as rewritten:

"§ 136-18. Powers of Department of Transportation.

The said Department of Transportation shall be vested with the following powers:

... .

- (2) To take over and assume exclusive control for the benefit of the State of any existing county or township roads, and to locate and acquire rights-of-way for any new roads that may be necessary for a State highway system, and subject to the provisions of G.S. 136-19.5(a) and (b) also locate and acquire such additional rights-of-way as may be necessary for the present or future relocation or initial location, above or below ground, of telephone, telegraph, electric and other lines, as well as gas, water, sewerage, oil and other pipelines, to be operated by public utilities as defined in G.S. 62-3(23) and which are regulated under Chapter 62 of the General Statutes, or by municipalities, counties, any entity created by one or more political subdivisions for the purpose of supplying any such utility services, electric membership corporations, telephone membership corporations, or any combination thereof, with full power to widen, relocate, change or alter the grade or

location thereof and to change or relocate any existing roads that the Department of Transportation may now own or may acquire; to acquire by gift, purchase, or otherwise, any road or highway, or tract of land or other property whatsoever that may be necessary for a State highway system and adjacent utility rights-of-way: Provided, all changes or alterations authorized by this subdivision shall be subject to the provisions of G.S. 136-54 to 136-63, to the extent that said sections are applicable: Provided, that nothing in this Chapter shall be construed to authorize or permit the Department of Transportation to allow or pay anything to any county, township, city or town, or to any board of commissioners or governing body thereof, for any existing road or part of any road heretofore constructed by any such county, township, city or town, unless a contract has already been entered into with the Department of Transportation.

....

- (10) To make proper and reasonable rules, regulations and ordinances for the placing or erection of telephone, ~~telegraph or other poles,~~ telegraph, electric and other lines, above or below ground, signboards, fences, gas, water, sewerage, oil, or other pipelines, and other similar obstructions that may, in the opinion of the Department of Transportation, contribute to the hazard upon any of the said highways or in any ~~wise-way~~ interfere with the same, and to make reasonable rules and regulations for the proper control thereof. And whenever the order of the said Department of Transportation shall require the removal of, or changes in, the location of telephone, telegraph, electric or other ~~poles, lines,~~ signboards, fences, gas, water, sewerage, oil, or other pipelines, or other similar obstructions, the owners thereof shall at their own expense, except as provided in G.S. 136-19.5(c), move or change the same to conform to the order of said Department of Transportation. Any violation of such rules and regulations or noncompliance with such orders shall constitute a misdemeanor.

... ."

Sec. 2. G.S. 136-19 reads as rewritten:

"§ 136-19. Acquisition of land and deposits of materials; condemnation proceedings; federal parkways.

The Department of Transportation is vested with the power to acquire either in the nature of an appropriate easement or in fee simple such rights-of-way and title to such land, gravel, gravel beds or bars, sand, sand beds or bars, rock, stone, boulders, quarries, or quarry beds, lime or other earth or mineral deposits or formations, and such standing timber as it may deem necessary and suitable for road construction, maintenance, and repair, and the necessary approaches and ways through, and a sufficient amount of land surrounding and adjacent thereto, as it may determine to enable it to properly prosecute the work, either by purchase, donation, or condemnation, in the manner hereinafter set out. If any parcel is acquired in fee simple as authorized by this section and the

Department of Transportation later determines that the parcel is not needed for highway purposes, first consideration shall be given to any offer to repurchase made by the owner from whom said parcel was acquired or the heirs or assigns of such owner. The Department of Transportation is also vested with the power to acquire such additional land alongside of the rights-of-way or roads as in its opinion may be necessary and proper for the protection of the roads and roadways, and such additional area as may be necessary as by it determined for approaches to and from such material and other requisite area as may be desired by it for working purposes. The Department of Transportation may, in its discretion, with the consent of the landowner, acquire in fee simple an entire lot, block or tract of land, if by so doing, the interest of the public will be best served, even though said entire lot, block or tract is not immediately needed for right-of-way purposes.

Notwithstanding any other provisions of law or eminent domain powers of utility companies, utility membership corporations, municipalities, counties, entities created by political subdivisions, or any combination thereof, and in order to prevent undue delay of highway projects because of utility conflicts, the Department of Transportation may condemn or acquire property in fee or appropriate easements necessary to provide highway rights-of-way for the relocation of utilities when required in the construction, reconstruction, or rehabilitation of a State highway project. The Department of Transportation shall also have the authority, subject to the provisions of G.S. 136-19.5(a) and (b), to, in its discretion, acquire rights-of-way necessary for the present or future placement of utilities as described in G.S. 136-18(2).

Whenever the Department of Transportation and the owner or owners of the lands, materials, and timber required by the Department of Transportation to carry on the work as herein provided for, are unable to agree as to the price thereof, the Department of Transportation is hereby vested with the power to condemn the lands, materials, and timber and in so doing the ways, means, methods, and procedure of Article 9 of this Chapter shall be used by it exclusively.

The Department of Transportation shall have the same authority, under the same provisions of law provided for construction of State highways, for acquirement of all rights-of-way and easements necessary to comply with the rules and regulations of the United States government for the construction of federal parkways and entrance roads to federal parks in the State of North Carolina. The acquirement of a total of 125 acres per mile of said parkways, including roadway and recreational, and scenic areas on either side thereof, shall be deemed a reasonable area for said purpose. The right-of-way acquired or appropriated may, at the option of the Department of Transportation, be a fee-simple title. The said Department of Transportation is hereby authorized to convey such title so acquired to the United States government, or its appropriate agency, free and clear of all claims for compensation. All compensation contracted to be paid or legally assessed shall be a valid claim against the Department of Transportation, payable out of the State Highway Fund. Any conveyance to the United States Department of Interior of land acquired as provided by this section shall contain a provision whereby the State of North Carolina shall retain concurrent jurisdiction over the areas conveyed. The Governor is further authorized to grant concurrent jurisdiction

to lands already conveyed to the United States Department of Interior for parkways and entrances to parkways.

The action of the Department of Transportation heretofore taken in the acquirement of areas for the Blue Ridge Parkway in accordance with the rules and regulations of the United States government is hereby ratified and approved and declared to be a reasonable exercise of the discretion vested in the said Department of Transportation in furtherance of the public interest.

When areas have been tentatively designated by the United States government to be included within a parkway, but the final survey necessary for the filing of maps as provided in this section has not yet been made, no person shall cut or remove any timber from said areas pending the filing of said maps after receiving notice from the Department of Transportation that such area is under investigation; and any property owner who suffers loss by reason of the restraint upon his right to use the said timber pending such investigation shall be entitled to recover compensation from the Department of Transportation for the temporary appropriation of his property, in the event the same is not finally included within the appropriated area, and the provisions of this section may be enforced under the same law now applicable for the adjustment of compensation in the acquirement of rights-of-way on other property by the Department of Transportation."

Sec. 3. Chapter 136 of the General Statutes is amended by adding the following section:

"§ 136-19.5. Utility right-of-way agreements.

(a) Before the Department of Transportation acquires or proposes to acquire additional rights-of-way for the purpose of accommodating the installation of utilities as authorized by G.S. 136-18 and G.S. 136-19, there shall first be voluntary agreements with the appropriate utilities regarding the acquisition and use of the particular right-of-way and requiring the payment to the Department of Transportation for or recapture of all of its costs associated with that acquisition, including the use of funds allocated to such acquisition. Such agreements may take into account the fact that more than one utility can make use of the right-of-way. No such agreement shall constitute a sale of the right-of-way and all such rights-of-way shall remain under the control of the Department of Transportation.

(b) A prior agreement between the Department of Transportation and the affected utilities may be entered into but is not required when the acquisition of right-of-way is for the purpose of relocation of utilities due to construction, reconstruction, or rehabilitation of a State highway project. The Department of Transportation shall notify the affected utility whose facilities are being relocated and the affected utility may choose not to participate in the proposed plan for right-of-way acquisition. The decision not to participate in the proposed plan of right-of-way acquisition shall not affect any other rights the utility may have as a result of the relocation of its lines or pipelines.

(c) Whenever the Department of Transportation requires the relocation of utilities located in a right-of-way for which the utility owner contributed to the cost of acquisition, the Department of Transportation shall reimburse the utility owner for the cost of moving those utilities.

(d) Any additional right-of-way obtained pursuant to this section which is part of a railroad right-of-way shall be returned to the railroad or its successor in interest when the Department of Transportation and the affected utilities agree that the additional right-of-way is no longer useful for utility purposes and the Department of Transportation determines that it is no longer useful for highway purposes."

Sec. 4. G.S. 62-133(b) reads as rewritten:

"(b) In fixing such rates, the Commission shall:

... .

(1a) Apply the rate of return established under subdivision (4) of this subsection to rights-of-way acquired through agreements with the Department of Transportation pursuant to G.S. 136-19.5(a) if acquisition is consistent with a definite plan to provide service within five years of the date of the agreement and if such right-of-way acquisition will result in benefits to the ratepayers. If a right-of-way is not used within a reasonable time after the expiration of the five-year period, it may be removed from the rate base by the Commission when rates for the public utility are next established under this section.

... .

(5) Fix such rates to be charged by the public utility as will earn in addition to reasonable operating expenses ascertained pursuant to subdivision (3) of this subsection the rate of return fixed pursuant to subdivisions (4) and (4a) on the cost of the public utility's property ascertained pursuant to ~~subdivision (1).~~ subdivisions (1) and (1a) of this subsection.

... ."

Sec. 5. Chapter 62 of the General Statutes is amended by adding the following new section:

"§ 62-36B. Regulation of natural gas service agreements.

Whenever the Commission, after notice and hearing, finds that additional natural gas service agreements (including 'backhaul' agreements) with interstate or intrastate pipelines will provide increased competition in North Carolina's natural gas industry and (i) will likely result in lower costs to consumers without substantially increasing the risks of service interruptions to customers, or (ii) will substantially reduce the risks of service interruptions without unduly increasing costs to consumers, the Commission may enter and serve an order directing the franchised natural gas local distribution company to negotiate in good faith to enter into such service agreements within a reasonable time. In considering costs to consumers under this section, the Commission may consider both short-term and long-term costs."

Sec. 6. This act is effective upon ratification.

In the General Assembly read three times and ratified this the 18th day of July, 1990.