

TOWN OF LUNENBURG
Office of the Planning Board

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Minutes
Public Hearing
UNITIL Storm Resiliency Program
August 12, 2019

Meeting Posted: Yes
Place: Town Hall, 17 Main Street, Lunenburg, MA
Time: 6:35 PM

Present: Matthew Allison, Tanner Cole, Gregory Bittner, Paula Bertram, Adam R. Burney
Also Present: Town Manager Heather Lemieux, Tree Warden John Rodriquenz, and Select Board members Tom Alonzo, Phyllis Luck, Damon McQuaid, Katey Adams, Michael Ray Jeffreys

The hearing was to review a request to prune and/or remove trees along Leominster Road from West Street to Lancaster Avenue, and along Lancaster Avenue from Massachusetts Avenue to Rolling Acres under MGL Ch 40, Section 15C, Scenic Road Designations and under MGL Ch 87, Section 3, Cutting of Public Shade Trees.

The applicant, UNITIL, was represented by Municipal & Community Services Manager John DiNapoli, System Arborist, Sara Sankowich, and Forestry Supervisor Dave Clapham.

The Storm Resiliency Program (SRP) helps prevent power outages caused by trees and nearby vegetation. This program is beyond UNITIL's normal pruning program. Trees that pose a risk to the electrical lines have been marked/tagged for either pruning or removal. This program enables UNITIL to access the wires during a storm outage. Boards were in receipt of Tree Risk Assessment Forms for each individual tree along with a listing of all trees, indicating size, species, whether or not the tree would be removed or trimmed, whether or not the tree was on private or public property, and number of tree(s) offered as replacement. UNITIL is looking at removing 32 public trees.

M. Jeffreys opined that if routine pruning had been in place, tree removal would not be necessary. S. Sankowich responded that in 2011 she started a vegetative management program, which is a five-year cycle. This is a program separate from the SRP and will still continue. She stressed that UNITIL does not have the authority to trim or prune without a property owner's permission. Data showed that in 2018 there were 34 tree-related outages, in 2017, 23, and in 2016, also 23. These outages were just for the circuit which is the subject of this Hearing. An outage can range from one to multiple customers. Out of all the UNITIL circuits, this is the worst one for reliability in the Commonwealth.

K. Adams remarked she did not want to see pruning beyond the routine vegetative management program.

H. Lemieux clarified the role of the Select Board for this Hearing, citing MGL Ch 40 which requires a public hearing with the Planning Board and Tree Warden. Also MGL Section 83 in which the Tree Warden grants approval for cutting/removal of trees. If there are any individual Board objections in writing, then the Select Board has the final approval.

P. Bertram expressed she would like to see the data presented in a more understandable format; possibly a spreadsheet instead of working off multiple documents. She inquired as to potential liability to the Town if it chooses not to have tree(s) removed. She doesn't feel enough data has been provided to make an informed decision.

S. Sancowich responded that the Town consult its legal counsel as to liability.

Tree Warden J. Rodriquenz noted this is something he deals with daily, but this is on a much larger scale. He has dealt with both S. Sancowich and D. Clapham in the past and noted that he and D. Clapham assess each tree individually before making a decision. UNITIL is providing a service, and through this assessment, they are letting the Town know what needs to be done.

S. Sancowich stressed that UNITIL is only looking for a decision from Lunenburg as to whether or not it wants UNITIL to pursue the STP. If the Town has no wish to pursue, UNITIL requests a letter stating same. M. Jeffreys was of the opinion that maybe the SRP should be pursued, but not on such a large scale. He asked if UNITIL could provide data as to when/where outages had occurred.

H. Lemieux will pursue the question of liability with Town Counsel.

K. Adams opined this comes down to personal preference, i.e., does an individual want the trees to remain and run the risk of power outages or take down the trees to have less outages. **K. Adams made Motion to not grant the 32 trees on the public land in the scenic roadway.**

Sarah Cammer, 304 Lancaster Avenue- She is not located within the current SRP, but feels this is being presented as an all or nothing plan and no options are being offered to the Town. Many of the trees were selected due to proximity of power lines; power lines could be placed underground.

S. Sancowich responded there are options available, but that the Town will gain the most benefit from following through with the recommended SRP. UNITIL and the Town can discuss what would be the perfect plan for the Town.

Some Select Board and Planning Board members expressed an interest in hiring an arborist to go through the marked trees.

Bonnie Reynolds, 91 Lancaster Avenue- Would appreciate a selective process on the trees. She was also concerned with types of replacement trees and any type of warranty.

S. Sancowich stated that unless a significant number of trees will be pruned/removed, it is probably not beneficial for UNITIL to move forward with the intended SRP. Some hazard tree removal could still be performed as part of its regular program.

J. DiNapoli asked if it would be possible for both Boards to provide a written list of their questions to enable UNITIL to respond to all the concerns.

K. Adams withdrew her Motion.

J. Rodriquenz noted in 2015 he petitioned the Select Board for a Town-wide hazardous tree survey. That Survey listed approximately 20 trees on Lancaster Avenue. He would like to cross reference that survey with UNITIL's data.

UNITIL requested the Hearing be continued to the Planning Board's September 23rd meeting. P. Bertram suggested moving the Hearing to October 7th for the availability of the Select Board Chair.

G. Bittner was looking for clarification as to whether or not the Town would be hiring an arborist. A. Burney suggested the Planning Board participate in the Select Board's August 27th meeting for discussion of same.

P. Bertram made Motion to continue the Hearing to September 23, 2019, 6:35 PM, G. Bittner Seconded, all aye.

P. Bertram made Motion to send a letter to the Select Board recommending an arborist be hired to corroborate the results of UNITIL's findings following a review of the 2015 Hazardous Tree Study, G. Bittner Seconded, P. Bertram, aye; G. Bittner, aye; T. Cole, nay; M. Allison, Nay. Vote did not carry.

Hearing recessed 8:57 PM

Documents used at meeting:
Risk Assessment Forms
Storm Resiliency Program Narrative to include Tree Listing