

Planning Board
Drive Around Minutes
Durham Point Road – Eversource Tree Cutting
June 6, 2019

Planning Board

Barbara Dill, Vice Chair
James Bubar
Lorne Parnell
Sally Tobias
Sarah Wrightsman

Applicant

Bob Allen, arborist
William Burleigh, arborist, Asplundh
Mike Busby
Sandra Gagnon
Ian Farley
Marie Letorneau

Others

Michael Behrendt, Town Planner
Bob Ely
Heidi Ely
Mike Hoffman
Mal Sandberg
Dinny Waters

The group met at Town Hall and drove together in a van to three stops on Durham Point Road. Barbara Dill called the site walk to order at 2:10 pm. The group got out of the van at the first stop on Durham Point Road. Michael said what the board's purview was for trees on scenic roads.

Eversource explained that different trees are treated differently. Oaks are good and resilient. Maples and willows are not as strong. Pines are more of a problem and need to be cut further. Which trees are removed and which branches trimmed depends on the species, the branches, and the health of the tree. Ash is a problem now with the emerald ash borer. When the tree shows yellow streaks ("blonding") it may be infested. A V-crotch is a sign of problems. The crack can expand, from stress such as ice and the trunks can fail. A U-shaped crotch is a more natural growth for two trunks. Eversource wants to take only trees that are a problem, based on an individual assessment of each tree.

Eversource looks at branches located within the box but will remove branches and trees beyond the box if they are not healthy or are a threat.

Eversource will bring in an updated list of trees to be removed tomorrow. The list will be significantly reduced from the 137 trees shown earlier for removal. They will not be adding any trees to the list. Bob Allen pulled a ribbon off an oak tree there that he said was no longer considered a problem.

Somebody asked about the canopy on Longmarsh where some cutting had already occurred. Bob Allen said the cutting was only on one side.

Mal Sandberg asked why the poles are 15 feet higher than the existing ones. Eversource said this is the new standard. The National Electric Safety Code dictates the pole height. There is nothing proposed for 5G as part of this project. Eversource is leaving space for other utilities in the future. Eversource said they have not installed 35 foot poles in many years. They said the canopy is optimally 15 feet above the lines.

Eversource said they do not trim to the full box if it will stress a particular tree too much. They could also cut on the other side of the street if there are problem trees. They will evaluate the other side for any threats.

Eversource said in some places they will be doing surgical trimming. The ribbons are only for trees being removed.

Mal Sandberg asked what Eversource can do to protect the scenic qualities of this scenic road. Eversource said if this was not a scenic road they would limb up higher. They try to leave the trees intact if they can. They try to preserve the canopy. Mal Sandberg asked what Eversource would do if the Planning Board denied the application. Eversource said they do not know. They would talk with their engineers. They can engineer around some situations.

Mike Hoffman said 3 phase power is industrial. Eversource said there is 3 phase power on the road now. They are filling in the gaps and also getting redundancy for service with the 3 phase.

Eversource said the spacers are placed on the street side of the pole so that can reduce the amount of cutting.

The group stopped at the second stop on the road. It was noted that the trees grow out toward the street, toward the light. Eversource said they evaluate tree by tree, stem by stem to see what can be saved. They do not touch the undergrowth. They want to keep the natural look to the road.

Mike Hoffman said the cutting stands out more when the leaves are off the trees. Mal Sandberg asked how the Planning Board decides. Bob Allen said they will revise the matrix of trees to be removed. Mike Hoffman said even if there is no cutting we will still gain resiliency with the project.

Eversource said there are not different standards for the box and for cutting with the 3 phase spacers.

Mike Busby said he would send information about how the new poles are treated. The poles get immersed in the chemical. He said they are not using composite poles. The poles are standard southern pine. He said that Eversource will not need to upgrade the lines now for another 50 years.

The group moved to the third stop. There was a question about the right of way. Michael Behrendt said it is considered the stone walls unless there is evidence to the contrary such as on a private deed.

Eversource said they obtain permission from the abutting landowner to cut trees both on the private lot and in front within the right of way. If they don't get permission they don't cut the trees.

Mike Hoffman said this specific area is a particular concern as the homeowner across the street has taken good care of the trees in this area.

Mal Sandberg asked if the project would go forward if the Planning Board denied the application. Mike Busby said he did not know. Mal Sandberg said the NH Supreme Court will now hear an appeal on the Seacoast Reliability Project from the Conservation Law Foundation plus the wetland permits have not yet been approved by the Army Corps of Engineers. Under these circumstances, since the project is related to the Seacoast Reliability Project, he questioned if it made sense for the Planning Board to approve it now.

Sandra Gagnon said the project will still be worthwhile independent of the Seacoast Reliability Project. Mike Busby said the poles are about 50 years old and need to be replaced. They are just pushing up that timeframe a little now.

He asked what is needed for the Planning Board presentation on June 12. Sally Tobias said good visuals that explain the project. Barbara Dill said it would be helpful to have a photo of every tree being removed. Ian Farley said that would be ambitious. Sally Tobias said it would be helpful to at least have examples of the different kinds of trees and situations. Mike Hoffman suggested having a number for each tree. Ian Farley said they could mark a number on each ribbon. Bill Burleigh said there is a pole number for each tree. Bob Allen said there is a limited number of species and they can discuss the plans by tree species.

Lorne Parnell said he did not think the Planning Board will look at individual trees. It will evaluate the updated list and make a decision.

Eversource said they would include the street address for each tree or a map and lot number where there is no address.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted.

Michael Behrendt, Durham Town Planner