

Date: August 29, 2020

To: PURA (Public Utilities Regulatory Authority)
Docket 20-08-03
Pura.information@ct.gov

From: Kevin Gough
Town Councilor, Bloomfield
kgough@bloomfieldct.org

Re: PURA Docket 20-08-03: PURA Consideration of Civil Penalty and Enforcement Action Against the Electric Distribution Companies After Storm Isaias Investigation

I am submitting this comment for the public record for the above-referenced Docket.

I sincerely hope that the aftermath of Storm Isaias, after the similar Halloween Storm disaster in 2011, will motivate state authorities to take action on our electric/utility system. In particular:

- Underground all future utility lines and implement a plan for burying all existing lines by 2030;
- Protect the quality of our natural environment, particularly our invaluable trees;
- Relocalize our utilities, with local workers available to maintain them;
- Regulate the executive compensation of all utilities;
- Breakup predatory private utilities such as Eversource.

Attached with this letter are a) an article on this subject that appeared in the August 21 edition of the Bloomfield, Windsor, and Windsor Locks local papers and b) a resolution on this issue that I have introduced to the Bloomfield Town Council.

Respectfully,

Kevin Gough

One Councilor's View

Bury the Utility Lines!

Storm Isaias, roughly nine years after the infamous Halloween Storm, should finally goad us to establish as a policy: no project should proceed in Bloomfield unless the utility lines are buried. Additionally, the Town should require Eversource (and other utilities) to bury all existing lines within the next ten years.

I plan to introduce a resolution to this effect at the August 24 Town Council meeting. (Since my column is due before the agenda for that meeting is finalized I can't say for certain that it will make the 'final cut.') It's time we quit complaining and take action before the next disaster strikes.

Following Storm Isaias it should be obvious that we can no longer afford the health, safety, and economic risks of multiple days without power and other services. Yes, burying utility lines is initially more expensive (cost estimates vary but generally it is two to four times as much) but over the life of the service this may not be the case, as millions of dollars are lost in catastrophic power outages.

Utilities attempt to defuse calls that lines be buried by alarming customers with the prospect of higher rates. However, rates currently include the costs of repairs to the system, which may be as high or higher. But rates don't include the cost of spoiled food, property damage, etc. that is the result of lost service but borne independently by rate payers. Additionally, in the case of Eversource, rate payers are paying for outrageous executive compensation. In 2019, Eversource's top five executives were paid \$40 million. Personally, I'd rather pay for burying the lines and having a reliable electric system in what should be a non-profit, at-cost public utility.

Along with improved reliability, there are obvious quality of life benefits to burying the lines. Above-ground wires are ugly, detract from community aesthetics, and are a nuisance to trees (often delegated by utility companies as the 'enemy' – we need more trees, not less) and the natural environment.

Underground lines are not a panacea. Buried lines are subject to different risks (e.g. water damage) and failures may be harder to locate and more difficult to repair. However, in an era of 'smart' technology, these difficulties have and can further be mitigated.

Ultimately municipalities need to rethink the prevailing 'large-scale, multi-area' utility model. Scale can increase efficiency – and hence lower expenses and thereby rates – but it also reduces resiliency and sustainability. Large systems break more easily and are more difficult to repair, as we saw firsthand a few weeks ago, and when they are run based on "shareholder value" rather than the benefit of their customers these problems are compounded. Wallingford has its own electric utility and it is always one of the first towns back on line after a storm because damage is localized and local workers are available to make repairs.

As state Sen. Norm Needleman, chair of the senate Energy and Technology Committee stated, “Eversource has brought us to the point where we no longer have in-state resources to manage anything but the most minor event. This has been a deliberate attempt to reduce their on-the-ground workforce in favor of executive compensation and shareholder value. The rate-payers of Connecticut deserve better...”

It’s time to bring back true public utilities, a local workforce to support them, and to bury the lines.

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“One Councilor’s View” highlights local issues. My desire is that the column be informative and motivates your increased involvement and activism in the town. I look forward to hearing from you.

Councilor Kevin Gough
(860) 243-9508 (home)
(860) 965-4029 (cell)
kvngough7@gmail.com

Bloomfield Town Council Resolution on Burying Utility Lines:

TO REQUIRE THAT UTILTIY LINES BE BURIED IN ALL NEW PROJECTS AND THAT A PLAN BE CREATED AND IMPLEMENTED TO BURY ALL EXISTING UTILITY LINES OVER THE NEXT TEN (10) YEARS

WHEREAS, Storm Isaias (2020) and the Halloween Storm (2011) generated undue hardship on the residents and Town of Bloomfield due to power and other service outages; and

WHEREAS, the upfront capital costs of burying utility lines may be higher but likely may be less than the costs of repair, hazard, and suffering from repeated outages; and

WHEREAS, technological advances have and will make identification and repair of underground breaks or problems easier; and

WHEREAS, above-ground wires are ugly, detract from the aesthetics and quality of life in the town, and are a nuisance to trees and the natural environment;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town of Bloomfield hereby will undertake changes in its policies and governing ordinances to require that utility lines in all new projects be buried and that a plan be created and implemented so that all existing utility lines are buried over the next ten (10) years (i.e. completion by end of year 2030).