Draft Minutes of the Town of Easton Conservation Commission Meeting

Wednesday, January 3, 2024
In accordance with RSA Chapter 91-A and the Town of Easton, New Hampshire Conservation Commission Guidelines adopted June 1, 2012, we as a group of members convened.

E.C.C. Members Present: Mike Kenney, ECC member, Charles Pates, ECC member, Rich Larcom, ECC member, Pam McNary, ECC member, Avid Kamgar, ECC member, Linda Hansen, ECC Chairperson.

Eversource Representatives in attendance: Matt Koehler, Eversource Easton Representative; Lindsey White, Eversource Environmental Permitting; Kurt Nelson, Eversource Environmental Engineer; Alex Green, Eversource Outreach Representative; Sam Harris, Eversource Project Manager; Jennifer Codispoti, Eversource Communications Representative

Members of the Public in attendance: Michael Hu-Sing Lee, Sugar Hill Police Officer, Kris Pastoriza, Jim Page, Bob Lamanna, Bev Lamanna, Bob Thibault; Tom Boucher, Shirley Boucher, Mark Hansen, Roy Stever, Deborah Stever, Ned Cutler.

Linda called the meeting to order at 5:33 pm; Charles Pates seconded. Linda moved to approve the December 5, 2023 minutes. Rich Larcom seconded. All in favor. None opposed. Minutes approved.

Linda turned the meeting over to the Eversource representatives.

Jennifer Codispoti, Eversource Communications Representative, presented the following slide shows. See links below.

Easton Permitting Briefing 1.3.24.pdf

X178_Project Intro Fact Sheet 2024.pdf

Sam Harris, Eversource's Project Manager, explained that Eversource uses 4' X 16' timber mats when crossing wetlands which are then removed after construction. These mats could be several layers thick depending on the depth of the wetland area.
On steep slopes, Eversource builds gravel roads with a 6" base layer of DOT 404 crushed ledge mix followed by a 3" surface layer of gravel that binds well and minimizes sediment run-off. These roads stay in place after construction to aid in inspection and repair of towers and lines. Sam Harris also explained that each pole requires a 4' diameter hole that is 10% of the height of the pole + 2' deep backfilled with gravel.

Questions from the audience and Eversource's responses:

Q-A member of the Conservation Commission asked, "What do you do when you encounter ledge?"

Eeversource- There is no blasting. Eversource uses pneumatic assisted drills and hammers on an excavator to cut through ledge if necessary.

Q- A resident asked, “Will residents lose power during construction?”
Eversource- Eversource can replace lines while keeping existing lines up and running. The X-178 is a “transmission level” line (communicating between sub-stations), not a “service line” to individual houses; therefore, no one’s house will lose power while work is happening.

Q- A member of the Conservation Commission asked, “Is this transmission line bringing power to Easton or just running through Easton?”
Eversource- There is an “indirect” effect for Easton. Transmission level lines are 115,000 Volts that travel between substations; individual service lines of 4,000-12,000 Volts service individual homes. At the BeeBee River Substation in Lincoln and the Streeter Pond Substation in Sugar Hill, the power then moves to “service lines” to power individual homes in Easton and elsewhere.

Q- A member of the Conservation Commission asked, “Where does the power come from originally?”
Eversource- There are multiple power generating sources (for example, the Seabrook Nuclear Plant and the Moore Dam in Littleton both generate power). Eversource does not manage the generation of power; Eversource manages the transmission of power.

Q- A resident asked, “Will any part of this project run on DC power?”
Eversource- No. Eversource does not have DC power.

Q- One resident described multiple past and present Eversource projects throughout New Hampshire in which Eversource did not adhere to the environmental standards that they said they would. The resident asked, “Who will hold Eversource accountable for preserving our natural resources?”
Eversource- Eversource is beholden to all Federal, State, and Local agencies who issue their permits. Ultimately, we the public are the “eyes and ears” who will hold Eversource accountable for doing what they say they are going to do to preserve our environment.

Comment: Some residents then mentioned that in the lead up to the failed Northern Pass project, Eversource left over 100 discarded utility poles in the Reel Brook and Bog Pond watersheds in Easton. These poles were treated with pentacholorphenol (PCP), a known carcinogen.

Q- A resident asked, “What is an Asset Condition project?”
Eversource- An Asset Condition project is a project that replaces an existing asset. The X-178 line was originally constructed in the mid-1960’s and the mid-1980’s. The new line will include Optical Ground Wire which is a different diameter and weight from the original wire. OGW allows high speed communications between substations that allow technicians to pinpoint exactly the point of an outage. According the Eversource

representatives, this Asset Condition project will increase electric resiliency and reliability.

Comment: A resident commented that in 2018, Eversource had targeted 56 poles in Easton to be replaced. Now in 2024, Eversource wants to replace all their poles to double or triple the power capacity in the X-178 line. The resident continued that ISO New England (https://www.iso-ne.com/) plans for renewables. ISO New England has not said that Eversource's X-178 plan is necessary. Consumer Advocates of New England sent a letter to Eversource asking Eversource to put all Asset Projects on hold.

Q- A resident asked, "Why is it necessary to replace all the poles in Easton instead of the 56 poles identified in 2018 in need of replacement?
Eversource- From an environmental standpoint, it is better to replace all the poles at once rather Than building roads and adding wetland mats every time some of the poles need replacing. It is less costly and requires less impact on the environment to replace all the poles at once. The new line can carry more power than the current line.

Comment: A member of the Conservation Commission said that "Going forward, we are all moving towards using more electricity in our daily lives by installing mini-splits and buying electric cars, etc.

Q-A resident asked, "How much will this project cost?"
Eversource- Not able to answer yet due to various permitting requirements.

Q- A resident asked, "Why is the X-178-line replacement project necessary?"
Eversource- The X-178-line replacement project is necessary due to pole degradation and the need to increase the reliability and resiliency in the electric lines; the installation of Optical Ground Wire improves communication between substations and allows Eversource to pinpoint outages to exact locations reducing repair times during outages.

Q- A member of the Conservation Commission asked, "Why not shift towards local lines and decentralization of power rather than constructing one centralized power grid?"
Eversource- Based on N.H. law, one company cannot generate and distribute power. Eversource just distributes power and is not involved in generation of power. Creating local power grids would be the province of N.H. state regulators and not under Eversource's control.

Comment: A member of the Conservation Commission said, "Corporations such as Eversource are motivated by profit." A resident replied, "There is a lack of trust that Eversource will work hard to protect our natural resources in Easton."

Q- A resident asked, "Why are landowners not asked to sign DES permits?"
Eversource- Permits are signed by Eversource, not the individual landowners. Landowners are encouraged to check their individual easement documents for their legal rights.

Q-A resident asked, "Eversource claims that some of their poles are degraded and need repair.

Inspection reports have not been shared with the public. Do these inspection reports exist?

Eversource- Inspection reports for Eversource's poles exist, but they are not shared with the public.

Q- A resident asked, "What is the effect on real estate values due to structure heights?"
Eversource- no answer from Eversource

Q- A resident asked, "Why do the new towers have to be taller than the old towers?"
Eversource- The average height difference between the old towers and the new towers will be 12.5' higher. Some towers might be 20' higher than existing towers. The National Electric Security Council (NESC) requires that once some towers are replaced, all towers on a line need to be upgraded to the current building code.

Q- A resident asked, "Why not fly in poles with special helicopters as is routinely done in Alaska rather than spreading the construction period over a period of years? Perhaps doing so will reduce the construction time frame so that the costs even out."
Eversource- Helicopters with cranes and special equipment are prohibitively expensive.

Q- A resident asked, "Why not construct more towers so that the height of the towers could be lowered?"
Eversource- More towers would have a greater impact on wetlands and steep slopes.

Q- A member of the Planning Board asked, "If Eversource had to run the same power (without increasing the conductor size), could they keep the same tower heights?"
Eversource- Yes

Q- A member of the Planning Board asked, "So higher towers are necessary because of the increased power capacity of the new towers?"
Eversource- Yes, we (Eversource) want to increase the power capacity of the X-178-line to standardize power carrying capacity in NH, VT, MA, and CT.

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 pm