

Garden Club Files Motion to Halt Power Company Tree Cutting

By Louise Washer

Power line right-of-ways (ROWs) often provide prime habitat for pollinators, birds, and other wildlife that benefit from early successional habitat—defined as “habitat with vigorously growing grasses, forbs, shrubs and trees which provide excellent food and cover for wildlife but need disturbance to be maintained,” by the [National Resource Conservation Service](#). There are thousands of miles of power lines across the country, so their management is of concern to environmentalists working to protect habitat. ROWs also reach through heavily fragmented areas essentially creating wildlife corridors, or pollinator pathways, if managed with an eye to conservation.

That makes energy companies great potential partners for Pollinator Pathway communities. For that partnership to work, though, sometimes negotiation may be necessary. Right now, in Connecticut, the New Haven Garden club is working to have its environmental concerns regarding tree cutting heard by Eversource, New England’s largest energy company, which supplies CT, MA, and NH. We can all learn from their strategy and the toolkit they helped put together for protecting community trees.

PROTECTING NEIGHBORHOOD & OTHER ROADSIDE TREES



Strategies for Community Leaders and Residents

Strategy for Being Heard

In response to Eversource’s plans to expand tree cutting across the state, the Garden Club filed a motion in Connecticut requesting that the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) halt implementation of "resiliency projects" by Eversource in 12 towns.

The Club then issued this [alert](#):

EVERSOURCE is planning to implement "resiliency projects" in 2022 for extensive tree removal in at least 12 towns: Chester, Clinton, Guilford, Mansfield, Middletown, Naugatuck, Newtown, Redding, Sharon, West Hartford, Windham and Woodstock. It proposes to remove any tree, within the public right-of-way or on private property that could fall on its overhead pole and wire distribution system. This is a major deviation from its prior line maintenance standards and was not included in the line maintenance plans for 2022 that it must submit for review by CT’s Public Utilities Regulatory Agency (PURA). Therefore, PURA has

not reviewed it. GCNH's statement to PURA requests, for numerous reasons, that the projects be halted pending thorough review by PURA.

Toolkit for Protecting Trees

The Garden Club website links to a [Toolkit for Protecting Neighborhood and Other Roadside Trees: Strategies for Community Leaders and Residents](#) which compiles “best practices and effective strategies emerging from towns that have taken a proactive tree management stance as electric utilities have started implementing their new vegetation management/line clearance programs across Connecticut.”

The toolkit lists practices that best protect a town’s interest in the economic and environmental value of trees and their impact on quality of life, **while simultaneously maintaining a safe and reliable utility infrastructure**. Towns are strongly encouraged to adopt policies similar to those mentioned within this toolkit and to modify it to fit their particular circumstances.”

Thank You to the New Haven Garden Club for Taking Action

As the CT Forest and Park Association said in its comments supporting the Garden Club’s motion: “It continues to be critical to balance multiple societal interests in reliable power, well-managed roadside forests, and in livable communities that receive considerable benefits from trees.” By sharing its ideas and strategies, the New Haven Garden Club has better prepared us all for helping to find that balance in our communities.

Proposed Best Practices From *Protecting Neighborhood and Other Roadside Trees*

- **Empower your tree warden** to make the final decisions regarding town trees, and ensure that proper procedures are in place to protect healthy trees from indiscriminate tree removal. Decisions should not be made solely or primarily by the utilities that have no ongoing interest in the economic, environmental, aesthetic, and community values provided by trees.
- **Require a written permit** that evaluates the proposed tree work on a tree-by-tree basis, and post notice of prospective tree removals as in accordance with law.
- **Ensure that each tree is being evaluated** by the utility company prior to selecting it for pruning or removal.
- **Create a town ordinance** or other written statement of policy to control the procedure by which a tree removal may be requested, including a written permit application and detailed policies regarding what factors should be considered when selecting town trees for removal.
- **Consider creating a Tree Task Force or Tree Commission** to evaluate the status of current tree policies in your town and, if necessary, create new town tree policy.
- **Create a long-term plan for the management of roadside trees**, potentially with a tree inventory.
- **Communicate your town’s policy to the Commissioner of the Department of Transportation** to ensure that the DOT’s policies are consistent.
- **Hold a town meeting and use other communication tools** to explain the town’s policies regarding town trees and the utility plans to town citizens.
- **Ensure residents receive effective, timely notice of any tree work** and a meaningful opportunity to object.