

MEETING MINUTES
Town of Heath
SELECT BOARD
Jacobs Road Municipal Center
Thursday, November 21, 2024

Called to Order at 6:00 p.m. With Robyn Provost-Carlson, Elissa Viarengo, Will Emmet and Nancy Thane, Office Assistant.

This meeting was recorded.

Others in Attendance: See attendance list.

POLE HEARING: For National Grid Petition for Joint or Identical Pole Locations, No. #30933364 and No. #30933367. Both Locations sited on Burrington Road.

Representing National Grid: Robert P. Ide, Community Manager, Pat Shea, Project Management, and Jean Charles, Stakeholder Management.

Robyn introduced herself as representing the Select Board as chair, not as an Assessor. A quorum of the Board of Assessors was present, but they were not representing that board, nor were any other board or committee members present representing their boards.

Mr. Ide opened the presentation by saying that a safe, reliable, cost-effective service is National Grid's obligation as a power company. According to recent analysis that had been completed, National Grid (NG) has determined that there is insufficient reliable power in Heath. The pole height of 45 feet is determined by the safety needed for 3-phase lines. In some places it means that existing poles will be replaced by taller poles. All cable lines attached to the original poles will need to be relocated to the new poles. Once all this work has been done it will be Verizon's task to remove the original poles. NG is working toward improving efficiency and communication in hopes that the old poles are removed in a timely manner.

Town officials noted that there is an unanticipated large-scale cost for moving broadband cable to new poles (replacing approximately 80 poles). WiredWest and Heath share those costs. All towns in the collaborative share WiredWest costs, adding to our costs. Does NG help with these costs? Mr. Ide responded that, due to equity, NG cannot provide help to Heath without help to others.

In response to the inquiry about the NG activity on Avery Brook Road the information was given that they are looking into feasible alternative options for routing the 3-phase line.

Wanda Mooney, a resident on Burrington Road, requested that the Select Board deny the NG installation plan for four poles in front of their house and to bury the line, instead, citing concern that the view would be obstructed. A realtor present stated that new poles in front of Mooney's property would mean a \$250,000 value loss. Another resident living close to Burrington Road asked the Board to look at alternatives and deny the request before them.

Several comments from the floor were made regarding the possibility of rerouting to Avery Brook Road. It is thought that the broadband cable would only need to be relocated on 46 poles while on Burrington

Road there would need to be relocation on 86 poles. Environmental impacts will need to be assessed along this route. Mr. Shea indicated that Route 8A was considered but rejected. He did not know if its suitability was considered in person or by map.

Questions were asked as to why NG is using a feeder from Charlemont and how many customers will be helped. NG officials replied that there will be two feeders that can switch when needed. All residents, Rowe, Monroe, Heath, Hawley will be helped. It will reduce outage time significantly.

Will Emmet noted that there is a trade-off in between burying the line at Mooney's or using Avery Brook Rd. Both overground and underground can have outages, which means time for linemen to travel and repair. A resident commented that Green Mountain Power (VT) plans to have buried all its lines by 2030, workers' conditions improved with buried lines, and that consideration of view can be a factor. Mooneys had hired their own contractor (J.S. Rae) who provided an estimated cost to bury the line will be \$139,000. They feel National Grid should pay for the estimate.

Another attendee stated that he had worked for a power company and that there are no worries when there are underground lines and asked that the lines be buried or go another route. Comments were also made asking if Eversource buries lines, why can't National Grid? The Select Board was asked to wait for more information on alternatives to the original plan. It was asked, who has authority to make this choice? Mr. Ide explained that it is not his authority; he gives all the information to NG management.

Concern was expressed that according to MGL, the utility company has 90 days to remove poles, but there is no means of enforcement. There are old, abandoned poles on Burrington Road that need to be removed.

Will Emmet said he understands that Heath is at the bottom 5% of line compromise and asked how many outages are from fallen trees or from break-down of wires. Questions were also raised about the Town's outage trends over the years and whether there is an increase or decrease. How is the trend since the recent tree trimming program was completed? Mr. Ide replied that NG has a rigorous tree trimming program. This project will be artery of a larger capacity to serve. Large scale outages will be able to be addressed, not individual homes.

Questions were raised about related issues. The additional equipment on poles at the intersection of Bray Road and Colrain Stage Road were due to an independent project but it will help with this project. That new equipment sectionalizes the fault and restores electricity in seconds, improving system reliability. Smart Grids are not being considered although the 3-phase lines are along the path of similar technology. 5G technology means using cellular networks where cell service is available to read meters. Concerns were voiced about future installation of 5G and a listener wanted to know if the project can be done like fiber optic, instead. Mr. Shea said that this is not part of the current project.

NG officials stated that the distance for pole from edge of road is less than 10 feet, depending on the situation. Tyson Howard, Highway Superintendent, remarked that if underground line becomes an option, they need to watch for impeding on the road and culverts.

NG has not been granted permission for this project from Charlemont; their hearing is Dec. 9.

Robyn requested answers to all the questions before a decision was made. Once additional information has been provided, the Select Board will make a decision based on what is the best for all the town as we are all taxpayers and deserve the best rate for all, not to consider only one situation. She also asked National Grid to report back on what other benefits there would be to Heath.

At this point Robyn asked the Board if there should be a continuance of this meeting. Mr. Ide suggested mid-January for the continuation. ***On a motion by Elissa Viarengo and seconded by Will Emmet, the Select Board unanimously voted to continue the Pole Hearing.***

The Select Board requested the following information:

- Cost comparison of Avery Brook Rd. vs. Burrington Rd., and other effects and challenges of the project.
- Same information on an underground option.
- Response to the question of why not Route 8A?
- What are the trend lines?
- What is the actual cost to our town (irrespective of other involved towns)? Consider how everyone is affected when considering the underground option. Consider aesthetics and environmental impact, as well.

The Board re-stated concern that the town recently paid for upgrades with broadband, and this will be another infrastructure cost.

Mr. Ide affirmed that he would get clarity on the above questions. It is in National Grid's best interests to work with the town and offered thanks for the people's time and comments.

On a motion by Will Emmet and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted a continuance to a date certain of January 16, 2025. 6:00 p.m.

8:10 p.m. On a motion by Will Emmet and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Thane
Office Assistant