



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

CONNECTICUT SITING COUNCIL

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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

July 21, 2022

TO: Service List, dated June 9, 2022

FROM: Melanie Bachman, Executive Director *MB*

RE: **DOCKET NO. 3B** – The United Illuminating Company Amended Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need for replacement of a portion of the existing Derby – Shelton 115-kV electric transmission line facility. **Reopening of this Certificate based on changed conditions pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes §4-181a(b).**

Comments have been received from the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection on July 21, 2022. A copy of the comments is attached for your review.

MB/MP/laf

c: Council Members

July 21, 2022

Connecticut Siting Council
10 Franklin Square
New Britain, Connecticut 06051

RE: Derby Junction to Ansonia 115-kV Transmission Line Rebuild
United Illuminating
Shelton, Derby and Ansonia
Docket No. 3B

Dear Members of the Connecticut Siting Council:

Staff of this department have reviewed the above-referenced application for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need and have performed a field review of the project corridor on July 6 and 12. Based on these efforts, the following comments are offered to the Council for your consideration in this proceeding.

United Illuminating proposes to rebuild the 4.1-mile transmission line from Derby Junction in Shelton to Ansonia Substation, replacing the existing lattice transmission line structures which date from 1924 with monopole structures and upgrading the existing copper conductors with steel-reinforced aluminum conductors. The proposed rebuild will improve the reliability of the affected circuits (lines 1560, 1808 and 1599) which serve the Indian Well and Ansonia Substations which have no option for supply from any other source or direction other than Derby Junction. Replacing the 98-year old structures with modern, code-compliant support structures and re-conductoring the lines with aluminum clad, steel-reinforced (ACSR) cables will provide important reliability and resiliency benefits. The majority of transmission line failures in the region are related to aging infrastructure and storm damage. This project, when completed, will reduce the likelihood of storm damage and consequent line failure. The rebuild will also bring the affected lines into conformance with the current National Electrical Safety Code requirements.

Description of the Project Corridor

The topography along most of the 4.1-mile right-of-way is very challenging. Options for linear access along much of the right-of-way are non-existent. Particularly in the Shelton segment of the corridor, much of the right-of-way is overgrown with dense vegetation, including blackberry and Japanese knotweed, which make portions of the right-of-way completely impenetrable. Other portions of the corridor alignment, particularly in Ansonia, are residential, with the 115-kV line crossing maintained residential yards or running along roads.

As seen in the aerial photos in Appendix A.4, western portions of the Shelton segment of the line cross hayfields near structures 351 and 352. The house at structure 353 on the west side of Meadow Street is abandoned and dilapidated. The line then traverses the side yard of the house

at 151 Meadow Street on the east side of that road before crossing a large garden or small agricultural plot behind that home that extends to structure 354. The corridor begins to descend steeply after structure 355 and becomes impenetrable due to dense vegetation. The steep descent and the dense vegetation extend to Howe Avenue, Route 110. Structure 359 on the east side of Howe Avenue supports vine coverage by Virginia creeper, oriental bittersweet and grape/porcelainberry up the majority of its height.

The transmission line then spans the Housatonic Rive between structures 359 and 360, crossing upstream of Derby Dam.

Once across the Housatonic River to Derby, the corridor runs along the west side of Route 34 to Indian Well Substation, then exits at a right angle to run along B Street. Beginning at structures 3A and 3B at the end of B Street, the line ascends a steep grade which is covered in an impenetrable wall of Japanese knotweed across the full width of the right-of-way up to structure 4 on the south side of Hawthorne Avenue. The corridor then crosses Hawthorne Avenue and runs along Coon Hollow Road which, although there are residences in proximity to the east, has the feel of a largely undeveloped road visually separated from nearby homes except at its extreme southern end. Beginning at structure 8, institutional uses begin, consisting of the Ansonia-Derby dog park and the Derby Department of Public Works facility. Coon Hollow Road then transitions to commercial use at structure 9. The line then crosses the Griffin Hospital remote parking lot between Chatfield and Division Streets where it then enters Ansonia at structure 10.

From structures 10 to 12, the transmission line crosses Osbornedale State Park. Along this 1,465' segment of the line, United Illuminating proposes to widen its right-of-way from the current 50' width to 110' of width. This subject is discussed further in the following section of these comments. Existing forest vegetation along the western side of the right-of-way in this segment would be cleared to meet clearance requirements for the conductors.

Five homes along Hawkins Road and one home at the end of West Street are located in very close proximity to the transmission line on the east side of the right-of-way. The home at the end of West Street may be as little as 25' from the line itself, while the right-of-way extends to the edge of the backyards of the homes on Hawkins Road. Homeowners at 5 and 7 Hawkins Road pointed out a small drainage channel running along the back boundary of their yards before entering a culvert at 5 Hawkins Road. The culvert has become clogged previously and should be monitored as clearing and then construction work progresses on this segment of the new line. The homeowner at 7 Hawkins Road also noted that he has seen red-tailed hawks in recent years roosting on the transmission line structure, which would be structure 11.

Clearing of the band of forest west of the existing right-of-way in this segment, as proposed by UI, would remove most, but not all, of the visual screening between the 20 condo units at 315-317 Silver Hill Road and the transmission line. This would also be true for the vacant home undergoing renovation on Silver Hill Road immediately north of the 315-317 Silver Hill Road condos.

Between structures 11 and 12, the corridor runs adjacent to an open field in Osbornedale State Park on the east side of the line. Though this field likely supported agricultural use at one time, it does not show recent signs of doing so.

Continuing northward, the transmission line runs across the backyards of 14 homes on Reichelt Terrace and Edgehill Road before reaching structure 14 and crossing Route 8.

After crossing Route 8 to structure 15, there is a wooded buffer between the line and the homes at the end of Dwight Street. This widens out to an informal brush dump operation between the right-of-way and the homes at the end of Clarkson Street. The line then reaches Hull Street in close proximity to the home at 31-33 Hull Street on the south side of that street, then crosses Hull Street to structure 16 and runs across the front yards of the four homes along Willow Street. After crossing Scotland Street, it runs between two homes on the north side of that street, then reaches structure 17 in the Nolan Field Athletic Complex, the home field of the Ansonia High football and baseball teams, before making a right angle turn to the east and running along the southern boundary of the athletic complex to structure 18. The line then crosses Wakelee Avenue, passing between homes on North Westwood Road and South Westwood Road, before entering more industrial land uses at structure 19.

From structure 19, which offers a clear view of Ansonia Substation, the corridor descends very steeply down a mugwort and knotweed covered slope to the aggregate materials yard of Burns Materials. The remainder of the utility corridor runs adjacent to or spans industrial land uses. A small sedge wetland is crossed between the mulch area and the asphalt bin of Burns Material before reaching structure 20. The line then runs behind Burns Construction to Structure 20B which consists of two modern vintage monopoles. Finally, the line passes behind two businesses before access to structure 21 which is just outside of Ansonia Substation.

Osbornedale State Park and the Potential Widening of the United Illuminating R.O.W.

DEEP and United Illuminating are in discussions concerning the proposed widening of the UI right-of-way by 60' across Osbornedale State Park. Though the transmission line corridor is not proximal to the developed portions of the State Park, the proposed widening and the conversion of forested area to permanent low growth vegetation will have habitat and aesthetic impacts. UI and DEEP are evaluating a range of mitigation options to offset these impacts. We cannot offer a definite timeframe for the completion of these discussions but we do envision that an acceptable accommodation will be achieved. It should be noted that United Illuminating is proposing to place the new structures 10 and 12 just outside of the boundaries of Osbornedale State Park from their current locations which are just inside the state park boundaries.

Project Permits and Approvals, Natural Diversity Data Base Review

The list of permits and approvals from DEEP for the proposed transmission line rebuild as given in Table 8-1 of the application is accurate. UI has not yet submitted applications for these permits. Construction is projected to start Q3 2023, with an in-service goal of Q4 2024. UI and DEEP have also had continuing discussions of Natural Diversity Data Base issues including opportunities to enhance the habitat value of the right-of-way through the planting of beneficial vegetative species in the right-of-way.

In addition to the State Endangered sedge wren and the State Threatened bald eagle listed in the NDDDB determination letter of January 18, 2021, the clearing of the proposed 1.82 acres of hardwood trees on the western side of the right-of-way at Osbornedale State Park could have implications for tree roosting bats in the affected forested area. Therefore, DEEP recommends that tree clearing be timed to avoid the months of June, July and August.

Miscellaneous Application Commentary

Page 6-10 of the application notes that three of the monopoles must be located within the 100-year floodplain, displacing 706 cubic feet of flood storage capacity, and four additional monopoles will be located within the 500-year floodplain and will displace 730 cubic feet of floodplain capacity. Any impacts to flood storage capacity would be evaluated as part of the Section 401 Water Quality Certification. While the volumes of floodplain storage capacity involved are not significant, the comparison of this lost capacity to the 2,000 square mile watershed area of the Housatonic River is not a relevant or meaningful comparison. A meaningful comparison would be to the volume of flood storage capacity in the affected reach of the Housatonic River for these two flood events. A comparison of storage volume to watershed area is not a meaningful comparison.

Regarding the discussion of EMF levels along the corridor in Chapter 7 of the application, it is unclear how there can be decreases of as much as 23mG in the magnetic field strength in some areas along the corridor (p. 7-5) when the when the current magnetic field strength averages 4.5 mG, with a maximum value of 12 mG (p. 7-4).

Regarding the discussion of conductor uplift on page 9-13 for the reduced right-of-way expansion option through Osbornedale State Park, the conductor uplift effect is cited as the reason that structures 10, 12 and 13 would need to be increased in height if a taller structure 11 were used to allow for a narrower addition to the ROW width through the park. The two concerns cited in footnote 56 for temperature-related contraction of the conductors causing upward tension on the neighboring structures but also potential conductor clearance violations seem to be in conflict. Are the potential conductor clearance violations referred to between the conductors themselves as opposed to between the conductors and vegetation along the corridor? Admittedly a layman's question, but could a bit of sag be added between in the two segments between structures 10 and 11 and between 11 and 12 to reduce or eliminate the uplift concerns cited, were this option to be selected?

On page 6-8 of the application, various measures to protect water resources from construction impacts are cited. The eighth bullet item states, "to the extent possible, petroleum products will be stored in upland areas more than 25' from wetlands ..." Twenty-five feet is not much of a buffer from water resources in the event of a leak or spill. Given the fairly limited presence of wetlands and watercourses in the project corridor, could UI commit to a wider buffer of at least 50', or ideally 100', between areas of temporary storage of petroleum products and water resources in the corridor?

Lastly, do the two new monopoles at structure 20B need to be replaced and, if so, why?

Thank you for the opportunity to review this application and to submit these comments to the Council. Should Council members or Council staff have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (860) 424-4110 or at frederick.riese@ct.gov.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frederick L. Riese".

Frederick L. Riese
Senior Environmental Analyst

cc: Commissioner Katie Dykes