

STATE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT TASK FORCE

MEETING #1 – FACILITATOR’S SUMMARY

April 24, 2012, 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Rocky Hill Town Hall

Members Present: Kim Barbieri, Timothy Bockus, Mark Goetz, David Goodson, Jim Govani, Eric Hammerling, Jane Harris, Mary Hogue, John Jasinski, Leslie Kane, Kevin Kelly, Joe McGee, JoAnne Messina, John Mitchell, John Parry, Karl Reichle, Bruce Villwock, Jeffrey Ward.
Alternate: Ken Bullard. Members Absent: Kevin Kelly, James Skiff.

Connecticut Department of Energy and Environment (DEEP) Participants/Ex Officio Members:
Chris Donnelly, Susan Frechette, Chris Martin.

Observers: *These need to be added.*

Facilitator: Bill Logue Recorder: Sara Ganzer.

Welcome and Introductions. The agenda and handouts were reviewed¹. Task Force Chair Eric Hammerling welcomed the members and asked everyone to introduce themselves. DEEP Deputy Commissioner Susan Frechette also welcomed everyone and noted the importance of the Task Force work and how it was part of Governor Malloy’s and Commissioner Esty’s response to the weather events and disruptions which occurred in the fall of 2011. The goal is to improve preparedness for future events. Eric Hammerling reviewed the mission of the Task Force. He then asked Joe McGee, co-chair of the Two-Storm Panel, to provide his perspective on the context for the work of the Task Force.

Mr. McGee expressed appreciation for the members’ willingness to serve and noted several things he felt important for the Task Force to be aware of. With respect to vegetation management and tree trimming he stated that assumptions and practices may need to be questioned and gave the example of Florida of testing trimming practices and high winds with jet turbines and finding that trimming practices actually weakened trees. He also noted that species choice and location is important. He suggested that member look closely at SB 450 with respect to trimming practices and the relationship and cost issues as they relate to private property. He also encouraged better integration between utilities and municipalities on what is trimmed and how, and the role of municipal tree wardens. Lastly, he noted the opportunity to create change was ripe and should be taken advantage of.

¹ Documents from the meeting are generally available at:
<http://www.ct.gov/dep/cwp/view.asp?a=2697&q=503040>

DEEP Overview. Chris Donnelly noted that DEEP would: develop a webpage for the process to post information for the public, gather input from the public, and provide information to the Task Force as necessary. He presented an overview of the Urban Forestry Program and basic information on the changes in Connecticut's forests (forest cover, age class). The quality of tree care in the state is high with safety standards starting in 1972 and pruning standards created in 1996. The pruning standards have been revised three times. State statutes require a tree warden in each municipality, but set no qualification criteria, and licensing for commercial arborists. He referenced various American National Standards Institute (ANSI) standards for safety, pruning, vegetation management, tree risk assessment, and utility pruning. Municipal tree budgets vary from \$217 to \$900,000 with the average being \$58,918.86. On a per capita basis, this ranges from \$0.07 to \$16.60 with an average of \$3.00. The total municipal tree trimming spending is estimated at \$10 million/year. CL&P spent \$24,625,000 and United Illuminating (UI) \$3,418,883. Representatives of the utilities noted that budgets for trimming have increased significantly with Northeast Utility/NStar will doubling and UI likely to be \$53.5 million for vegetation management, electric storm hardening and infrastructure storm hardening. These budget are likely to increase over the coming decade.

A member noted the general lack of enforcement of trimming best management practices.

Process Overview. The group discussed the Task Force process and goals. They approved the Ground Rules and reviewed roles for members, agency representatives and the public. The Ground Rules address Task Force mission/purposes; decision making; and communicating with constituencies, the media and others. Mr. Hammerling noted the goal of having one or more work products by the end of August. Bill Logue noted the general sequence of the process will be to gather information, confirm topics for discussion, develop a direction and draft recommendations, share these with the public for feedback, then develop final recommendations through an iterative process. Bill Logue suggested that, due to time constraints meeting summaries be prepared as facilitator summaries. The group agreed.

Mission and Topics List. As part of the discussion of mission and tasks, possible work products were mentioned, these might include a report, guidelines, or an educational pamphlet for example. The group reviewed the mission and as part of the work a number of suggestions were made. The group agreed that one goal, but not the central mission, was to help the state be more prepared for another large disruptive event. The group engaged in a wide ranging discussion, noted below, which had implications for how focus topics might be grouped or addressed. Following the discussion Chris Donnelly noted that although the Task Force has an operating timeframe the underlying work will continue after the when the Task Force sunsets. He committed to revising the topics list. The discussion also brought the light to have clearer common understanding and definitions.

Discussion. A number of themes emerged in the discussion.

Budget, legal liability and standards. Several members noted that most municipalities had very limited budgets for tree work and expressed the concern that, if standards are created or municipal plans and surveys are required, this might create the legal obligation to conduct work or face liability for damage or injury where a plan exists but is not implemented due to lack of funding. The state's role in providing funding for municipalities was raised. As part of the discussion, the need for communication and transparency about budget increases and other activities relating to trimming, and the fact that, no matter how much is done, preparations will never be 100% effective.

Education. Several members noted that a significant portion of the damage from Storm Alfred resulted from downed trees on private property, not from the rights of way, and this would indicate the need for public education. Resulting from this discussion, the group agreed to look into possible revisions of the "Right Tree/Right Place" guidelines as part of their work.

Rights of Way. It was clarified that utilities only have rights of way with respect to property where they hold an easement or land in fee. For other work they must obtain permission of the municipality and/or the land owner.

Information needs. A number of possible information needs were identified. These included information on sources and causes of outages and assistance from DEEP counsel and/or legislative liaison on legal implications of any recommendations. Deputy Commissioner Frechette committed to exploring the availability of staff for this after the close of the legislative session.

Next Meeting and Schedule.

A proposed schedule of future meetings will be circulated to the members via a poll to assess availability. The next meeting was set for May 8 from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM at the Connecticut Forest and Parks Association in Rockfall, CT.

The members agreed that it would be useful to have brief 10-15 minute presentations on the areas of expertise and topics of import to them that they felt others on the group should be aware of. The following ad hoc work groups were formed to assemble the presentations for the upcoming meeting:

- Utilities: Dave Goodson, John Mitchell, Ken Bullard.
- Municipal/Tree Wardens: Jim Govoni, Karl Reichle, Tim Bockus.
- Private Land Tree Owners: Kim Barbieri, John Parry, Jane Harris.

- Environmental/Public Perspective: Mary Hogue, Joanne Messina, Jeff Ward, Leslie Kane.
- State: Bruce Villwock.

Documents Distributed at the Meeting

The following documents were provided to members at or before the meeting:

- Proposed Agenda
- Draft Proposed Charter and Ground Rules
- Roles
- Draft Topics for Focus
- DEEP Presentation: Connecticut Urban Forestry Program
- Two Storm Panel Report

Follow Up/Commitments

- Ad Hoc Work Groups prepare presentations 5/8/2012
- Revise Focus Topics List, Chris Donnelly 5/8/2012
- Inform Task Force of availability of Legislative liaison/counsel to attend meetings, DEEP 5/15/2012
- Disseminate poll on future meetings Hammerling/Logue 5/7/2012