

CITY COUNCIL STANDING COMMITTEE

**Planning & Development**

Wednesday, August 25, 2010 – 6:30 p.m.

1<sup>st</sup> Fl. Council Conference Room – City Hall

**Present:** Chair, Councilor Joseph Ciolino; Councilor Greg Verga, Councilor Jacqueline Hardy (Alternate)

**Absent:** Councilor Whynott

**Also Present:** Councilor Jacqueline Hardy; Fire Chief Phil Dench; Charles Mahoney, Electrical Inspector; Mark Cole, DPW Operations Manager; John Upham, National Grid; Jane Lyman, Comcast; Stan Usovicz, Verizon

**The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.**

**Councilor Ciolino** thanked the guests in attendance for coming to the meeting to work towards solving the problem of double poles in the City of Gloucester. It was the goal of this meeting to open lines of communication and to work towards removing all double poles from City streets and sidewalks and working within the parameters of the City's Pole ordinances (see Sec. 23-77 et. al.). He noted Councilor Hardy, the previous Planning & Development Chair, thought that it might be wise to put all the parties in one room to solve the problem of double poles. He passed out copies of the Gloucester Code of Ordinances sections which covered the rules and regulations on poles and wires.

**Councilor Hardy** thanked Councilor Ciolino for taking the matter up and to put it on course. The new City Council picked a few items to tackle proactively this year, and this was one of them feeling everyone needed to understand the policies. The previous Council heard several different stories; and now the Council wanted to know how they can work proactively with the utilities to solve the double pole dilemma.

**Councilor Ciolino** asked who owns the poles. He had heard many versions of who owns them. One such story was that years ago one side of the tracks that run through Gloucester was owned by AT&T, and the other Mass Electric. He wanted to know how it all was sorted out.

**John Upham**, National Grid Coordinator-Community Relations/Economic Development NE stated they're jointly is designated as the maintenance party, which means they actually set the poles. If the telephone company had a project in Gloucester, and needed a pole set, National Grid (NG) would set the poles; unless it was a solely owned pole, then they would set their own, and the same for NG. In Gloucester, the electric company is responsible for setting poles. If they need to extend a line for a new customer, or refurbish an existing line for a customer along the street, NG would set the poles. Sometimes NG does it for their own benefit. Those Gloucester Avenue and Hawthorne Street were some of the areas he'd looked at prior to coming to the meeting. Those were areas that they've set poles that they've transferred off. The progression on a pole is: electric is on top, then communications (fire alarms, telecoms. They're normally the first off then they cut and the rest transfer over time. The last person off normally "takes the dead wood". Sometimes the pole is set in the existing hole, and that's called a "cut and kick". They'll take the old pole and pull the butt out; set the new pole in; and then the poles are lash the old pole to the new pole until all parties transfer onto the new pole. Those are the normal two ways you would find a double pole situation.

**Councilor Ciolino** stated then that NG owns the poles.

**Mr. Upham** responded they're jointly owned. But NG is responsible for setting any new poles. Half the pole is theirs (Verizon), and half is for NG. Comcast and others lease space on the poles.

**Stanley J. Usovicz**, Regional Director-External Affairs, Verizon stated if the pole is cut, and they're the last one off, they take the 'dead wood'. If it's in the same hole, and it's not cut, then they have to contact NG.

**Councilor Hardy** asked is there a set order on the pole.

**Mr. Usovicz** stated typically it is electric and street light (NG) first in Gloucester. Fire alarm is next after the street light has been removed; then cable, Comcast; and then finally telephone. As much as the electric company is first off first on; telephone is last on, last off. Everything trickles down on the data base so that all the 'players' know what the status of each pole is, and who is next.

**Jane Lyman**, Senior Manger- Government & Community Relations, Comcast noted the term was "ball in court". So they'll communicate to each other, 'how many BIC's do you have

**Councilor Verga** asked about fire alarm wires, which now is no longer in use.

**Chief Dench** stated they haven't completely shut down the system yet. They're close with Stop 'n' Shop Supermarket and the Hovey School condos off of Summer Street remaining to go wireless. Those are two privately owned buildings. They're contracted and are in the process of receiving equipment and getting installation of equipment or they have the equipment and are waiting to install.

**Councilor Verga** asked how the new system would work.

**Chief Dench** explained it is part of their alarm system. Right now it runs on wires that are either on the telephone poles or in manholes. They're switching over to a wireless system and eliminate the use of the wires; and use a radio box. In addition to those two privately owned buildings, there are three buildings owned by the City; Fitz Henry Lane House, Maplewood School and Magnolia School that they have to get the money in place to switch them over. They've already shut down a portion of the system, certain branches of it. Those areas have had their hard-wire systems shut down from the fire station. Their problem is they have no money to take them off the poles to pay L.W. Bills to physically remove the wires.

**Councilor Verga** followed that the City would be responsible for those alarm wires.

**Charles Mahoney, City Electrical Inspector** stated once everybody's off that system they need to find someone to take the wires down. There is a lot of it to come down. He didn't know how much copper was in the wires but felt it could be worth something.

**Chief Dench** had asked L.W. Bills to give him an estimate. There's so much of it throughout the City, they're reluctant to even try to do that. The feeling is anyone would be reluctant to make a guess on what it would cost.

**Councilor Ciolino** wondered if "we were our own problem".

**Mr. Mahoney** replied there are 15 poles on the list (produced by NG and on file) that the City owns; that's holding up poles to move to the next step.

**Councilor Hardy** realized that unless the fire alarm wires come down, Comcast and telephone can't come down.

**Mr. Upham** clarified numbers on the list stated he checked the three highest streets (in terms of number of double poles) where it said the BIC for the electric company; he assumed the paperwork is in someone's in box because it didn't get updated in the database. The numbers were for 46 for the electric company, and now it's 21 as of today's date. As soon as NG sets the pole, they transfer it. They want to get off the old pole and get the new circuit working. The old circuit gets in their way to get the new circuit installed.

**Chief Dench** noted this year in his budget proposal they had \$25,000.00 in the account to take care of for fire alarms which included \$9,600.00 that went to L.W. Bills for emergency alarm work, and the rest was going to go towards removing wires this year. The other \$15,000.00 was intended to start the wire removal but was cut out of the budget. They had to pay LW Bills for emergency work and now have \$300 in that account left.

**Mr. Upham** understood the objective is to eliminate double poles. He felt it was hard because they're always upgrading their system, as is Comcast and Verizon. There's always going to be double poles. He offered to the Councilors and the others in attendance that if they have a double pole that's there a long time – the dead wood, he asked that they call him and in turn he can call Mr. Usovicz; and they can get rid of it. He was not 100% sure the data base was accurate from what he's seen. If there are certain locations, where constituents are calling them; they can make the extra effort to get them out of the way, on the sidewalks etc. He urged them to call any of the three of them (Ms. Lyman, Mr. Usovicz or himself).

**Councilor Ciolino** noted the some narrow sidewalks with double poles, in particular one on Bass Avenue, right at the terminus of Rt. 128 that he knew to have been there for years, making the sidewalk inaccessible. He felt above all else, those double poles are the ones that are a serious problem.

**Mr. Upham** stated that pole wasn't on their list, but he would check immediately on it.

**Mr. Usovicz** asked for the troubled areas from the Committee. Some of those poles they have he'll go back to their construction and ask them to take the dead wood that's listed there.

**Ms. Lyman** noted that it's nearly impossible to end this process completely. The poles get old and dry out and need to be replaced, struck by vehicles; equipment is added. There will be new reasons for them to go through the double pole process.

**Councilor Hardy** noted what was disconcerting to them is that they're looking at the same poles for years and years.

**Mr. Upham** reiterated those are the nuisance poles they really want to take care of.

**Councilor Hardy** asked if Mr. Mahoney could tell by looking at the pole who is next BIC.

**Mr. Mahoney** stated yes with the help of the list. It's a rotating list. Poles get fixed; poles get deleted and added all the time.

**Councilor Hardy** made note of many double poles in Lanesville that didn't appear on the list they had in their packet.

**Mr. Mahoney** stated he had a completely different updated list given to him by another NG employee, Doug Wagner, and didn't have the most up-to-date list Mr. Upham kept referring to.

**Mr. Usovicz** stated if you know there are poles that aren't on the list they can verify it if they can provide an address and a pole number and enter them onto the list.

**Councilor Verga** noted it seemed small percentages of these poles are for the City BIC; the majority say not attached to pole. "We're not our worst enemy" for the vast majority on the list provided to the Committee. He asked the utilities representatives what was the hold up if it's not the City, what they have to do to get the double poles removed. Most don't have the fire alarm wires on there.

**Mr. Upham** there's 20 for National Grid. Gloucester Avenue has 10, Gross Street has 6, and Hawthorne Street there was 9 with BIC for NG. He checked them before the meeting and noted they are transferred off of them. It's about 20. They're always going to be changing poles. There will always be a number of poles but cautioned that they need to be location specific.

**Councilor Verga** understood that NG has identified their issues and asked for the plans from Verizon and Comcast.

**Ms. Lyman** noted as of that meeting, Comcast had 9 poles in Gloucester. Sometimes it is a matter of justifying hiring a crew or contractor to come into the City to do the work. They hire contractors who are paid by the pole. Nine poles isn't a full day's work. It depends. If they have any pole they'd like them to address let them know. They like a certain number to send a crew to any city or town. Nine isn't a large enough a number to them.

**Councilor Verga** replied "but for Gloucester it is. He felt it was one of "those obvious things". He appreciated this was a constantly evolving list but didn't think it looked much different from the last list several months ago. He'd like to see it all cleaned up on the current list they have and then move forward from that.

**Councilor Hardy** read into the record the following from the Gloucester Code of Ordinances, Sec. 23-77, **Pole** specifications: "All poles for telegraph, telephone and electric lines shall be straight, properly trimmed and painted, in all respects, to the satisfaction and acceptance of the city engineer. Such poles shall not be less than twenty-five (25) feet in height from the ground, shall be, if of wood, not less than six (6) inches in diameter at the smaller end, and ten (10) inches in diameter at the ground. Such poles shall be properly set in the ground to a depth of at least five (5) feet and shall be octagonal in shape whenever the city council shall so require. When it shall be necessary during the installation of a new pole to temporarily maintain a double pole, the permanent repairs shall be rendered forthwith and the superfluous pole be removed within thirty (30) days. Failure to comply with the ordinance shall be punishable by a fine of not more than one hundred dollars (\$100.00) per instance to the owner(s) of record the pole or poles in question. This amendment shall become effective as of May 1, 1997.

She asked if the specifications in this section of the ordinance governing poles were at the current standard and wondered if the City needs to update the ordinance.

**Mr. Upham** stated the diameters vary as do the heights. There are different voltages on the top of poles, 34,000 volts, 13,000 volts or 4,000 volts. They stipulate how high they have to be because everyone has to be away from them. That's why they have a separate corridor at the top of the pole. Depending on the voltage and where they're putting the pole - if on a corner does it need a guy wire; if it's in a straight shot - what are the stressors on the pole. There are a lot of variables on size and class or the diameter (thickness) of the pole. They exceed those limits (in the ordinance) in most cases unless it's a very old pole set years ago and had no reason to touch it.

**Councilor Hardy** thought they should rework the ordinance, then to be more reflective of the current usages. She asked how deep they now plant the poles, is it still 5 ft.

**Mr. Upham** stated it varies by height; it's a percentage of the pole that goes into the dirt. Twenty percent of the pole goes into the ground. It's five percent of the pole. If it's a 30 ft. pole, then 5% of the pole would be in the ground. He could send the exact wording of how they do it so as to assist the Councilor in the reworking of the wording of the ordinance so it would comply with the class pole, diameter, planting depth, etc.

**Councilor Hardy** asked about the superfluous poles "when we say years, we mean years."

**Ms. Lyman** reminded the Committee to keep in mind that at least four different parties have to coordinate to do the work within 30 days which is extremely difficult to accomplish.

**Councilor Hardy** stated it's who owns the poles. National Grid should tell them to get off if they're a tenant.

**Ms. Usovicz** stated its data base driven.

**Councilor Hardy** asked that they do their job so that they don't have to constantly hear from their constituents.

**Chief Dench** noted the fire alarm wires are hung on hooks and asked was there some liability issue that the wires couldn't be re-hung by National Grid.

**Mr. Upham** stated it's that and a union issue. They've been asked that in multiple communities.

**Councilor Hardy** asked when a new pole petition comes to the City, whose office processes the application.

**Mr. Upham** stated it was National Grid. They set the poles so they petition the City. When they see them asking for Verizon and National Grid it is because they're jointly owned poles.

**Councilor Hardy** asked for a photograph of what type of a pole they're asking to put in so they know what it is.

**Councilor Ciolino** stated they don't know, for instance, what a "J" pole is. When large poles go in, people get upset.

**Mr. Upham** stated an air brake pole (or "J" pole) helps them to isolate a problem, energize as many customers as they can and repair the broken wire. He urged the P&D Committee if get a pole petition they aren't comfortable with, and they have questions that aren't being answered by their representative present at their meeting, they can always continue the matter and contact him to get the answers they need in order to approve the petition.

**Councilor Ciolino** stated Councilors should go through their wards to note the double that have been there for years and give that list to Mr. Mahoney, and who will check it against their data base.

**Councilor Hardy** was pleased to have a good beginning to a working relationship.

**Councilor Ciolino** stated they'll make a list and pass it on and meet in six months and see how they've done with the list. If there's movement they won't have to have a meeting.

**Mr. Usovicz** asked if it was possible to circulate any changes to the ordinance, so that those present would be able to review a draft.

**Councilor Ciolino** remarked that downtown during the windstorms the arm and the head went away on a particular street light. They have been trying to get the arm replaced with the light since that time. The last they heard was that they didn't have any parts. He found that very hard to believe that it's taken months, and a large chunk of the downtown is dark. He asked Mr. Upham to expedite it.

**Mr. Upham** indicated he'll get it done.

Councilor Hardy noted there were a few problems on the lights in the West End of the downtown as well and noted a light on Church Street that was dark (#3241 across from #9 Church Street). The resident was told that the light was "turned off to save electricity" at the request of the City.

**Mr. Upham** noted if they "red cap" it, then it is shut off. They only shut a light off if the party that's paying for it asks for it to be shut off. There is a photo cell at the top of the pole; you have the round glass on the bottom and aluminum on the top and on the very top of the pole is an actual red cap which can be seen from the ground.

**Councilor Ciolino** didn't believe the City would do such a thing.

**Councilor Hardy** thanked the group for their joining the Councilors and City employees and they'll call them if they need to.

**MOTION: On motion by Councilor Hardy, seconded by Councilor Verga, the Planning & Development Committee voted 3 in favor, 0 opposed to request the amendment of the Gloucester Code of Ordinances, Sec. 23-77 Pole Specifications, and to refer the matter to the Ordinances & Administration Committee for further action.**

**A motion was made, seconded and voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:06 p.m.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Dana C. Jorgenson**  
Clerk of Committees