First Selectman Mike Tetreau announced that the United Illuminating Company (UI) began work this week on a pilot program to trim or remove trees. The pilot program will take several months to complete.

UI will begin with only one crew at the corner of Congress and Burr Street and continue to work their way North on Burr Street to Aran Hill. Eventually UI will have another crew available in the Mill Plain area.

Interim Tree Warden Jeff Minder, who has been working with UI and the Town's Forestry Committee on this Pilot Program, was scheduled to be at the site Monday morning to introduce himself to everyone involved and to once again reiterate that he will be involved with this program every step of the way.

As part of the state-mandated Enhanced Tree Trimming program implemented by UI in Fairfield and other Connecticut towns, a pilot program has been launched in sections of Greenfield Hill and Mill Plain. This pilot program will allow the public to better understand how this program will be implemented in Fairfield and how it will affect the Town.

The locations for the pilot program were selected from UI's list of areas with a history of the most power outages caused by trees, including areas that have emergency evacuation sites and medical facilities in Fairfield.

Former Tree Warden, Ken Placko, the Fairfield Forestry Committee, which is a Town Committee, and UI's Certified Arborist and Manager of Vegetation Management have carefully evaluated the pilot program. The program in Greenfield Hill is concentrated on Congress Street just east of Burr Street to Hillside Road, and on Burr Street from Congress going north to Aran Hill Road. In the Mill Plain area, the pilot is on Unquowa Road from the train station parking lot to Mill Hollow Park, and on Mill Plain Road from I-95 to Glover Street.

The tree trimming program was approved by the Connecticut Public Utility Regulatory Authority in response to the increased frequency and severity of storms — and the subsequent power outages — over the past few years. UI's goal is to establish a Utility Protection Zone — the area extending horizontally 8 feet to the side of the electrical conductors from the ground to the sky.

What the public should know:

• UI has selected and marked trees for removal on both private and public properties with a red tag in the pilot areas. They have worked with the homeowners in these areas to ensure they are aware and approve of these trees for removal.

• Work Planners for UI's tree contractor, Lewis Tree, have gone door-to-door requesting each property owner's consent for all tree pruning or tree removal work.
• The Tree Warden has the authority to approve or deny UI’s request for tree pruning or removal on public property (the town’s right-of-way, along the roadside.) UI has applied for a Tree Warden permit, as required by state law, for all trees within the town’s right-of-way.

• Ken Placko, Fairfield’s former Tree Warden, has inspected each tree within the pilot program that is within the Town’s right-of-way that UI has requested for removal. The Interim Tree Warden, Jeffrey Minder, will carry out all future inspections.

• Where the Tree Warden has agreed to removal, a “Notice for Removal” has been issued and posted (white 8.5”x11” sheets of paper entitled “Posted”) on each tree.

• The “Notice” is posted for a minimum of 10 business days to allow anyone who lives in Fairfield to ask questions and/or voice concerns. To pose questions / voice concerns, contact the Fairfield Interim Tree Warden, Jeffrey Minder, at jminder@fairfieldct.org or (203) 256-3177. If uncontested, permits will be issued and tree removal will begin.

• If a tree has a “Notice of Removal” on it, any member of the public, even those who don’t live on the street or live outside of Fairfield, can contest the removal because these are public trees.

• Trees on private property do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Tree Warden and will not get his inspections or postings. However, if a tree on private property overhangs the public right-of-way, the Tree Warden may rule only on the portion of the tree that is in the public right-of-way.

• Homeowners wishing to contest the removal of trees on their own property may voice their concerns directly to the Lewis Tree Work Planner that requested consent or by contacting UI at Trees@UINet.com or 800 - 7 CALL UI (800-722-5584). In most cases, UI has agreed with the property owner.

• Once the pilot areas are completed, the Town will review the completed areas and upon approval, the pruning program throughout the town will begin.

• UI will complete the full Tree Trimming program, which will include all of the 270 miles of roads in Fairfield, over an eight-year period.

For more information about this Enhanced Tree Trimming program and the Utility Protection Zone please see http://www.uinet.com/trees and http://www.gardenclubofnewhaven.org/trees--power.html.

For any questions or concerns as this process moves forward, please contact Fairfield’s Interim Tree Warden, Jeffrey Minder, at jminder@fairfieldct.org or (203) 256-3177.