

March 4, 2014

Arthur House, Chairman
John W. Betkoski, Vice-Chairman
Michael Caron, Commissioner
Public Utilities Regulatory Authority
Ten Franklin Square
New Britain, CT 06051

Via e-mail to PURA.ExecutiveSecretary@CT.gov

Re: Docket No. 12-01-10, Investigation into Tree Trimming Practices of
Connecticut's Utility Companies

Dear Commissioners:

The Garden Club of New Haven (GCNH) submits this supplemental statement for consideration in connection with the PURA technical meetings and public information sessions on March 5 and 6 in Docket No. 12-01-10.¹

The State Vegetation Management Task Force recommendations do not include the use of rigid line clearance standards such as Enhanced Tree Trimming (ETT), which can lead to Enhanced Tree Removal (ETR), and, in fact, call into question the continued implementation of current electric distribution utility line maintenance plans that include the rigid application of ETT and ETR within what is known as the Utility Protection Zone. Section 60 of Public Act 13-298, enacted *after* the commencement of this docket, and the earlier Public Act 12-148 require that the tree pruning and removal standards established and approved for the utilities by PURA be consistent with the recommendations of the State Vegetation Management Task Force.²

¹ We request that you also review the written and oral testimony presented to PURA on behalf of GCNH in its public hearing in this docket on July 31, 2013, as well as the comments to this docket submitted together with the New Haven Urban Resources Initiative on March 20, 2012, December 17, 2012 and February 13, 2013.

² Public Act 12-148 (codified as Sec.16- 32h, C.G.S.) provides in pertinent part: "(c) The authority [PURA] shall, in the docket initiated pursuant to subsection (b) of this section, review: . . . (4) Tree trimming policies of each electric distribution company and shall determine . . . (E) the standards appropriate for road-side tree care in the state, vegetation management practices in utility rights-of-way, right tree-right place standards, and any other tree maintenance standard recommended by the State Vegetation Management Task Force established by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection" Docket No. 12-06-09 was initiated pursuant to this statute, and the Final Decision in Docket No. 12-01-09 transferred this issue to this Docket No. 12-01-10.

Most important, Subsection (a)(4) of Section 60 of Public Act 13-198 provides: "'Vegetation management' means pruning or removal of trees, shrubs or other vegetation that pose a risk to the reliability of the utility infrastructure, and the retention of trees and shrubs that are compatible with the utility infrastructure. Until such time as the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection issues standards for identifying such

We support the Exceptions to the draft decision in this docket filed by the State Vegetation Management Task Force, but submit that the following standard for pruning of non-hazardous trees within the Utility Protection Zone is more consistent with the Task Force Report recommendations than what is proposed in the Exceptions:

In order to avoid negative aesthetic, societal, economic or environmental impacts, any non-hazardous tree located in whole or in part within the utility protection zone shall be retained, and be pruned to protect the utility infrastructure in accordance with professional pruning standards that protect the tree's health and consider the location, species, condition and growth rate of the tree.

As explained in the Task Force Exceptions, the Draft Decision in this docket incorrectly considered the line clearance requirements proposed by UI and CL&P as recommendations of the Task Force. Although the insertion of subsection (c) into the utility line clearance requirements (page 9 of the Task Force Exceptions) *permits* the utilities to comply with the definition of vegetation management in Public Act 13-198, it does not require compliance. PURA's standard for tree pruning and removal should omit the utilities' proposal and instead recognize that the Utility Protection Zone defines an area in which utility tree pruning and removal can take place, and that compliance with the Task Force recommendations requires retention of healthy tall and tall growing trees, as the above suggested standard would ensure.

It is also important to recall PURA's estimate, in its final decision in Docket 12-06-09 at pages 11-12, that 78 % of the power outages caused by trees during the 2011 storms were caused by trees that fell from outside of the "normal trim zone." Thus, to prevent major outages from such major storms, the utilities should first and foremost focus on removing hazardous trees and branches, both within and outside the Utility Protection Zone, as they are defined in Section 60 of Public Act 13-298: "dead, extensively decayed or structurally weak trees or tree parts that would damage utility infrastructure if they fell." This, too, is consistent with the Task Force Report.

United Illuminating's prior line clearance standards³ for pruning within the wire zone appear to allow for the flexibility called for in the Task Force recommendations, explicitly stating under Clearance Requirements, A. II. Evaluation (p. 29): "Each tree

compatible trees and shrubs, the standards and identification of such compatible trees and shrubs shall be as set forth in the 2012 final report of the State Vegetation Management Task Force . . ." The Task Force clearly called for the retention of tall and tall growing healthy trees, their removal when their decline made them hazardous, and their replacement with "right tree/right place" trees.

³ See United Illuminating's Line Clearance and Vegetation Management Specification, revised 2008, and used by UI to date (except as proposed in its November 1, 2013 Vegetation Management Plan). It is included as a separate attachment in the e-mail transmittal of this statement to PURA.

must be evaluated individually at the time it is trimmed." The evaluation includes, in addition to consideration of the characteristics of the electric line and the pruning cycle, "[g]rowth rate, species, shape, condition and location of the tree." Methods / Practices General I (p. 33) states: "Directional pruning shall be used to guide tree growth away from wires." According to United Illuminating: "The program has been in place for over 15 years and has worked well for average New England weather." (Page 7 of United Illuminating Vegetation Management Plan, November 1, 2013, submitted in response to Orders Nos. 8 & 9, Docket No 13-01-19.) UI's 2013 Vegetation Management Plan does include some discussion of hazardous tree removal (page 11), but its scope is uncertain, and the plan appears to call for removal of non-hazardous trees simply due to height and growth pattern.

If both utilities prune healthy tall and tall growing trees within the Utility Protection Zone in accordance with the standard we suggest and undertake much more aggressive hazardous tree removal, Connecticut would be well-protected in future major storms. Protection can best be improved over time by careful data collection and rigorous study of the data to determine why apparently healthy tall trees or branches fell and how that failure could have been predicted and prevented.

By focusing on removal of hazardous trees, and eliminating the direct cost of removing healthy trees (including disposal of the debris), the utilities will have funds to grind or remove stumps, and, in fulfillment of the Task Force's vision, to plant right tree/right place trees as hazardous trees must be removed.

Respectfully submitted,

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Garden Club of New Haven