



SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING

1:00pm, Monday, May 11, 2020

Virtual Meeting via Zoom call due to COVID-19 Pandemic:

Broadcasted live on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/cityofisleofpalms>

MINUTES

1. Call to order

Present: Council members Popson, Streetman, Moye, Ward, Buckhannon, Bell, Pounds, and Smith, and Mayor Carroll

Staff Present: Administrator Fragoso, Attorney Copeland, various department heads

2. Discussion of the removal of 97 palm trees on Isle of Palms as part of Dominion Energy's five-year tree trimming cycle to maintain public safety and system reliability.

City Council members engaged the following representatives from Dominion Energy in discussion about the removal of 97 palm trees from the Isle of Palms: Bill Turner, VP Electric Operations; Danny Kassis, VP Customer Relations & Renewables; Mark Branham, Forester/Certified Arborist; Clay Chaplin, Forester/Certified Arborist; Paul Fischer, Public Affairs, and Jennifer Hightower, Government Affairs.

Mr. Branham explained that upon inspection, 97 palm trees were identified as "Cat 1," thus needing to be removed. These trees, marked with a white X, have the greatest potential to interfere with power lines. According to Mr. Branham, residents affected by the tree removal were notified by mail on April 28, 2020 that the tree removal process will begin on Monday, May 18, 2020. He said these particular trees cannot be shortened or groomed away from the power lines and therefore need to be removed. Mr. Branham indicated that less than half of the citizens affected have contacted Dominion Energy with concerns. Due to their proximity to the power lines, the trees create an immediate risk for interrupted service and fire.

Several Council members asked about the feasibility of burying the powerlines to prevent trees from being removed. Dominion Energy representatives explained that multi-year process is possible but requires a plan and funding. They shared that some municipalities have used a portion of their franchise fees and grants to fund burying their power lines.

Council members asked about the lost value of the trees, the possibility of replanting any of the trees, the costs of planting new trees, and Dominion Energy's willingness to pay for any of those incurred costs. Mr. Kassis indicated that any agreement outside of their non-standard service agreement is more complex, but they are working on similar approaches with other municipalities. Mr. Turner indicated this tree removal will be an ongoing process as there are many more trees near power lines. Mr. Branham said that the replanting of these particular trees is not possible due to their proximity to power lines and other electrical infrastructure. The trees must be cut to the ground. He said debris will be chipped and cleaned up and any stump removal will be the property owner's responsibility.

Council members asked for data regarding the number and location of trees removed during the last tree-trimming cycle in 2014. They also agreed that a lengthier, in-person conversation is needed to discuss the process of planning for burying power lines. Council Member Buckhannon asked if the City could use the franchise fee monies to purchase and plant new trees. Mr. Kassis said, the way the fund was set up the provision would be that the utility would be required to put assets in service using the funds and that direct tree replacement would not be possible. It may be possible in conjunction with undergrounding.

Mayor Carroll said he believed leaving stumps behind was "the cheap way out," and he requested Dominion Energy remove all tree stumps. Mr. Turner said he will look into that request further, noting that stump removal could damage anything else underground that may be nearby. Mayor Carroll also requested that further notification to affected residents be made prior to the start of the removal process. Mr. Turner said door hangers can be put at each affected property.

Mr. Turner and Mr. Branham stated that these trees cannot be transplanted at this point, but that the replanting of trees now categorized as "Cat 2" is possible and up for discussion. Mr. Turner also said that an education effort of putting the right tree in the right place is needed going forward.

Administrator Fragoso indicated staff will follow up with Dominion Energy about stump removal, further notification to affected residents, information about tree removals during past tree-trimming cycles, and the anticipated impact of the following cycles.

3. Adjournment

Council Member Buckhannon made a motion to adjourn, and Council Member Moye seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 2:35pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Nicole DeNeane
City Clerk

Public Comment For City Meetings

Name

Benjamin Naylor

Address

2 Frank Sottile Ln, Isle of Palms, South Carolina 29451

Comments for Council Meeting

Hi, I would just like to add a comment that I would like to see a plan for burying the power lines on Isle of Palms. There is a run through my backyard and it would be nice to:

reduce risk of outages due to wind

reduce risk of damage due to wind

improve aesthetic

reduce easement requirements

save trees on our island

Meeting This Comment is Intended For:

City Council

Public Comment For City Meetings

Name

Michael Roth

Address

1201 Oak Harbor Blvd, Isle of Palms, South Carolina 29451

Comments for Council Meeting

If I cut down the trees like dominion energy has cut and trimmed trees on my property I would be incarcerated and also be subject to a very large fine.

Furthermore why is dominion energy not looking at ways to put the powerlines underground. I believe there is a federal grant the subsidized powerlines to be put under ground. Long-term the cost of putting the lines underground would be much cheaper than maintenance cost for the overhead lines.

Meeting This Comment is Intended For:

City Council

Public Comment For City Meetings

Name

John Graham Wagner

Address

409 Palm Blvd, Isle of Palms, South Carolina 29451

Comments for Council Meeting

5/11/20

Dear City Council,

Thank you in advance for looking into the palm tree removal plans today in your meeting. Per my previous email to you all, Dominion Energy is cutting down many palm trees, and though I can understand why it must be done at times, it has not necessarily been handled very well. We are losing 14 tall palm trees across the front of our house. I met with the Dominion contact while he spray painted white X's on the trees because by chance I saw him out there doing it on April 9, 2020. Recently, Dominion called me and told me there would be no changes regarding the 14 trees in front of my house. Dominion will not remove the stumps, and it is the homeowner's responsibility to remove stumps and/or fill in the holes when the stumps rot. To be clear, I did not plant these trees. They grew on their own. For Dominion to say they do this every 5 years is simply false. They have never done anything regularly to those trees. I've spent money to have them pruned at times. Now Dominion comes in and wants to clear cut most of them. I know some must go and maybe nothing will change; however, we really appreciate you looking into things. Have a good day.

Sincerely,

John & Amanda Wagner

409 Palm Blvd

843-270-3553

Meeting This Comment is Intended For:

City Council

Public Comment For City Meetings

Name

Dr Robert D. Stapleton

Address

20 Ocean Point Drive, Isle of Palms, South Carolina 29451

Comments for Council Meeting

For the Special City Council meeting on 5/11 regarding Dominion's 5 Year Trimming cycle

I've lived on the Isle of Palms for 27 years with my wife. We are both physicians - my wife is an internal medicine doctor specializing in wellness and prevention at MUSC and I am a pediatrician. We've brought our 2 kids up here on the island - my daughter is a senior in computer science at CofC and my son just finished his masters at Clemson on the way to a PhD. In a mixed blessing, the pandemic has brought them both home for the time being.

I needed to leave this comment for a simple reason. In normal times there are a number of families on the island who rely on consistent power availability to manage their chronic illness. Examples include oxygen and nebulizers for lung disease, but there are other equipment needs for other organ systems. I've cared for families on the island with these needs, but given the age distribution on the island, you'll find these needs more prevalent among the senior citizens in my wife's practice.

Now to the point - the COVID-19 pandemic amplifies the need for continuous power for all of our residents.

- First, the residents with chronic illness unrelated to COVID-19 still have their chronic illnesses.

- Second, we are all at risk of having significant acute complications as COVID-19 spreads prior to the development of an effective vaccine. Any of us now might find ourselves at home on oxygen and much more dependent on continuous power than we ever imagined. Hopefully a vaccine comes soon - but there is the potential that 70% of us will get this virus over the next 2 to 3 years. And most of us discussing this today, my wife and I included, are in the high risk groups for complications.

- Third, and this is not talked about enough in the press, many of us who get COVID-19 will develop long term damage to an organ like the lungs, but also the kidneys and/or heart and/or liver and/or brain. That means the island is very likely to grow a whole new population of residents that count on continuous power to manage these new and frightening chronic illnesses.

And as we've found out, we are not the type of island community that can just close down and keep visitors with COVID away.

However, there are many things we can do right now - and many more we will find out in the near future that we should do - to minimize risk to the families on the island where possible. Prioritizing Dominion's access to power lines is one of those things.

Thanks for your time and consideration.

Meeting This Comment is Intended For:

City Council

Public Comment For City Meetings

Name

Curmudgeon James W Smiley

Address

16 44th Ave, Isle of Palms, South Carolina 29451

Comments for Council Meeting

Please see my email voicing concern over the removal of 97 Palmetto trees.

Meeting This Comment is Intended For:

City Council

Public Comment For City Meetings

Name

Mary Alice Kruesi

Address

7 2nd Ave, Isle of Palms, South Carolina 29451

Comments for Council Meeting

Thank you for protecting all citizens. I understand that everyone is seeking fresh air and water. I believe the state opened up without enough restrictions and guidelines. The beach is a place of congregation of large groups. Please continue to protect those who visit as well as those who live here by limiting congregation on the beach until CDC guidelines are met. Thank you for your hard work and remaining strong.

Meeting This Comment is Intended For:

City Council

Public Comment For City Meetings

Name

Catherine G Phillips

Address

172 Daniels Ridge drive, Summerville, South Carolina 29485

Comments for Council Meeting

Just a question on the removal of Palm trees. What are you doing with them? I'm a senior, limited income, fighting cancer and would love a couple for my yard for therapy of seeing something beautiful every morning. Dont want them just chopped down. I love them. Please email me at Nanatimbecca@yahoo.com on your decisions

Meeting This Comment is Intended For:

Public Works Committee

Public Comment For City Meetings

Name

nadine deif

Address

3305 Hartnett Blvd, Isle Of Palms, South Carolina 29451

Comments for Council Meeting

What has top legal Counsel done ;TRO, other temp injunction relief, etc to halt this process?

When Hartnett wires were buried by sce&g/scana (about 5 years ago) , who paid what amount for this project? What is the cost for the burial per lineal foot?

What portion of taxes (2.5% excise tax?) is or was allocated towards the burial of wires?

Due to being the highest winds:storms and hurricane prone areas of SC, where can we get funding and or loans towards the permanent burial of wires?

With scana there must have been a street by street or areas from front beach to the inter coastal Areas that were part of a wire burial plan?

Legally, in the past in SC, how did we get wires buried underground?

First action, in my opinion, should be an immediate injunction against DE. I am happy to help with this project or discuss the options for a resolution with DE, if needed.

Thank you

Nadine Deif

843-926-3850

Meeting This Comment is Intended For:

City Council

Public Comment For City Meetings

Name

Mr. Dennis J Frazier

Address

37 Fairway Oaks Lane, Isle of Palms, South Carolina 29451

Comments for Council Meeting

To City Council

Mary and I strongly object to the indiscriminate removal of palm trees and extremely bad pruning of other varieties as well, by Dominion.

Our Island's iconic look is linked to these palms, especially those on Palm Blvd. In fact the beauty and joy of living or visiting our island is in large part due to the beautiful and well managed foliage and flowers. Dominion (and SCEG) have a long history of butchering trees on IOP and elsewhere in the name of their power lines. Some common sense trimming or a well planned relocation of trees is needed. If trees need to be trimmed, or removed, replace them with a like size tree in a nearby location that is approved by the the city and resident nearest the line.

The need for palm tree removal is not always well founded. I asked a local well respected landscaping design company on Sullivan's Island about removing palms. I was told Dominion does it because of the potential for the fronds catching fire near their lines. When asked how often that has happened, the answer was once....once is a very infrequent reason to remove mature and beautiful palm trees. More likely, Dominon's crews have been given carte blanche to trim at their discretion without regard to common sense.

Property owners and the city must have oversight just as you do for residents when they plan to trim or remove large mature trees. Dominion should be no different.

Perhaps Dominion should put the power lines underground as they appear to have already done on parts of the island....Palm Blvd for one.

I understand the need to protect our utilities and not to damage them unnecessarily, but trees that are tall enough to concern Dominion, are also old enough to warrant a shared input in the decision to trim or cut with IOP having the final approval.

For an example of poor trimming on other tree varieties, look at the trees just outside the Wild Dunes gate on the gate side. Dominion has carved out a large v shaped area in the top middle, leaving a few terrible looking trees. They should be required to coordinate proper trimming approved by IOP and the residents. They should have replaced the tree with one of similar size and near the same area, but not encroaching their lines.

Thank you you for your consideration and concern

Mary and Dennis Frazier

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