

Martha's Vineyard Scenic Roads Initiative

Minutes of Meeting 3 of the Scenic Roads Committee

Date: June 5, 2014, 5:00 p.m.

Location: MVC Offices, 33 New York Avenue, Oak Bluffs

Present:

Committee Madeline Fisher (Co-Chair, MVC), Trip Barnes (MVC), John Breckenridge (MVC), Stuart Fuller (Edgartown), Jay Grande (Tisbury), Fred Hancock (MVC), Richard Knabel (West Tisbury), Joan Malkin (MVC), Kathy Newman (MVC), Linda Sibley (MVC), Brian Smith (MVC), Henry Stephenson (Tisbury), Craig Whitaker (Tisbury)

NSTAR Jerry McDermott, Paul Sellers

MVC Staff: Christine Flynn, Priscilla Leclerc, Mark London, Bill Veno

The meeting was chaired by Madeline Fisher who opened the meeting at 5:05 p.m.

1. **NSTAR**

1.1 **Background**

Jerry McDermott introduced himself. As Community Relations Officer, he is responsible for NSTAR's relations with towns and the community. He brings in other NSTAR employees with specialized expertise and responsibilities as needed, such as Senior Arborist Paul Sellers, here today, and Mark Baldwin who is responsible for construction and operations. NSTAR generally deals directly with towns, mainly with DPW directors who are often also town arborists and Boards of Selectmen. It deals with regional entities for bigger projects such as the new submarine cable.

A year ago, there was a break in one of the undersea cables and NSTAR had to act quickly to ensure that the Island, including the hospital, had power, so it brought in fifteen generators, some overnight. Some of those generators were not the best and resulted in some complaints. Jerry was not informed and wasn't able to inform local officials immediately. In the future, he should be informed and would be able to pass the information on.

In case of a problem, Jerry notifies the primary or secondary emergency response person for the town where the problem is located. In the case of a break in a cable, he would notify all towns. There is an Island-wide emergency management committee, currently chaired by John Christensen of West Tisbury, that could play a role in planning, but the official notification system is directly with each town.

Committee members suggested that an Emergency Generator Siting Plan be prepared and pre-approved by the towns.

1.2 **Submarine Cable**

Jerry said that the new Number 75 submarine cable from Falmouth to West Chop is 99.5 percent complete. They still have to do some planting, using native plants, and clean up. The details are being worked out with Sheriffs Meadow, as designated in the MVC DRI decision. The lines have been powered. NSTAR can now meet the demand of a peak summer load without extra generators. There are four generators owned by Morantz that are permanently on the Island.

1.3 Planned Pole Upgrades

Jerry said that there are no major pole replacements planned for the foreseeable future. The biggest project is replacing the five poles on the north side of Beach Street in Tisbury with four poles on the south side. They are waiting for grants of location from MassDOT.

At the request of the Committee, Jerry agreed to provide a digital map of NSTAR's pole locations.

With a small project such as adding a few poles, usually in relation to a construction project, the Board of Selectmen has to approve a grant of location, as specified in MGL chapter 166 section 22. There must be a public hearing.

NSTAR switches out damaged poles on its own, anticipating that all poles will be replaced over a twenty-year period. New poles are typically 40' to 45', whereas the old poles may have been 30 to 35' high. No regular poles are taller than 45'. The 55' poles installed last year were to give the extra ten-foot height to accommodate the main cables for the primary distribution network from the new submarine cable.

Although NSTAR is not required to ask for permission to upgrade components of its network, it goes to Boards of Selectmen as a courtesy. For example, NSTAR will be going to the Edgartown Board of Selectmen in relation to the upcoming installation of a new transformer.

Committee members asked Jerry to clarify the existing and new heights when poles get replaced. If the heights along a road go from 35' to 40', it might not make much of a difference, but going from 30' to 45' would be very noticeable.

Jerry will clarify what the changes are.

West Tisbury has a bylaw that says that any electrical distribution to new areas must be underground. Could it pass a regulation saying that all replacement projects also be underground? Jerry will check with his legal department to clarify if this is possible and, if so, who would pay the cost.

Committee members noted that there are some instances where NSTAR puts in a new pole, but the stub of the old pole remains in place for quite a while waiting for Comcast or Verizon to transfer their wires to the new pole. Jerry said that NSTAR cannot force them to act, but as a courtesy, he will contact them.

Jerry noted that some poles are set by NSTAR, others by Verizon. Some poles are co-owned by NSTAR and Comcast. On NSTAR poles, Comcast pays an attachment fee.

1.4 Major Projects

Committee members asked how the community could be notified well in advance if NSTAR is contemplating a new project, such as the recent replacement of all the poles on Moshup Trail. For a project like that, it would be useful that NSTAR discuss the options with the community, including the possibility of undergrounding. It might be possible to find funding for the cost difference, at least in the most critical areas. This may out not to be feasible, but at least the community would have participated in the decision.

Jerry said that to initiate a major improvement project in response to community desires, such as undergrounding or relocating cables, the town DPW director or planner should reach out to NSTAR, namely to Kathy White who is in charge of the Plymouth & Lower Cape district. The town might want to get its own electrical engineer to advise on the project. NSTAR lead engineer John Gomber and Carol Kennedy, chief NSTAR engineer for the Island would then check the feasibility

and prepare a cost estimate. NSTAR charges the expense of costing out the project. If the town approves, it pays the cost and NSTAR carries it out. NSTAR usually does the design work in-house, but they sometimes contract it out.

There was a discussion of possible financing for projects initiated by the community, such as undergrounding wires along some roads. Presumably, this could be paid for by towns and/or abutters. There had been testimony during the MVC's DRI hearings for the new poles last year to the effect that NSTAR could fund the construction and recover the costs by adding a surcharge to electricity rates, but that Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard were part of one rate district, which could pose a problem. The Committee asked Jerry to clarify what the financing process is.

Jerry indicated that although NSTAR had stated during the MVC's DRI review of the new poles that the cost of undergrounding was between \$1.0 and \$1.5 million per mile, recent estimates are closer to \$3.0 million per mile. In 2007, Stuart Fuller worked on undergrounding the cables on Water Street from the Edgartown Library to the Lighthouse, about 6/10 of a mile. The Town constructed the conduit system and installed vaults; NSTAR, Comcast, and Verizon pulled their own wires. The cost was \$3 million, of which NSTAR's portion was about a third. About 80 to 90% of the Town share was funded privately, and some CPA funds were used.

Jerry said that in the future, NSTAR would notify the community in advance of major projects.

1.5 Vegetation Management

Paul Sellers said that they are on a four-year cycle to maintain vegetation on NSTAR's 41 acres of transmission and distribution rights of way on the Vineyard. This includes mechanical removal. Last year, they used herbicides for the second time, the previous time being 2009. The next herbicide treatment is tentatively set for 2018. Herbicides are used for emerging vegetation. For roadside vegetation management, they only do tree trimming and removal, and don't use herbicides.

Herbicides are applied with three or four people with low-volume foliar backpacks. They target mainly oak, maple, and oak trees, leaving low-growing species such as viburnum, blueberries, and grasses. The aim is to transform the rights of way into upland grasslands. They use mainly Crenite and Escort. They also use Rodeo as a stump treatment. The herbicides are applied after the mechanical mowing has grown out for a year. The herbicides all stay where they are sprayed, get into the root structure, and don't spread. The herbicides are not applied during high, gusty winds. The products are sensitive to light, and break down on the soil. They follow the Department of Agriculture Resources standards including not spraying within 10' of open water or certified vernal pools, 50' of public wells, and exceed their standards by not spraying within 400' of private wells. Mass DAR can do random spot checks. The spraying is done with private crews, Vegetation Control Service, which has certified arborists, using NSTAR's criteria, products, and targeted species. The town notifies abutters with door hangers. A supervisor flags the locations of wells so they are clear to the crews.

NSTAR has to file a Five-Year Vegetation Management Plan and yearly plans.

NSTAR regularly trims trees to maintain reliability. NSTAR clears an area 10 feet at the sides and below the primary wire, and 15' above it.

NSTAR keeps a couple of crews on the Island year-round, so they are available in storms.

Committee members were concerned about the impact of NSTAR trimming on trees. There is an initial shock that people get over with time, especially as the trees start to grow in. However, there is a problem when NSTAR trims trees to keep the wires clear that threaten the viability of the

tree. Taking out half a pitch pine means that the tree will end up dying, but it is apparently not up to NSTAR to deal with that.

Paul said that NSTAR files a Yearly Operational Plan with each town, as required by MGL Chapter 87 section 14. It gives the tree warden its standards, maps, and an extended schedule. They review the proposals with the tree wardens. Sometimes the towns do follow up with structural trimming of trees.

The removal of any tree with a diameter greater than 1½" requires a public hearing. Alternatively, a hazardous tree plan prepared by a certified forester, along with consent from the abutter, can be presented to the tree warden. This requirement might change in the near future to only apply to trees with diameters greater than 4" or 6".

NSTAR has a grant program for planting trees that won't grow taller than 15', related to the DCR Urban Forestry Program. Grants are up to \$10,000.

NSTAR is working on a tree-planting program on Old King's Highway, Route 6A, on Cape Cod. Trees had been removed within the state right of way and MassDOT won't allow replanting them so they are working with private abutting property owners.

1.6 Commissioners' Questions and Follow-Up

Committee members asked what the protocol is for dealing with spills from spraying herbicide. Paul said that it has never happened.

Committee members asked what the financial impact would be if NSTAR didn't use any herbicides. Paul said he is not aware of any financial analysis; this is the best management practice. Previously, NSTAR was just mowing but that perpetuated undesirable species and limited access to the poles.

Committee members asked whether they anticipate not needing herbicides once the upland grassland is established. Paul said that the amount was reduced radically between 2009 and 2013, but he doesn't anticipate that the need for herbicides will ever be completely eliminated because of problems with invasives.

Committee members asked whether there was any restriction on a town planting tall trees under and close to utility lines. Paul said that although NSTAR prefers trees that won't exceed 15 feet, a town may plant any size tree and NSTAR will eventually perform the necessary tree trimming.

Moving forward, after NSTAR's supplies GIS maps of all poles on the Island and identifies the key distribution routes that it might want to upgrade, the MVC should overlay them on maps of key cultural areas, rural and scenic road viewsheds, and other resources. This will allow us to collaborate on finding alternative solutions – which may include rerouting and/or undergrounding – that minimize the impacts on these resources.

It was agreed that there would be ongoing meetings with NSTAR and a work group of the Scenic Roads Committee. They could end up being twice a year, but we might need extra meetings at first to deal with some issues. Jerry promised to provide answers to the questions.

Madeline thanked the NSTAR representatives for coming and meeting the committee and adjourned the meeting at 6:40 p.m.