

**HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE SPECIAL MEETING
HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP MUNICIPAL BUILDING AUDITORIUM**

Monday, April 16, 2018 – 7:00 p.m.

PROPER STATEMENT OF NOTICE – Mayor Kuchinski called the meeting to order stating that notice of the meeting had been posted on the municipal bulletin board and forwarded to the Hopewell Valley News, The Times, the Trentonian and the Hopewell Express (the official newspapers) on April 12, 2018, in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 231, P.L. 1975.

ROLL CALL: Those answering the roll call of the Deputy Municipal Clerk:

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Blake, Ruger, Mayor Kuchinski

ABSENT: Hart, McLaughlin

STAFF PRESENT: Administrator/CFO Borges, Deputy Municipal Clerk Fenton-Newman

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG - Mayor Kuchinski led those in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

WORK SESSION

Mayor Kuchinski explained that, in light of the many recent nor'easters, the Township Committee invited colleagues at JCP&L to speak about what happened during the storm, the lessons learned, and what can be done better.

Robert Walton, JCP&L Area Manager, addressed the community's power outages associated with the many extreme weather events which occurred within the past several months. Mr. Walton discussed the following:

- Reviewed the events of the March 2, 2018 storm.
- Explained that work crews cannot go up in bucket trucks in winds over 40 miles per hour.
- JCP&L's first priority in a storm of that magnitude is to open roads and respond to hazard calls, i.e., wires down. No customers' power will be restored during this phase.
- Reviewed the events of the second storm on March 7, 2018.
- Provided the total amount of customers affected, the number of roads closed, the number of poles knocked down, the amount of wires pulled down, and the amount of tree locations that trees did damage to wires and poles.
- Spoke of pole inspection and vegetation management.
- Urged the public to call JCP&L when they see a tree may be a problem with poles or lines.
- Trees are the number one cause of power outages and many homeowners refuse to allow JCP&L to trim their trees.
- Explained that the Estimated Time of Restoration and the Outage Map did not work well during the March 2 storm due to there being too many outages to provide accurate information.
- JCP&L will attempt to improve their Estimated Time of Restoration (ETR) system.
- JCP&L's process of restoring power is the following:
 - First Priority – Hazard Calls and Road Openings
 - Second Priority – Restoring Critical Facilities (Hospitals, Schools, Holding

Places, Municipal Buildings, Warming Centers, Fire Houses, Sewer Plants, Water Pump Stations, etc.)

- Next comes restoring power to densely populated areas.
- After comes restoring power to sparsely populated areas.
- Reviewed events of March 23, 2018 storm.
- Reviewed events of April 4, 2018 wind storm.

Mayor Kuchinski asked Mr. Walton to speak about the changes JCP&L has implemented in Hopewell Township since Super Storm Sandy. Mr. Walton replied that a circuit tie will be completed this year that will allow JCP&L to change the flow of electricity from one circuit to another which would enable them to isolate an outage incident and JCP&L will also be adding an extension into Hopewell Township later this spring.

Mayor Kuchinski expressed his frustration about multi-day power outages and the expense of replacing the spoiled contents of refrigerators, having no septic and well usage, and the lack of heat.

Mayor Kuchinski solicited public comment.

Jeyanth Thanapalasingam, a resident of Chase Hollow Road, expressed his frustrations regarding his lengthy power outages in the past, and shared that when he reaches out to JCP&L he is told that the restoration is all about density, and he lives in a low density area. Mr. Thanapalasingam made suggestions to have power restored more quickly, stated that being without power for 8 days is unacceptable, and the damage being done to homes without power is very expensive.

Mr. Walton explained that people who live in rural areas are addressed more slowly than more densely populated areas because of the number of people affected and Hopewell was not unique as other low density municipalities were affected the same way. Mr. Walton explained the differences in JCP&L and PSE&G service areas and the division of power company providers throughout the state. He also explained that power lines could be placed below ground to prevent outages at a cost of \$1 million per mile, but the cost would be borne by the customers of the utility. Mr. Walton explained that in the first storm, JCP&L did not have the crews they required to do the job efficiently, however, in subsequent storms they had adequate crews and the restoration was much faster.

Mayor Kuchinski observed that previous conversations addressed the frequency and length of disruptions saying that the frequency has improved, but the disruptions are becoming longer and asked how to make the system more resilient. He suggested placing critical portions of the system underground and asked the public to provide their ideas for solutions.

Mr. Thanapalasingam asked that his residence be placed on a different circuit or loop the circuit he is currently on and made suggestions for restoring the power in his area more swiftly.

Patricia Reilly, a resident of Marshalls Corner-Woodsville Road, stated that she was without power for ten days and asked if JCP&L could make other alternatives available for people who cannot afford generators attached to their gas, suggesting providing grants so more people can have electric. Mr. Walton replied that JCP&L has investigated providing generators and they do care very much about their customers.

Christopher Jaeger, a resident of Pleasant Valley Road, commented that he believed the grids should be addressed immediately; implied that PSE&G restores power sooner than JCP&L; addressed JCP&L's communication to its customers; and the communication problems to the crews working in the field.

Mr. Walton explained that it would take a lot of time to exchange grids between PSE&G and JCP&L, if the Board of Public Utilities (BPU) would allow that to happen, and he is not aware of any discussions of any grid exchanges in the state. He also clarified that it did not matter which utility managed the grid, sometimes more grids go out for JCP&L than PSE&G and sometimes the opposite happens, it changes each storm and depends on where the lines go down. Mr.

Walton acknowledged that their communications were insufficient during the past storm and needs to be addressed. He also explained that all in-state crews had on-board computers with GPS tracking systems and had good communications but the contracted crews did not have those systems and it was challenging communicating with them.

Annie Mingle, a resident of Harbourton Woodsville Road, stated that she feels as if Hopewell Township always comes last and asked Mr. Walton if JCP&L can “shuffle it up” so Hopewell Township isn’t always last. She added that losing service is detrimental to home values and suggested that JCP&L provide a link to the page she visited during the power outage which provided better information or email its customers.

Mr. Walton replied that he has been told by many people that they feel they are the last to be restored and emphasized that Hopewell was definitely not the last to be restored and acknowledged that it is frustrating to be out of power for many days.

Committee Member Blake told Mr. Walton that communications are crucial in terms of people planning because people did not know if they should find a place to live for a couple of days and it is frustrating. She suggested that OEM, Public Works and the Police Department could report outages to JCP&L and become resources for them and that JCP&L provide residents with a list directing where to go and what to do and discuss the best ways to communicate that list. Mr. Walton provided information on a Mercer County event for Mayors, Fire and Police Chiefs where they will be discussing those types of issues with emergency professionals.

Committee Member Ruger thanked Mr. Walton for coming and conveyed his experience of when he lost power and his sump pump went out causing tens-of-thousands of dollars’ worth of damages and stated no one should have to repeatedly incur costs such as those. He asked Mr. Walton the definition of a long and short term outage to which Mr. Walton replied that a long term outage would be an outage over 24 hours and stated that the typical reason for long term outages are trees and storms; however other causes could be car accidents, animal contact, breaking wires and unknown cause outages.

Committee Member Ruger inquired as to the best way to address limbs near wires. Mr. Walton replied that each time there is a tree complaint a forestry crew is dispatched to make an assessment although sometimes the limb is out of their trimming radius or the homeowner will not let the crew trim the tree. Mr. Walton emphasized that there are many tree trimming refusals by homeowners which JCP&L documents and tracks. Committee Member Ruger then requested statistics demonstrating borough by borough outage numbers and how long it takes to resolve the outages to which Mr. Walton replied that he will email the data to him.

Mayor Kuchinski interjected that multi-day outages are occurring in the Township more frequently, taking longer to restore power and referred to a redundant circuit tie-in discussed at a previous meeting as a possible solution. Mr. Walton replied that multi-day outages are not exclusive to Hopewell Township and comparatively, Hopewell is a little above average for restoration time.

Committee Member Ruger asked Mr. Walton what concrete steps JCP&L will take in the short and long term to restore their customers’ faith. Mr. Walton replied that JCP&L is dedicated to making improvements, have made many capital improvements since Super Storm Sandy, and continue to make improvements.

Committee Member Ruger then inquired if JCP&L has made any concrete proposals to BPU regarding ways of mitigating. Mr. Walton replied that they are constantly in communication with BPU about different suggestions, ideas and the costs involved and provided examples of proposals that have been previously made.

Christopher Jaeger stated that he assumed that the corporation would be tracking catastrophic events and asked if the public would have access to that information to see how Hopewell Township compares in those instances to which Mr. Walton replied those statistics exist and are available.

Mayor Kuchinski suggested looking at the data to see where Hopewell appears on that list; advocate to the BPU any improvements that need to be made to begin solving the problem; building redundancy into the system; work on maintenance of the system; and backup sources that have a community focus such as generators that can provide services to a neighborhood. He then called attention to the fact that sewer infrastructure is considered a critical resource by the State, and suggested that the same benefit should be given to septic because when the power goes out, 80% of the service area in Hopewell Township did not have sewer capacity and it must be addressed. Mayor Kuchinski expressed his desire to work with JCP&L to find solutions and indicated the Township will be creative in the process.

Committee Member Ruger suggested that JCP&L provide a guideline about trees near poles and wires to help residents understand the basics and offered to distribute it on the Township's website. Mr. Walton stated that those resources are available to share.

Mr. Walton provided information regarding public hearings being conducted by the BPU regarding the recent storm.

Jeyanth Thanapalasingam asked why JCP&L doesn't know automatically that the power is out and why he always has to call to advise them. Mr. Walton replied that the meter does not communicate to JCP&L that the power is out, however, smart meters have been developed that could report outages, but they cost \$500 a unit and so they are deemed too expensive to install.

Mr. Walton then explained the tree cutting radius and how it relates to power outages and imparted his hopes for changes in policy.

Mayor Kuchinski considered disseminating the "Right Tree, Right Place" information to the public to educate them on the proper trees to place by power lines.

Committee Member Ruger questioned if it was important for everyone to report an outage. Mr. Walton replied that it is very important that everyone call because their outage system is a smart system and based on the calls it can estimate where the device is that is causing the problem and when they finish restoring the power they call the customer back to ask if their power was restored, if some indicate they have not, it helps them to better identify there is still a problem.

Mayor Kuchinski suggested targeted smart meter deployment within the Township where there are critical circuits which could provide intelligence on outages. Committee Member Ruger agreed and suggested, in the interim, educating people to call when there is an outage or download the app on their phone and use it to report an outage.

Mayor Kuchinski thanked Mr. Walton and requested construction estimates on the circuit tie-ins; looking at a separate circuit tie-in for Chase Hollow Road; how to provide better intelligence on the network and better armor it; and impart that septic is equally as important as sewer service.

Committee Member Blake expressed her desire to have a frank conversation about what the greatest weaknesses are in the Township and their solutions.

Mr. Walton stated that JCP&L shares the frustrations of its customers; they want to get power back to people as fast as they can; they work with very dedicated people who worked very long days to restore the power; they need to get better at restoring the power and communication and that he is proud to be part of the JCP&L team and proud to work with the Township to improve.

PUBLIC SECTION

The following members of the public spoke during public comment.

James Burd, a resident of Nursery Road, urged the Committee to take into consideration the situation with the ash trees and questioned when the items scheduled for the cancelled April 13,

2018 Special Committee Meeting will be addressed. Mayor Kuchinski responded they shall be placed on the April 23, 2018 regular meeting agenda.

The detailed public comment may be viewed at www.hopewelltp.org in the video library.

At 8:30 p.m., Motion by Blake, seconded by Ruger to adjourn the meeting.

MOTION UNANIMOUSLY CARRIED

The detailed public meeting may be viewed at www.hopewelltp.org in the video library.

KATHERINE FENTON-NEWMAN
DEPUTY MUNICIPAL CLERK