

A special meeting of the Township Committee came to order at 7:05 p.m. Present were Mayor Richard Wolfe, Deputy Mayor Tim Mathews, and Committee members Kevin Ostrander, Peter Miller, and Chris Sobieski. Also present was JCP&L Area Manager, Mr. Stan Prater.

In compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act, Deputy Clerk Pamela Dymek announced that this is a special meeting which was sent to the Hunterdon County Democrat on March 5, 2019. A copy of the agenda for this meeting was forwarded to the Hunterdon County Democrat, Times of Trenton, Star Ledger, Courier News, posted on the bulletin board and filed in the Clerk's Office on March 12, 2019.

Mayor Wolfe began the meeting by speaking about the power outages from the last two storms. Due to a number of calls and emails the Mayor received from residents with questions and an article that appeared online about these storms and JCP&L he asked Area Manager, Stan Prater to attend this meeting so residents who wanted answers to questions could hear directly from JCP&L. The Mayor asked Mr. Prater a number of questions and received answers and now you have the opportunity to get answers to your questions.

Motion by Mr. Ostrander, seconded by Mr. Miller, and carried unanimously to open to the public.

(4:12) Andrea Bonette, 17 Ridge Road, asked what the procedure was when you call in for a power outage. She noted when you call in there are two options is there a power line down on your property yes or no. Her problem and her neighbors have very long driveways and they can't see in the dark if a power line is down or not. They don't want to wander around and step on a live wire. She wanted to know if there was another option.

(5:09) Mr. Prater said the two options were there is a power line down or not and there are no other options. He asked Ms. Bonette if there was an option to say you don't know if there was a power line down. She responded no. He will look into the situation at the call center

(6:10) Kim Shepherd, South Hill Road, spoke about two circumstances in the last six months where a tree came down on the power line and caused a fire. It took JCP&L more than five hours in each situation to come out and put out the fire. The fire department stated that they couldn't do anything. You see the burning fire and the trees block the only exit out of our house. The wires aren't down on their property the wires are down on the street and there's no good way to report the fire.

(7:03) Mr. Prater asked if this happened on March 4, 2019. He pulled information on this case. This was at the end of the storm where five hundred and forty one customers were affected. There was an outage due to equipment failure that caused a pole fire that started around 9:42 p.m. and power was restored at 12:45 a.m.

Ms. Shepherd remarked that wasn't what she was speaking about.

(8:47) Mr. Prater stated a supervisor was sent out and de-energized the service. The meter was pulled so they could deal with the fire. He doesn't have any information on the fire Ms. Shepherd was talking about and will investigate.

(9:04) Ms. Shepherd said she lives on an unpaved road with four houses and feels they fall to the bottom of the list. The trees fall on the wires and there is no way out. Mr. Prater asked for Ms. Shepherd's address. She replied 20 South Hill Road. The wire went down between her property and Lindbergh Road and the trees that are falling down are located on abandoned property near her home. The fire she spoke of was during that big storm with winds of fifty or sixty miles an hour. That's when the tree fell, sparked the wire and there were sparks and the sparks were setting off little brush fires all around where the wire sparked. She just wanted it turned off and understood that JCP&L can't get to four houses as your first priority. Nobody has the power to turn it off until somebody gets there. Her concern was that they live in a remote area. The same situation happened last year when a tree fell and leaned on a wire, the tree caught fire and was literally flaming log until it fell through the wires and fell to the ground flaming for five hours before crews got there.

(11:09) Mr. Prater remarked that when an energized wire falls down on a tree or in a dry field a brush fire is a common cause. When JCP&L knows an outage is coming they get mutual

assistance from sister companies. First Energy has nine, PSE&G, and Atlantic City Electric. Due to the fact that this was a regional storm people were holding crews until after the event. We didn't get additional crews until after the wind storm subsided. If there are trees that are within their right of way that fall on their infrastructure the forester will come down and look at the site. If there is a fire you report it as a 911.

(12:50) Ms. Shepherd asked why the system couldn't have kill switches built in so municipal officials who get their quickly could turn off the power to the wire. Mr. Prater said it's unsafe because JCP&L doesn't want to give a public citizen the authority to turn off an energized piece of equipment.

(13:33) Mr. Prater said the order needs to be called in correctly and JCP&L needs to respond in a timely manner. Brush fires usually burn out and they are secured by first responders until JCP&L gets there. Resources just weren't available during this storm until the next day.

(14:42) Ms. Shepherd noted that in both cases when she called first responders it was Hopewell that sent out the fire trucks. They said they couldn't do anything and left. The neighbors watched to see if the brush fires were going to spread with no equipment to handle it.

(15:02) Mr. Prater asked for the name our OEM coordinator. Deputy Mayor Mathews replied he is the OEM Liaison and Gary Myers is the coordinator. Mr. Prater added that if you don't get a response in a reasonable time go to the Municipal Official who will contact Mr. Prater and he would get involved to expedite a situation like that.

(15:30) Deputy Mayor Mathews asked what the expected protocol is if there's a fire involving power equipment. Through chatter they heard that the fire department won't respond until the power is out. The power company won't put the power out until the fire is out. (15:58) Mr. Prater said crews will come and de-energize the equipment and then the fire department will determine to mitigate the fire or let it burn out. If it's an electrical fire caused by electrical equipment we need to come there and de-energize the equipment.

(16:20) The Deputy Mayor inquired if there was a scene and you de-energize do you stay, observe, and call the fire department and work together to make sure the fire is out. (16:32) Mr. Prater said the fire department is usually there when JCP&L crews get to the scene. He said first responders are there first and waiting for JCP&L crews to get there. A crew member would call Mr. Prater if it's pushed through a Municipal Official to get an ETR. He's had fires happen where the system automatically puts in an ETR based on data. A fire chief calls Mr. Prater and says there's a fire here I need somebody before two hours Mr. Prater gets involved by calling a supervisor in the field and tells them we need to get a crew member there asap and will pull them off the job to get them over there.

(17:21) Andrea Bonette voiced that it doesn't seem like Mr. Prater was familiar with the Sourland area. When Ms. Bonette heard Mr. Prater say that the fire was just in the brush and it wasn't a threat to the house she feels he needs to come out and visit the area. (17:38) Mr. Prater explained when a wire comes down and the ground is dry it's not an uncommon occurrence for a brush fire to occur. If it's near a structure and it's burning and has a potential to cause a house fire that's an unsafe area. He has been in the Sourland area and it has a lot of issues due to the highly treed area. When an energized wire comes down it's not uncommon for a tree or branch to catch fire and if the ground is dry the brush will also catch fire.

(18:44) Rich Spiegel of Mountain Road, stated that Hunterdon County had approximately fifteen thousand outages. He said East Amwell is split in two when it comes to power. Where Ms. Bonette lives its Flemington and this side of town it's the substation on Rock Road. He wanted to know if most of the power was out due to the substation on West Amwell that feeds us or Flemington or was it because of trees coming down on wires. (19:37) Mr. Prater replied no substations were down and most customers were affected by the power coming out of the Ringoes substation off of Route 579. The Ringoes substation serves about eighty five percent of the town. Mr. Spiegel wanted to make sure that the substations weren't down.

(20:43) Deputy Mayor Mathews noted that we were told years ago by Mr. Anderson that a major investment was made to reroute so if we lost a substation power would be re-routed through another substation. In this case there were a lot of homes out of power for a long time and didn't feel like there was any type of re-routing of power. (21:04) Mr. Prater answered there were a lot of broken poles and wires that need to be replaced and a lot of embedded damage. Tying couldn't be done repairs had to be done due to this storm. He continued that the Ringoes

substation serves about eighty five percent of the town and is up to be trimmed in the second quarter of this year. Better reliability is seen after the trees are trimmed and we are on a four year cycle. Hazard trees and ash trees will be removed. The contractors will be out and about between April and June doing a lot of tree trimming in town. JCP&L will investigate any trees the Township brings to their attention.

(22:19) Mayor Wolfe received a call from a resident that had power out for several days and a crew was there working on it and at four thirty the crew left. Another crew didn't show up and no one returned until the next day. We discussed this and he asked Mr. Prater to explain the situation. (22:57) Mr. Prater said the crew is under a contract for Union workers and have a CDL and can only work a certain amount of hours. They are on a sixteen to eight schedule. The crew timed out, had to leave, and there was no crew compliment to replace them to make those repairs until the next morning. The CDL license that the crew holds and the union contract would not allow them to stay and complete that particular job. There were people on the property but there wasn't the right compliment to make that particular repair until the next day.

(23:56) Ms. Bonette asked if the crew could be paid overtime if they volunteered to make the repair. (23:59) Mr. Prater replied no because they are being paid overtime if they work over the eight hours but because of the way the State law works they have to rest after working sixteen hours if you have a CDL.

(24:22) Frances Gavigan, 123 Wertsville Road, noted that JCP&L refused mutual aid from Ohio and from other places and questioned if JCP&L was relying on their own internal crews and turning away help from other utility companies. (24:53) Mr. Prater said in the first storm we didn't get mutual assistance because it was a regional storm and got assistance on the next day Tuesday the twenty sixth. On the snow storm we had mutual assistance. (25:23) Ms. Gavigan said with a CDL you can drive a truck, have limitations and your regular repair crew could climb the pole if someone else drives the truck then it would be an additional expense during an emergency and asked if JCP&L sought out people who'll come and have the licensure and when there is a situation like that and your technical experts for timing out you can pull in someone. There are a lot of residents that have their CDL licenses and know the area. (26:21) Mr. Prater said JCP&L has a contract with the IBEW to utilize their people for hazard assessment for some major events. In the past two events contracts were in place but were unable to get people until the next day. (26:52) Ms. Gavigan continued that there are a number of seniors and people with health issues and given the frequency that the power goes out can you make Township specific protocols to insure the area some kind of a plan where you bring in people or set you up with people that have the licensure that can be pulled in to help. (28:12) Mr. Prater answered that citizens couldn't be used but we would use licensed electrical contractors and journey men that are experts in substation and line mechanics in the case of an emergency. (28:31) Ms. Gavigan asked if there could be a township specific plan that you can share with the Mayor. (28:49) Mr. Prater can't make that type of agreement because JCP&L doesn't make a specific plan for the town and they service the entire area. A reliability plan was submitted last year to the Board of Public Utilities to enhance reliability and included a lot of smart metering and fusing, built in redundancies, tree trimming that will help in the reliability in this area. There is no specific plan for East Amwell only for the area. If the plan gets approved by the Board of Public Utilities Mr. Prater will let East Amwell know how the plan impacts the town. (29:55) Ms. Gavigan wanted to know if Mr. Prater would share the plan that was submitted to the Mayor and the Township so it can be put on the website. Mr. Prater said once the plan is approved he will share it with the public officials.

(31:03) Mr. Spiegel questioned the CDL licenses. He got the impression that the person that drives the truck without air brakes doesn't have to have a CDL. When you drive a truck with air brakes you have to have a CDL license. That was passed by the State. Mr. Spiegel doesn't understand why all drivers don't have a CDL license. (32:19) Mr. Prater explained that every employee that you see working in the field have a CDL license. There's a union contract and after a certain number of hours of work you have to have a certain amount of hours of rest. You can only work so many hours because of the unsafe conditions. (33:09) Mr. Spiegel suggested getting in touch with the NJ State Department of Labor because he didn't remember if the utility companies have that in their contract. He doesn't understand how the utility companies got it in their contract that they can't work over the hours. Mr. Prater replied it's a negotiated item in the contract. Mr. Spiegel voiced that the next negotiated contract the Township should weigh in. Mr. Prater remarked that the town wouldn't have any leverage.

(34:19) Ms. Shepherd asked if JCP&L own the poles. Mr. Prater said they're owned between them and the telephone company. She continued when a pole and wire comes down the electricity wire may go back up but the other wires don't go up and there is no way of telling which wire is down since last summer. She wanted to know who coordinates with all the other companies to pull their wires off the ground. (34:54) Mr. Prater stated JCP&L will go out and do their work. When the work is finished and all the transfers are made on the pole a phone call will be made to either the cable or phone company to let them know one of their wires are down. (35:11) Ms. Shepherd mentioned that she had wires down for two years after Sandy and one wire down on the ground since last July. When she called the cable and the phone company they will only come out if it's on her property and the pole is on the street and she wanted to know how to reach them. (35:36) Mr. Prater said JCP&L investigates every wire since Sandy. He said to call the phone or cable company they have a responsibility when they come out to tell you whose wire it is. (35:56) Ms. Shepherd added they only send out somebody for a residential call. There's no way an individual can get them to come out with a truck that's needed. Each repairman said they would call it in. Mr. Prater asked if she had contacts for Verizon or Century Link.

(36:20) Deputy Mayor Mathews announced that Mr. Clifton of Comcast is sitting in the back corner being very quiet. There was laughter amongst the public. Mr. Clifton commented that he would have someone investigate the downed wire.

(36:39) The Deputy Mayor added that last year when we had the storm we put out a word for everyone to identify the wires when we had the Roadside Cleanup. We told everyone on Roadside Cleanup to record them and we reported them to Mr. Prater. From the power company perspective most of them were corrected. Mr. Prater said contractors clean up after storms.

Deputy Mayor Mathews suggested that the volunteers for Roadside Cleanup keep a list of wires down. Mr. Prater will then go out and make a determination and will let the Township know whose wires they are.

(37:25) Ms. Gavigan added that after the last storm nobody knew who owned what pole which was part of the problem There was a promise to come up with an inventory that could be mapped to who owns what and where and be shared with the Township. As far as she knew that wasn't done.

(38:01) The Mayor concluded the meeting by saying that he and Deputy Mayor Mathews called Mr. Prater several times or emailed him during the storms and he was always very prompt at getting back to him. The information the Mayor received from Mr. Prater was put on the website. He told residents to check the website.

Mayor Wolfe thanked Mr. Prater for attending the meeting.

(39:01) Deputy Mayor Mathews commented that the recommendation was made by the BPU experts to the power company in their report from last March's storms to inventory all the poles

Motion by Mr. Ostrander, seconded by Deputy Mayor Mathews, and carried unanimously to close to the public.

There being no further business the special meeting adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

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Pamela Dymek,  
Deputy Clerk