

8/27/2020

Dear Energy and Technology Committee Members,

Hamden Alliance for Trees respectfully requests that you use this letter to support requirements that will make the electric utilities more responsible to the public.

UI's failure to seek customer feedback has been an ongoing serious concern of HAT. We have shared our concerns and suggestions with PURA and are now happy to share them with you.

We believe that providing quality customer service must be a requirement of the utility companies and be an important PURA consideration when reviewing the performance of the utilities.

On Page 48 of Docket 09-01–25 Commissioner CARON asked: So for all the panels just a general -- after you've gone through, after the companies have gone through, done their work, got their consents, got their objections, all that, **is there any customer service follow-up to see how the customer's experience went, post-work ... were customers surveyed?** **THE WITNESS (Goodson): No.** Not at the UI, no. **THE WITNESS (Carey):** Not at Eversource.

This lack of concern for customer satisfaction should be unacceptable.

Faith in our government and its agencies is dangerously low. Discontent is growing and bubbling over. Our civil society is breaking down. Energy production, distribution and consumption is a critical factor in our society.

Rate payers are the utility companies' customers. Other industries regularly measure customer satisfaction and many even hire "mystery shoppers" to evaluate their employees. A responsible company would consider customer satisfaction an important part of consumer relations and would value the information and consider it a legitimate cost of doing business. It is not a frill.

Quality customer service will benefit the environment through reduced healthy tree removals and reduction in over-pruning of these trees.

We believe PURA has no way of knowing if the utilities are "providing safe, adequate and reliable utility service at reasonable rates" or if customers are "reaping the price and quality benefits of competition" and are "protected from unfair business practices", as referred to on the PURA website, if the PURA does not actively seek and seriously consider feedback from the utility's customers.

https://www.ct.gov/pura/cwp/view.asp?a=3157&q=404410&puraNav_GID=1702

Examples of quality customer service would include:

A. Notifying towns at least 2 weeks before work is scheduled to be performed, giving the towns time to evaluate the tree(s) in advance and speak to property owners and get approvals, objections and modifications in advance- saving time and money for all.

B. Providing a tear-off satisfaction survey as part of the utility door hanger notification that can be returned directly to the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority. This should result in higher quality tree work and honor the type of work the property owner requests and is agreed to by the utility company.

C. Allowing a property owner to request a consultation with the tree warden, an arborist designated by the municipality or the Commissioner of Transportation and requiring the utility to provide all plans, records and information so the evaluation will ensure the best evaluation of the tree and provide peace of mind to the residents on the street. The cost of producing the paperwork, which should be available, will be offset by the money saved in less removals and pruning.

D. Allowing abutting property owners to arrange to be present when the work is being done and having the utility provide contact information to make the arrangements.

E. Notifying the property owner when the work is completed. This is valuable information to all who are having work done but especially important to property owners who arranged to be present during the work.

These actions that Hamden Alliance for Trees is advocating for are important for all neighborhoods but especially lower income neighborhoods where residents have fewer resources to help them manage unexpected hardships such as extended heat waves or frigid temperatures.

HAT believes that to accomplish Governor Lamont's call to lead on climate, Connecticut must protect our trees. For our own sake and our children's future, we must demand an end to the now radically dangerous acceptance of "Business as Usual" and require our electric utility companies to acknowledge the role they play in climate change and become responsible stewards of the trees they are responsible for maintaining on behalf of the people of Connecticut.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Diane Hoffman
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for Hamden Alliance for Trees
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