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April 6, 2010

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE
ON PUBLIC UTILITIES AND PUBLIC WORKS

The Committee on Public Utilities and Public Works convened on April 6, 2010, with Chairman Sean O'Donovan presiding and Committee Members Aldermen Bruce Desmond and Robert Trane also present and voting. Also present were Aldermen John Connolly, Rebekah Gewirtz, Maryann Heuston and William White, DPW Commissioner Stan Koty, Superintendent of Lines and Lights Steve MacEachern, Assistant City Solicitor David Shapiro, Director of Constituent Services Steve Craig, Director of SomerStat Tara Acker, Superintendent of Inspectional Services Ed Nuzzo, William Zamparelli from NSTAR, Ken Fagan from RCN, Earle Lawson from Comcast, Stan Usovicz and interested members of the public.

188865 – defective street lights:

Mr. Zamparelli explained the process used by NSTAR to address defective street lights. NSTAR maintains a database of all reported street light outages compiled from data it receives in emails from the city's 311 call center. Each reported problem stays in NSTAR's database until the repair is verified, at which time the record of the complaint drops out of the system without leaving any historical data. Mr. Zamparelli said that many times an address or street name is given for the location of the problem and he noted that this often leads to multiple entries for the same problem. To help relieve this confusion, Mr. Zamparelli asked that the pole number be provided when reporting a problem. If the repair involves more than replacing a ballast or light bulb, it may be referred to the Boston group and might take 72 hours to be completed. Since Somerville does not own the street lights as most communities do, NSTAR has 3 lamp rangers assigned to cover the city at various times, usually during the evening hours. There are 4000 street lights in the city at a cost of \$18.00 per light per month, (\$72,000.00 per month or \$864,000.00 per year). Alderman Desmond asked what the city's service contract calls for regarding repair times and whether any credits are due to the city because contract provisions are not being met. Alderman Connolly added that if no service contract exists between NSTAR and the city, it might be a good idea to create one. Mr. Zamparelli told the members that he would look into the matter. The committee briefly discussed the possibility of having the city's Parking Control Officers verify that street light repairs have been completed.

Damage to trees:

Mr. Koty spoke about a verbal agreement relative to replacing trees damaged by utility work made during the Kelly-Gay Administration which is not being honored by NSTAR. Mr. Koty stated that there is no written agreement to the best of his knowledge and Mr. Zamparelli stated that he was unsuccessful in

attempting to locate someone within NSTAR who was aware of the agreement, therefore enforcing it is problematic. In one particular instance in dispute, NSTAR offered to replace 14 trees. The city declined the offer due to the large number of trees needing to be replaced.

Double Poles:

Alderman Connolly asked that an updated report of all double poles be prepared for the next meeting of the committee covering the period from November 2009 to the present. Alderman Connolly continued that the city is not happy with the number of double poles and said that the Board of Aldermen has no intention of letting this issue fall by the wayside. Mr. MacEachern reported that according to NSTAR's database, there are 150 double poles in the city, 107 of which are awaiting action by Verizon to remove their equipment, (NSTAR has 1 and Comcast has 8). Mr. Koty disputed those figures and said that there are approximately 30 double poles that are not on the list. DPW personnel will verify the accuracy of NSTAR's list and will update if, as needed.

Mr. Usovicz told the members that Verizon has a small crew assigned to Somerville and that he would move this work up the chain to get it addressed and will report to the committee at next meeting. Mr. MacEachern stated that he has heard this story over and over. An analysis of permits from January 1st through March 31st showed that of the 321 permits issued, only 7 were for Verizon. Mr. Usovicz said permits aren't pulled for residential trouble calls and went on to say that the law (c166 s21 & 22) is very clear as to when permits must be pulled. He did point out that Verizon does get police details when traffic is affected. Mr. Koty referred to a previous letter from Verizon's Peter Bowman that stated that Verizon would take care of the problems in the city and he asked Chairman O'Donovan to discuss the matter of permits not being pulled by Verizon at the next committee meeting. Mr. Koty told the members that Verizon is violating the law by not pulling permits and obstructing sidewalks and he suggested that the city stop granting permits to them. Chairman O'Donovan requested a copy of the letter and made Mr. Usovicz aware that the city would initiate legal proceedings if the problems aren't resolved. Mr. Shariro was asked to research the laws referenced by Mr. Usovicz and to email the passages to the committee members. These issues are scheduled to be re-visited in 2 weeks. Aldermen Trane and White both stated that they are considering exercising their right to block any permits that come before the Board of Aldermen.

Cable installations:

Alderman Gewirtz spoke about a constituent who complained that her house had been torn apart and that holes were made in its walls. Attempts were made to contact the cable company responsible but no response was received by the homeowner. At Alderman Gewirtz's request, Mr. Lawson explained the installation process pointing out that when a customer switches vendors, new wires are run from the service pole, since vendors don't share lines. Alderman Gewirtz asked that the cable companies be aware of the frustrations being experienced by consumers and said that the customer service being provided is lacking.

The next meeting of the committee will be on April 20, 2010 at 6:00 PM

No papers were acted on.