

UTILITY ADVISORY TASK FORCE
Meeting Minutes
March 17, 2021 - 7:00 PM
Warren Craft Meeting Room

The mission of the Utility Advisory Task Force is to assess the level of communication and service from the utility companies providing services to Bernards Township, identify areas of concern and in need of improvement, suggest ways to collect and report chronic outages and disruptions, facilitate and/or coordinate resident feedback to the Board of Public Utilities, and represent Bernards Township customers before the BPU when appropriate.

Present: Edelstein, Estrin, Fields, Fischer, Guibord, Romano, Shah
Absent: Monaco, Neiman, Robina

1. Call to Order

2. Flag Salute

3. Open Public Meeting Statement

4. Approval of Minutes

The February 17, 2021 meeting minutes were approved as submitted.

5. JCP&L Presentation – Maintenance, Field, and Inspection Plan (Bob Flynn)

Mr. Flynn from JCP&L gave a reliability presentation. He reported that preventative maintenance circuit inspections occur every 5 years, wood pole inspections every 10 years and vegetation trimming every 4 years. Preventative maintenance inspections are also performed at the substations. JCP&L monitors worst performing circuits when assessing where the most outages occur. Pad mounted boxes are periodically inspected and must remain clear of obstructions within 10 feet for access. The electric distribution lines have fuses that will open if there is a problem.

Mr. Flynn reported that there are 9 locations within Bernards Township that have tripsaver switches, which are part of a new statewide program. These switches are designed to redirect and restore power automatically. They have been installed in areas that have historically had more outages. There is an overarching plan to proactively improve switching. The Martinsville/Basking Ridge border has a new substation serving 5000 people. Transmission lines and substations are the first priority for service restoration during an outage, then service to critical customers such as hospitals and life-support locations, then service to highest-customer concentrations, and then service to traditional customer areas. Safety remains the number one priority during outages and all other field operations.

Mr. Flynn discussed and emphasized the importance of effective and efficient customer communications when outages occur, and described elements of JCP&L's outage communications program, lessons learned, and its ongoing efforts to improve those communications. Mr. Flynn noted that as more customers report a particular outage, the higher the restoration priority becomes, so it is important that every customer report their outage. He also reviewed internet and mobile tools residents can use to report outages and get outage restoration information and updates.

There was a Q&A session that included the following discussions:

- a) Whether there are more capital improvement projects scheduled for our town. Mayor Fields summarized improvements that have been made thus far. Mr. Guibord explained the relationship between JCP&L and the BPU. Ms. Shah questioned if the new switching technology will be added elsewhere in the town.
- b) The dispatch of line repair trucks was discussed. Mr. Flynn reported that dispatch communication methods and response times are being reviewed and improved upon internally. In response to a question, he noted that there is a section of the JCP&L website where customers can request inspections of trees on their property for their potential impact to wires. Mr. Edelstein suggested methods for bringing to JCP&L's attention utility poles of questionable structural integrity. Mr. Flynn welcomed that input.

6. Altice USA/Optimum Update

a. NJBPU March 16th Hamilton/Robbinsville Hearing

Mr. Guibord provided an update on the five-hour March 16th BPU virtual hearing. He reported that hearing commenters often complained that Altice corporate management is not giving Optimum customer service and field technicians the training, resources and equipment they need to address and correct internet service problems. He highlighted the topics of comment by 54 municipal officials and residents from 25 towns, including inadequate service (slow internet speeds), unreliable service (frequent interruptions and outages), repetitive and ineffective repairs, missed and cancelled service calls, poor customer service, poorly trained service technicians, antiquated and faulty equipment and installations, unjustified pricing increases, discriminatory pricing, and lack of competition. He noted that many of these issues are the same as the variety of Optimum service issues and complaints in Bernards Township. Mayor Fields said she informed Ms. Davis of Altice that if the work promised in Bernards Township is not completed as agreed, the Township will file with the BPU as well. Ms. Shah shared that she had a technician come to her home for a service call. Service was restored while he was in the home, but when he left the speeds went back down. There was further discussion about routers, extenders and modems. Mr. Edelstein and Mr. Guibord discussed

how the BPU might impose fines on cable companies for failing to provide adequate and reliable service.

b. The Hills

Mr. Estrin explained there are 22 condo associations within The Hills that need to grant approval before internet providers can perform work. In the past, there have been issues about restoring excavated areas and landscaping to their pre-excavated condition. Mr. Guibord reported that the Altice/Optimum work on three nodes to improve internet service in The Hills is scheduled to be completed in the next 2-3 weeks.

7. Resident Survey Update

The survey is ready for distribution. Mr. Fischer has further refined the format. We will wait until one week after the Optimum service upgrades in The Hills are completed to send out the survey. Ms. Shah asked about how the link for the survey would look when it goes out. Mayor Fields said the survey will be distributed via Rave services. Ms. Shah suggested we put together a scripted note for distribution. Mr. Guibord provided suggested language. Mayor Fields will make mention of the Utility Task Force in her next letter. Mr. Robina is working on a press release. Ms. Shah, Mr. Guibord and Mr. Fischer discussed how survey data will be compiled and analyzed.

8. Public Comment

None

9. April Meeting Agenda

Ms. Romano requested that the Task Force at its April meeting recommend in its report to the Township Committee that all residents be notified of the importance of everyone reporting their power outage, as noted earlier by Mr. Flynn.

10. Comments by Members

None

11. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:12 PM.

**Submitted by Scott Guibord
On Behalf of the Utility Advisory Task Force**