

Dobbs Ferry Challenge: How to Bury the Wires

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by Abby Luby –

Downtown Dobbs Ferry may be able to bury electric lines at the same time Con Edison plans to upgrade the neighborhood's gas lines in the next year or two. The question is: "But how?"

On February 6th, the Dobbs Ferry Library hosted an informational forum entitled "Burying the Wires," billed as a fact-finding workshop with village officials and a representative from Con Edison. "It was a packed house of about 60 people," said Village Trustee Christy Knell. "The meeting lasted one-and-a-half hours and the Con Ed representative spoke last." The big concern is cost. Many downtown property owners rent out space to businesses and residents. According to Knell, many property owners who would be most impacted by an upgrade were not present at the forum.

“I think there were some very misleading numbers put out by Con Ed at the meeting,” said Paddy Steinschneider of the Dobbs Ferry Sustainability Task Force. “They initially said it would cost \$8 million, that became \$10 million, then \$12 million. They told us things that might not be true and the way it was presented was intended to be scary sounding.” Floating a bond was also discussed and how that would impact taxes over the next 10 years.

Steinschneider also suggested that the village could mandate the wires be buried if they adopted a resolution to that effect. It would involve the Public Service Commission who would consider burying the lines discretionary. In that case, Con Ed would not be permitted to increase its rates. Currently the village has a mandate for new developments to bury their wires. “The whole trick is the public service commission and the rules they have,” said Steinschneider. “If Con Ed was asked to put the wires underground by the village, it doesn’t work financially for them because they have to pay for it.”

There is also the safety issue concerning the clumps of jumbled wires and several poles. “Firefighters can’t safely rescue people from a fire if wires are in the way of their ladders and there’s no time to cut all the wires,” said Stephen Tilly, a downtown business owner and a member of the Dobbs Ferry Historic District Task Force. Tilly was also at the meeting and contended that the current condition of the wires currently violates a state fire protection code.

“Con Ed would have a tougher time refusing to bury wires if fire departments got together as first responders and requested they bury wires for fire safety,” Tilly said.

Tilly said there was also an aesthetic issue to consider and how the unsightly wires would attract more to the downtown and to shopping. “There’s a younger crowd moving to town

from places like Brooklyn and they really like the ambience and scenic setting. They look at the downtown with fresh eyes. There's the market impact," he said.

Con Ed offered to come up with a proposal of what it would cost to bury the wires, said Knell. "They will have a proposal for us when they are ready to upgrade the gas lines."

The end of the meeting became a bit more upbeat because "Con Ed became more realistic about the cost," said Tilly. "We also discussed a way to raise money through grants or tax assessments. It's an issue we have to keep on the agenda."

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