

Underground Utilities

Relocating utility lines underground in all or part of the project area would greatly enhance the appearance of the Village and has been recommended in multiple unfulfilled plans for York Village since the 1940's. The relocation of utility lines and elimination of poles in the Village project area was a notable feature of the Master Plan. Regrettably, the initial cost estimate for doing that was two times (\$7.9 m) the estimate for the rest of the project (\$4 m) and, therefore, was deemed unachievable. Underground utility project costs do not qualify for traditional Federal or State funding. Research by the committee could not find any source of outside funding. In addition, the utilities are not obligated to pay the cost of relocating existing utilities underground. The cost, therefore, of moving existing overhead utilities underground falls to the municipality requesting the work.

Two Options Under Consideration

In spite of the original estimate for moving all Village utilities underground, there continued to be support for something to be done about utilities in the Village. The design team has been asked to continue to explore the idea and seek information from the utility companies needed to develop more detailed costs to do the following:

1. Move current overhead utilities below ground in the right of way in a portion of the project area yet to be determined and retain existing overhead utilities elsewhere; and,
2. Install conduit throughout the project area while the Village project streets are being reconstructed thus, creating the option for the town to relocate utilities at a future date.

While only one of these two options will be chosen, it is important to develop costs for both.

Fig. 3: Comparison of Village Intersection with and without Overhead Utilities



Based on preliminary data the utilities provided the consulting team early in the design work, DPW Director Lessard estimated a materials cost for conduit only of \$126,000 per 1,000 feet. However, there will be a lot of additional costs involved in completing any sized installation. In order to get detail on material and installation costs, further engineering is needed and the utilities charge for that level of detail.

The consulting team will be contacting the utility companies to confirm whether the costs they provided many months ago for engineering level estimates are still valid. Once we have a cost estimate for the utility engineering services, an action item can be presented to the BOS. The town must set up accounts with each utility company for them to do engineering work based on conditions specific to the York Village project. The committee has been told that it should be possible to develop an estimate for any given length of underground utilities because the utility companies will estimate the entire area of the project as we originally define it and their design estimates will be provided per linear foot of conduit or wire, manhole unit, square footage, etc. With that information, the project team can scale their estimates to a defined utility project area with a realistic price that may be sent to voters for funding.

Village Utility Pole Survey

At our February 2018 meeting, Planning Director Smith proposed that we undertake a site walk of the entire project area to help us define the boundaries of the area(s) within the overall project that, if money were no object, would ideally have utilities relocated underground. The walk was undertaken on a rather cold February day. Supplied with a map of numbered utility poles in the project area, six VRC members, Planning Director Smith, Selectmen Palmer and Estes, and Bike & Pedestrian Committee member Leah Drennan, walked the area and individually recorded a rating for each pole. Each pole was rated for the importance of its location and the pole's impact on scenic view and secondary ranking based on impact on plan design, signage, foliage, pedestrian flow, and cost. Two additional VRC members took the survey on their own prior to the next regular committee meeting.

At its March 15, 2018 meeting, the committee reviewed the results of the survey walk. The group had surveyed the area along Long Sands Road from Woodbridge Road to the Village center and along York Street from the First Parish cemetery entrance to Williams Avenue. The survey tally identified an area from the Town Hall entrance drive to the east side of the old church building and up Long Sands Road to the library driveway as having the highest priority for relocating utilities. (See Figure 4.)

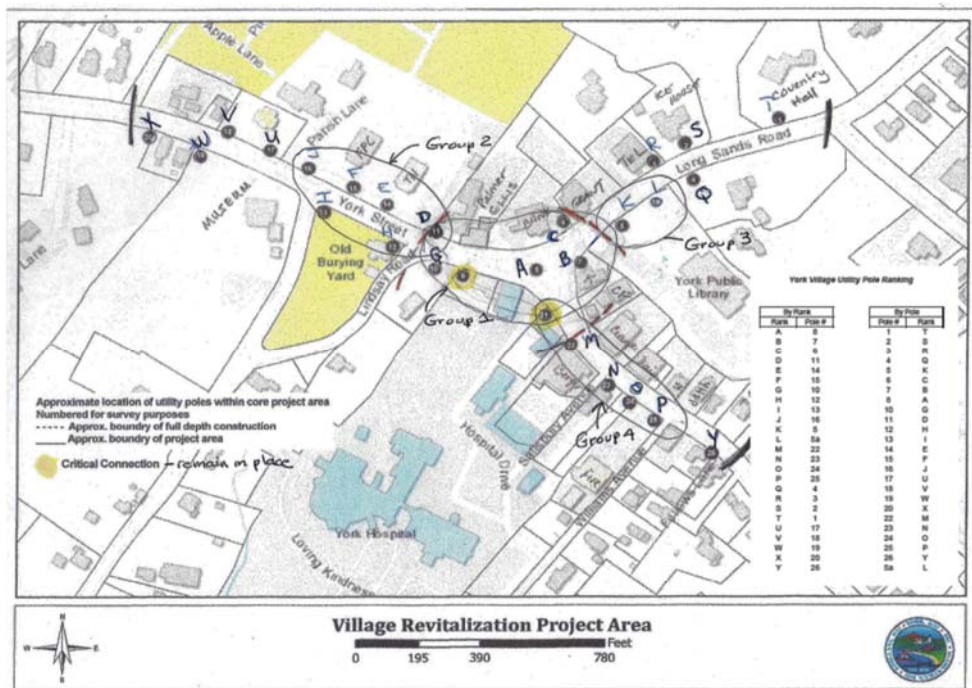


Fig. 4 Utility Pole Survey: Used to set priority areas for relocating existing overhead utilities underground.

To establish the priority areas, the committee assigned a letter to each power pole on the plan reflecting the priority for its removal based on our survey results and further discussion of each by the group. 'A' being the highest priority to 'Y' being the lowest priority. After completing that exercise, four groupings of poles were identified and prioritized. These have been sent to the consultants.

The group discussed various options and methods for removing or moving power poles along several segments of the roadway. The idea of moving power poles and lines behind buildings was discussed. That was ruled out

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because of the complication of having to get easements from property owners and that doing so could require property owners to face associated costs and further delay the project.

If an underground utilities project is to be added to the revitalization project, the next available opportunity to obtain voter approval will be the May 2019 budget referendum. The project team needs to start working on capital planning issues and making progress soon to meet the lead-in timeline for that date.

Full BOS Report #1 is available on www.YorkVillage.org