

## **Residents Object to DPW, Eversource Cutting Down Trees in Their Neighborhoods, First Selectman Responds**

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**Categories :** [Letters to the Editor](#)

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Residents of the neighborhood around [Littlebrook Road](#) have shared these letters emailed to First Selectman Jayme Stevenson, objecting to a plan to cut down trees on the street.

Meanwhile, Friends of Animals, a national organization headquartered at the corner of the Post Road and Sedgwick Avenue, has put up a banner related to their objections over a tree cut down as part of a sidewalk improvement project.

Stevenson, in an interview, reacted to the concerns of each group, supporting the tree removal from the sidewalk, responding to the banner, which attacked her, with a tart rebuke, and objecting to the proposed tree removals around Little Brook Road.

While both sets of objections are to tree removal and both the town tree warden and Department of Public Works are involved in each project, the Eversource proposal for Littlebrook Road is not related to the one on Sedgwick Road.

Stevenson emailed a response to the Little Brook Road area residents (see below) saying she's reviewing the matter with the town Department of Public Works and the Darien tree warden, and that generated more responses.

On Monday, Stevenson said in an interview that she had reviewed the matter, walked down the street and thinks Eversource had been too heavy-handed in proposing that so many trees along Little Brook Road be cut down.

"In my opinion, many of those trees can be pruned," she said.

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***SEE ALSO:***

—[\*\*Friends of Animals Staff Confronts Town Workers to Prevent Removal of Trees\*\*](#) (May 6)

—Eversource recently [sent out an announcement](#) about its (already begun) tree removal program in Darien, mentioning various streets in town where crews hired by the utility would be working the most in May and June.

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After raising objections to the proposed tree removal outside their offices, Friends of Animals lost in its effort to save the second of two trees on the east side of Sedgwick near the intersection.

Their banner reads: "Jayme Stevenson / Deforesting Darien."

In a Thursday email, Feral said:

"We sound off on deforesting Darien—it's got to stop! This banner hangs above the sidewalk where Friends of Animals' beloved sycamore was dismembered recently because Darien's tree warden couldn't figure out how to fix a sidewalk AND preserve a tree."

**Stevenson Responds**

In the interview, Stevenson pointed out that as first selectman she isn't generally involved in decisions about tree removal. The tree warden and DPW take care of those decisions. Trees are posted with signs and people

can object to removing or cutting them at town public hearings set up for the purpose.

### **Sedgwick Road Trees**

Stevenson said the two trees near the Sedgwick/Post roads intersection had been posted for weeks (even longer than they legally needed to be) with the town's intention to remove them.

When Friends of Animals staff confronted the tree removal crew and stood by one of the trees, town police had to be called in, Stevenson recalled. Public Works Director Ed Gentile spoke with them about safety concerns related to the tree roots lifting up the sidewalk, Stevenson said. She said the town has been sued after someone tripped and fell on a sidewalk not far from the intersection.

"As part of our sidewalk maintenance program, we have to go around the town and check out places that are a safety hazard," she said. "While I wasn't consulted up front about that [tree removal], I concur with that decision," she said.

"It was after that that Priscilla [Feral] called my office," she said. "I tried to help her understand the safety problem." But the conversation didn't go well: "She called me some names and hung up on me."

Friends of Animals sent out a news release detailing their objections and [discussing various ways](#) that other communities around the country have avoided removing trees, sometimes with innovative changes to sidewalks.

"I don't know why Priscilla needed to put a banner in her window about me," Stevenson said. "The first selectman doesn't make a decision about which trees come down and which don't. We certainly are willing to replace trees, maybe not in the same place, but elsewhere, nearby.

"I was startled by the lack of caring about the need for public safety by that organization," she continued. "They care deeply about the safety of animals, but not about human beings, so it was confusing to me."

### **Little Brook Road**

For years, Stevenson said, Eversource has tended to the trees — trimming and keeping their height down — along Little Brook Road near the company's high voltage transmission lines that run parallel the New Haven Line tracks.

"The trees themselves are on a town right of way," she said, not on Connecticut Department of Transportation or Eversource property. By state statute, the town had to post the tree-removal proposals on the trees on behalf of Eversource, she said.

Stevenson said she believes Eversource has "made changes in policy about how much and how much under transmission lines trees can grow."

Stevenson has asked to give her own opinion at an upcoming public hearing about the proposal. After looking into the matter and looking at the trees — a large number of them, she said, "it's quite startling" — Stevenson said she disagrees with the proposed cut-down — or at least the extent of it.

"In looking at the trees, I think they [Eversource] are heavy-handed," she said. "Many of those trees can be pruned and not cut down. [...] We need a longer conversation about this proposal."

"It's been very clear, especially over the last year, that pedestrian safety is a matter of great importance to our community," she said. "Sometimes we have to make difficult decisions about removing trees. Trees are great, unless they're the wrong tree planted in the wrong place."

### **Email Sent to Stevenson**

*Sent to the first selectman at 4:59 p.m., Thursday, May 20:*

The Darien Public Works Department posted a tree removal notice dated 5/18/21 on 40 trees from 12 Little Brook Road to 29 Little Brook Road which is one and half blocks, 10 days to object. I object to the tree removal.

Please forward the DPW report that identified removal of these trees.  
Reason why all trees were selected for removal and not pruned.

Ten days' notice is not adequate time for residents to respond with an objection. Public Works Notice references 10 days CT statutes. Does DPW as a department guideline permit flexibility in the interpretation of the 10-day guideline?  
DPW identified 40 trees for removal on one & 1/2 blocks. Does DPW have a department policy of notifying residents when such a drastic tree removal is planned?

The Notice states "After Ten (10) days from the date posted below, objections to this work must be received in writing on or before the Tenth (10th) Day AT: Town of Darien, Department of Public Works. Does an e-mail qualify as written notification? A Notice postmarked during the 10-day period yet received after the 10th day qualify as an objection?

Are tree replacement plans in place for the removed trees, type, size and potential growth?

Question, Eversource leaves a notice with phone contact on front door when planning tree pruning. The Town of Darien should be more responsive to residents than Eversource.

Approximately two years ago, DPW performed preliminary work on Little Brook Road and Little Brook

Road North for the purpose of paving the two streets. The streets were never paved, are they scheduled to be paved 2021? DPW budgeted tax dollars would be better spent on paving versus tree removal.

Overall objection:

Approximately every 10 years Metro North clears all trees and brush by the tracks. Thirty-six (36) years ago, the trees and brush were cleared, the Little Brook Road North neighbors responded, purchased/planted five pine trees to block the tracks and noise. Most importantly, home real estate values decreased. The cutting of 40 trees will decrease our homes assessed value and will be the basis of a tax appeal. Most likely we should win. Please note, personally, I have contributed to the life of these trees by pruning vines off the trees through the 36 years. Appreciate a hold being placed on the Notice until DPW can provide clarification on the project

Quality of life, biodiversity, beauty of the neighborhood will be impacted. Removal of 40 trees should have required a study and report justifying this proposed action.

Best regards,

Richard Poli

### **Stevenson's Response**

*Stevenson sent this reply at 9:23 p.m., Thursday, May 20:*

What I've been able to find out today is that the tree work is an Eversource project to address vegetation impacts to their transmission lines. Our Eversource liaison is in the process of gathering all the information and maps showing the proposed work. I've asked that nothing occur until me, our DPW Director and our Tree Warden have a chance to review.

I will be happy to address your other questions on Monday when I have the chance to meet with my DPW Director.

Here are the letters and statements objecting to the tree cutting:

### **Letter From a Little Brook Road Resident**

*Sent on Friday, May 21, after Stevenson's response:*

Dear Jayme, dear all:

The situation is more dire than you realize; it is not just the 40-plus trees on the left-hand side of our street going towards Selleck's Woods that are to be removed.

Connecticut Light + Power Company (Eversource) has the right of way through a portion of our property due to transmission lines that run across it. According to the title search conducted by our attorney when we bought the house in 2019, their right of way is as follows:

Grant from Florence M. Albrecht to the Connecticut Light and Power Company dated September 77, 1937 and recorded in Book 90 at Page 309 of the Darien Land Records.

(a) Connecticut Light and Power has a right of way across the Premises in order to install, inspect, operate, replace, repair poles, wires, etc. Also have the right to trim trees in the right of way.

(b) Owner of premises reserves the right to use the ground beneath the poles provided same does not obstruct rights of Connecticut Light and Power. See map attached hereto.

A contractor from Eversource came to the house and informed us that Eversource is planning to remove EVERY SINGLE TREE from our property line that borders the street, from the street sign that says “Little Brook Road” to the wooded area past our house, because they are “incompatible” with being next to the transmission power lines.

These are beautiful trees that line our street and block the view of the transmission lines when you turn onto our street, as well as block noise from the Metro North train tracks. We have just invested \$250k in a home renovation because we wanted to stay in our house for decades.

The indiscriminate removal of these trees would be devastating to not only our property value, but the property value of every house on Littlebrook and Littlebrook North. What Eversource wants to do is raze all of the land that borders the transmission lines by 20-30ft on either side, which in this case runs through an entire NEIGHBORHOOD in Darien.

Please see the photo below that originates from their “Understanding Vegetation Management” document and shows their goal in the context of a forest, as well as a photo that I took today of the trees on our street.

The right of way granted them the right to TRIM trees. I have not seen any assessment put forth that examines the structural integrity of the trees – evaluating whether they are indeed a danger – nor has a SINGLE tree been marked to be trimmed, rather than removed. Not even the fully grown apple tree on our neighbor’s property will be spared.

What rights do we have in this situation? Can you please help us? My phone number is [...].

Thank you,  
Robert and Alba Dexheimer  
5 Littlebrook Road

**Letter From a Raymond Street Resident**

***Darienite***  
***News for Darien***  
***<https://darienite.com>***

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*The letter writer passed this email on to Darienite.com on Friday:*

Dear Jayme,

I heard today from my neighbor on Littlebrook Road that the DPW has tagged 40 trees to take down on Littlebrook Road. Littlebrook Road North and Raymond Street will not be far behind.

The resident on Littlebrook Road who told me about this travesty said that she met today with somebody from Eversource and they are coming onto her property to cut down even the beautiful flowering tree that they planted when they moved in three years ago.

Neither the DPW nor Eversource are asking permission from anybody in the area to cut down these trees. They are just doing it and I know that everyone who lives here seriously OBJECTS to this action. The period to object on this expires 10 days from May 18th as per the tags on the trees. Since I don't know what course to follow to object I am doing it through this email and expect at least a hearing regarding this action.

Cutting 40 trees that protect Littlebrook Road from the horrible view of the train tracks, the noise, the pollution, the high tension wires, the electromagnetic emissions, etc. is a travesty. These trees help us stay healthier and make the area look more pleasant.

If the DPW and Eversource's concern is that the trees could bring down the wires in a storm, the trees should be trimmed, not taken down. I haven't seen the DPW nor Eversource doing any of that in our area. I have seen lately around town trimming trees but not drastically cutting the trees like they are planning to do on Littlebrook Road.

We have been planting trees for years. My husband and I spent over \$100,000 in 2018 putting trees on our property to protect us from the hideous view that the next-door property, which belongs to Eversource and where Darien has a sewer transfer station.

We also cleared all the thick, wild vegetation there fronting Raymond Street and abutting our home. We planted grass and evergreens on the Raymond Street side, and we care for the area ourselves. Neither DPW nor Eversource has bothered making that area look better.

Those trees we planted are growing and also are beginning to cover the awful view the area of the train track offers. It has taken a long time for Raymond Street and Littlebrook Road to look like more appealing streets.

The DPW or Eversource cannot simply come into our neighborhood and start cutting our precious trees because Eversource got in trouble with the last storm when they lost power and were not prepared for it.

As the leader of our Town, I hope that you will help us find a way to stop this insanity and protect us from such abuse. Taking down the grown trees is also a health hazard for all of us who live in this neighborhood, not to mention the loss of value to our properties.

***Darienite***

***News for Darien***

***<https://darienite.com>***

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We need your help and those who manage our town to stay this action. It is imperative to find a different solution before it is too late to save our trees. They cannot be replaced for at least a generation.

This action is tremendously shortsighted and nefarious. It is easy for DPW and Eversource, but devastating for us. I hope that your office and the Department of Public Works will realize what serious consequences this reckless action could have.

We request answers and help by May 27th before the DPW and Eversource start destroying our neighborhood. I would also like to know and understand under what authority can they come and take down whatever trees they want.

I look forward to hearing from you as to how we can find a better solution to this problem created by interests that don't take into account the welfare of the residents of Darien.

With kindest regards,

Ingrid Hess  
86 Raymond Street