

Dear Councilor McGee and the Holyoke City Council,

May 15, 2021

I am writing to express my support of the petition by Holyoke Gas and Electric and Verizon to relocate the poles from our backyards to the edge of Valley Heights Street, where I have lived as a homeowner for nearly 5 years. As a first-time homebuyer, moving out of a difficult rental and buying market in Northampton, I was excited to discover 24 Valley Heights as the perfect home for me in 2016. Even then, it was a competitive market, and my offer was successful because the seller wanted her mother's home to really make a big impact for someone, and to help them gain independence, and it has done that for me.

I can see the frustrations of the individual on my street who has made their voice known against the project known – yes, it is pretty, quaint street, tucked back from the rest of the city, and there is a currently a lovely view looking down its short length. However, is this the view that I enjoy most often when I'm at home? Do I sit in my front yard and marvel at the street? No. I, just like the rest of my neighbors, am busy enjoying my backyard. The backyards are the real prizes of Valley Heights. Our backyards are full of flower and veggie gardens, patios and grills, hammocks and swings. And electric poles and wires.

My yard, like those on the part of our road nearest to Lincoln Street, has a high voltage pole. Alongside this pole there are also many tall, old trees. These trees are on the city's conservation land, which abuts our property. This has put myself and my next-door neighbors in a precarious, and potentially dangerous position for many years. Because of this, I relish the opportunity to have this situation resolved by having the electrical pole moved to the street side, away from dangerous tree limbs. Having the pole moved would improve the beauty and safety of my backyard and make it safer for the HG&E staff to work on the poles from bucket trucks on the street, without navigating the obstacles of any yards.

I have been made aware of a "Plan B" that was proposed by a resident of Valley Heights to create an access road behind our backyards in order to provide HG&E access to the poles there instead of moving them. I am utterly opposed to this plan. Creating this road would require clearing a significant amount of vegetation, and ruin the lush, green views we all enjoy in the spring, and the winter views of trees and the Connecticut River tributaries in the winter. This would ruin the aesthetics of the backyards of the road. If the neighbor is trying to maintain the aesthetics of Valley Heights with this plan, then this leaves me baffled at best. I would not value maintaining the aesthetics of a paved street, which already has streetlights and fire hydrants along it, over maintaining the aesthetics of a naturalistic environment. Infrastructure belongs on the street side.

Furthermore, moving the electrical poles to the street side would help continue to increase property values on this street. It would allow us to tap into HG&E's potential future fiber-to-home plan, whereas our outdated backyard poles would not, and we'd stay beholden to our current providers. An access road at the edge of backyards would certainly turn off potential buyers as well.

I was present at the last City Council meeting where this topic was tabled, and I believe you are hearing from only one dominant voice on this matter, but I don't believe safety and other pragmatic considerations are being valued enough, nor do I believe enough of our street's residents have weighed in. I am trying to do some outreach on our street, and will be reaching out to you, Councilor McGee, as well.

Sincerely,
Emma Kerr

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