

Town of Edisto Beach

W. Crawford Moore, Jr., Mayor

Administration

Mark D. Aakhus, Town Administrator
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I will do my best to try and explain what is happening with Dominion and our Palmetto trees. This issue is one we are all unhappy with, and we have moved as quickly and aggressively as possible to head this off. Please know we have spent many hours with all involved and are continuing to do what we can.

Historically, Dominion trims trees back from our power lines approximately every five years. In the past this has also included Palmetto trees. As you know, Palmetto trees grow back very quickly (within a year) and the fronds die and become dry and brittle, as do the berry branches. Often owners allow their yard landscapers to trim these back. If the bloom area is within 10 feet of the power lines, then anyone who is to trim these back must be OSHA qualified to do so. There have been instances where some landscapers have been killed while trimming these Palmetto trees back. These individuals may not have been qualified to do so, and Dominion has been held responsible. Thus, for safety reasons, Dominion has taken the position that any Palmetto tree whose bloom comes within 10 feet of the power line must be cut all the way down. We actually had a Palmetto tree catch fire a couple weeks ago from the power line on Louise Street. The tree and part of the lot were burned.

The Town was notified several weeks ago of Dominion's plan. At that time, it was 200 trees. A few weeks ago, that number went to around 600. That started a serious discussion between Dominion and the Town. Not long after that, the number went to 950. By then we were in touch with Senator Campsen's office and Representative Leber's office, who also followed up with Dominion. I made calls to the mayors of Isle of Palms, Sullivans Island and Folly Beach. Isle of Palms has not run into this yet, but they will when the time comes for their next trimming. Sullivans Island had their Palmetto trees cut down a couple years ago in this program, and Folly Beach had 650 cut down a couple years ago. Immediately, we started communicating all the information we had on our website. This communication included the right of way that the property owner signed when they agreed to obtain power through Dominion or its predecessor (customer agreement), a diagram of how they decided which trees would be removed along with FAQ's in regard to trimming of power line trees, Dominion suggestions to power line planting, and the Utility Arborist Association Safety Brochure. We also insisted Dominion set up a Town meeting ASAP for owners to speak directly with Dominion. This Palmetto tree trimming came to our attention very quickly, and they were well into their plan before we became aware of the scope of what they were going to do. We have responded as quickly and best we can. I have been in touch with the president of Dominion, and his commitment to their plan is clear. Our authority, if any, is very limited as this relationship and contract for power is between Dominion and the property owner directly. As for the number we had on the website, it was

not useful enough, and we have addressed that. Please contact Town Hall at 843-869-2505 and we will put you in contact with the appropriate Dominion representative.

The other questions I have been asked had to do with the possibility of switching our power provider but as I am sure you are aware, that is a bridge too far, and I am sure that chances are, even if it were possible, any power provider would treat this issue the same way. I have also been asked about running our power underground. The expense to do that would be prohibitive, would tear up half the town, would extend our repair time after storms, not to mention issues with ground water and underground high voltage.

Through discussions with the president of Dominion, we are working together on a grant program, funded by Dominion, that would address replanting appropriate trees in the appropriate places throughout the Town. That is in the works now.

I know how frustrating this is to everyone. Janice and my family have been lifelong South Carolinians for generations and understand what the Palmetto tree is to our state. Understanding that, this is ultimately an issue directly between Dominion and the property owner. We have and are doing everything we can to slow the roll on this but, as I have stated, our authority is very limited.

While I know this doesn't help ease the pain of what is happening, I hope it in some way helps clear up the who and why.

With Kindest Regards,
Crawford Moore
Mayor, Town of Edisto Beach