

## PEPCO PRESIDENT FACES QUESTIONS FROM COUNCIL

*Reliability and improved communication, which broke down during snow and summer storms, were scrutinized*

By [Nathan Carrick](#) | [Email the author](#) | November 8, 2010

Pepco Regional President Thomas H. Graham admitted tonight that power outages and communication during crisis situations needs to improve, but said his company has already taken several steps to solve those problems.

In a briefing at the Mayor and Council work session, Graham fielded questions about the power company's outages and communication strategies during the February 2010 blizzard and strong summer storms that downed trees around the city.

Still, he was quick to defend his company's performance.

"There was a lot of discussion about Pepco sitting on it's hands this July," Graham said about the summer storms. "I'm here to tell you that didn't happen."

More than \$100 million in Federal grants will be added to \$150 million already set aside to improve Pepco's infrastructure, Graham said, including undergrounding many power lines and upgrading to smart grid technology.

Unfortunately no undergrounding, an expensive but advantageous procedure, is scheduled for Gaithersburg, he said.

He presented Pepco's enhanced five-year reliability plan that includes more tree-trimming, expanding feeder stations, distribution automation and selective undergrounding and revitalization of cables.

The prior plan had no money allocated for undergrounding wires or substation improvements. But the new plan sets aside \$15 million per year, for a total of \$75 million over the life of the plan.

The new plan also bumps the vegetation management budget from \$4.3 million per year to \$7.3 million, for a total five year increase of \$15 million.

Graham also pointed out how Pepco has an eight-point communication plan to better inform customers when work is happening in their neighborhood.

The communication plan includes notification letters with "a new look and feel they will be formatted for easier reading, and the technical descriptions of the

work will be written in a manner that customers can more easily understand," as well as putting Pepco banners on contractor trucks and using social media.

An interactive map on the Pepco website showing where work is scheduled and being done is also being developed, Graham said.

Councilman Jud Ashman said that one of the most important things Pepco can do is reach out to the City and ask for help.

Graham agreed, saying that Pepco did not know what Gaithersburg had done to clear snow and could not effectively coordinate where crews could access.

"The biggest problem we had was access," he said. "We know where the outages are" but not always what streets have been plowed.

In some cases, crews got to a snow-covered street and got out and walked to the problem line, he said.

Councilwoman Cathy Drzyzgula suggested improving communication to customers through cell phones.

Janet Randolph, head of Customer Relations, said that "amazingly" few customers give out their cell phone information.

Graham added, "If you want that type of information, it has to be a give-take relationship."