

Petition No. 1092
Verizon
Durham, Connecticut
Staff Report
March 6, 2014

On January 16, 2014, the Connecticut Siting Council (Council) received a petition from Cellco Partnership d/b/a Verizon Wireless (Verizon) for a declaratory ruling that no Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need is required for the extension of an existing telecommunications facility at 134R Creamery Road in Durham, Connecticut. Council member Dr. Barbara Bell and Siting Analyst David Martin visited the site on February 21, 2014 to review the proposal. Attorney Kenneth Baldwin represented Verizon at the field review. Durham's First Selectman Laura Francis and two members of the Durham South End Cellular Action Group, Charles Stengel and Carleton Stoup, were also present at the field review. The Town of Durham's Communications Officer, Scott Wright, participated in the field review via cellphone.

The existing telecommunications tower is currently owned by SBA and was approved by the Council under Docket 254 on December 9, 2003 at a height of 100 feet and capable of being increased in height by means of a petition to the Council. The Decision and Order also specified that all antennas on the tower would have to be flush mounted. According to engineering drawings submitted with the Development and Management Plan, the tower was designed to be extendable to a maximum height of 130 feet, which is the height the docket applicant, Sprint, originally proposed. Currently, Sprint has three flush mounted antennas at a centerline height of 96.5 feet and the Town of Durham has a whip antenna at a mounting height of 78.5 feet and a dipole antenna at a mounting height of 71.7 feet.

Verizon now proposes to extend the tower by 10 feet to a height of 110 feet in order to install nine cluster mounted antennas at a centerline height of 107 feet. Verizon would also install a 12-foot by 30-foot shelter, within the existing 50-foot by 50-foot compound, for its ground equipment and a diesel generator for backup power.

In addition to notifying the Town, Verizon provided notice to abutting property owners. No opposing comments have been received.

This petition is somewhat unusual in that a local citizens' group, the Durham South End Cellular Action Group, is asking the Council to consider approving a higher extension of the tower than the petitioner is proposing. This group is concerned about the lack of wireless coverage in the southern part of Durham and has been working with town officials to find a solution for this problem. The group has submitted a letter to the Council stating its concerns and suggesting that the tower be extended to 140 feet and that platforms be allowed instead of restricting antennas to flush-mounts. During the field review, the First Selectman made it clear that she supported this group's efforts to improve coverage in this part of the town. The town's Communications Officer also stated that Verizon's proposed tower extension would be welcomed because it would enable the town to improve the coverage of its emergency services wireless network. Durham's State Senator, Ed Meyer, submitted a letter requesting an extension of the tower to 140 feet, and State Representative Vincent Candelora wrote to support the proposed height extension. This municipal and legislative support for the petition is especially noteworthy given the considerable opposition voiced by neighbors and town officials during the original docket proceeding.

For this petition, Council staff sent a memo to telecom carriers asking if any of them had an interest in co-locating on this tower. To date, only T-Mobile has responded, stating that it does have an interest in this site "in the immediate future."

The maps of Verizon's existing and proposed coverage submitted in support of this petition indicate that extending the tower to 110 feet will meet Verizon's coverage objectives and that going to a height of 140 feet would not significantly improve the coverage possible from this tower. At the request of the Cellular Action Group and the Council for evidence of this position, Verizon supplied supplemental maps showing the predicted coverage from 140 feet. These maps corroborate Verizon's stance that locating its antennas at the 140-foot height would not result in any significant improvement in coverage.

A Visibility Analysis was submitted as part of the petition materials. The low height of the existing tower makes it scarcely visible in the surrounding area. This condition was confirmed by the two members of the Durham South End Cellular Action Group, who took their own, informal visual survey from vantage points in the neighborhood. It was also confirmed by the Council's representatives who, while standing in the driveway of the property owner's house, could not see the tower. A 10-foot extension of the tower should hardly make a discernible difference in its visibility.

The proposed tower extension is not expected to have any substantial adverse environmental effects. Staff recommends approval.