Public Safety Communications Committee
DRAFT

For: letter to ATT regarding municipal preferences on proposal for cell tower at Coote Hill Road . . . input based on RCC Consultants work . . .

The Town of Sherman has three major objectives in its consideration of cellphone coverage in town:

– that there be a comprehensive plan to provide cellphone coverage in the whole town, rather than a sub-optimal, piece-meal approach that primarily serves the interests of the cell-phone vendors;

– that there be minimal visual impact on this town that is noted for its rural character, its scenery, and its recreational sites and activities;

– that the town's Public Safety Communications system and the cellphone solution share the same infrastructure

The Town's response to the ATT proposal for a tower at Coote Hill is shaped by this thinking.

Regarding the Coote Hill proposal specifically:

RCC analysis of the Coote Hill Road location says that there is very little difference in coverage between a 170' tower (covers 17.8% of the area of the town) and a 120' tower (covers 13.9% of the town); even a 100' tower at that location would cover 12% of the town. The negative visual impact on the surrounding area, especially the scenic/recreation area around Mauweehoo Lake, would be very significantly reduced by lowering the height of the tower.

A 120' tower would provide good coverage for ATT, and allow for other vendors at lower levels who would get almost as good coverage.

The RCC work says that the Tower Hill site in Patterson would serve to provide coverage for the west side of Sherman, along the New York border, from the southern border of the town as far north as Wakeman Hill Road. In conjunction with even a 120' tower at Coote Hill, the coverage figure would be 23.6%, a substantial improvement over the coverage of

Coote Hill by itself, even at 170' (17.8%).

A major element of the visual impact of the tower is the arrays of panel antennas surrounding the pole itself. Given the relatively sparse population in the area, and the fact that road travelers will typically be low-volume users, non-sectorized omni-directional antennas should be sufficient to handle the local communications / data load.

The technical report includes a chart labeled "Population Coverage (2008 Census Block Data)." The town requests that ATT explain how those population estimates were derived, and whether the figures presented represent only permanent residents, or also include the owners of second homes in the area.

A more specific and useful analysis of the effects of the change of coverage would be based on an accounting of the buildings that would have coverage or not. A map exists showing all of the buildings in town as of 2007, digitized in a format that allows it to be added as a map layer on existing digital maps of the town. The town requests that ATT add this layer to their maps, so that a more detailed and better founded analysis can be done. The map / data set is available from the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials organization in Brookfield, Ct.

If the Coote Hill proposal were to be implemented, Sherman prefers that the proposed tower be no more than 120', that it use omni-directional antenna technology rather than the panel antennas, and that it be done with a companion antenna at Tower Hill.

Regarding an alternative site for the southern section of town:

The RCC work says that a tower located on land owned by Naromi Land Trust (NLT) on the top of Mauweehoo Hill would provide very much better coverage than the proposed Coote Hill Site – a 120' tower at that site would cover better than 32% of the area of the town, versus less than 18% for a 170' tower at Coote Hill.

A tower at that site would likely be much less visible, both in the surrounding area and from a distance

The property in question was formerly owned by [Indy Mac Bank??], and is

listed as [# 20?] in the list of Sites Evaluated in the ATT Technical Report. The property is now owned by Naromi Land Trust, who is open to discussion of this project. Access would be from Wagon Wheel Road, and would not be simple, but may compare favorably with the access problems for the Coote Hill site.

Sherman prefers that ATT consider the NLT property on Mauweehoo Hill as an alternative location to the Coote Hill site.

Regarding a comprehensive town-wide plan for cellphone coverage:

RCC has investigated additional sites in Sherman that could be the basis for very much improved cellphone coverage in the whole town:

– a site on land just north of the Fire Department building in the center of town. This site is also owned by Naromi Land Trust. It provides better coverage for the central section of town than either the White Silo location (S2041) or the Happy Acres location (CT5502), and it is heavily wooded so that visual impact would likely be minimal.

– a site at the north end of town, on the top of Evans Hill, off Evans Hill Road. This site would provide both cellphone and fire department communications coverage for much of the north end of town, as well as Routes 39 and 55 in Sherman and Route 7 in Gaylordsville. This site is currently in private hands, but the owners have indicated an interest in preserving the land in general and are open to the idea that a communications facility might help to accomplish that.

– as mentioned above, the Tower Hill site in Patterson, NY adds significantly to the coverage of the town along the NY border in the southern section of town.

Sherman prefers that ATT consider a comprehensive, town-wide solution for cellphone coverage in town.

Regarding the Town's Public Safety Communication system:

The Town of Sherman has invested in work to improve the public

safety communications system used by the Volunteer Fire Department and the Emergency Management department of town government. These improvements are based on the addition of antenna structures at the north and south ends of town, very similar to (but not nearly as intrusive as) that proposed by ATT at the south end of town.

Sherman prefers that any communications infrastructure provide space for both cellphone and public safety communications antennas and equipment on the same site and structures.

Prepared by David Hopkins, Chair, Sherman Public Safety Communications Committee