

DOCKET NO. 415 - Cellco Partnership d/b/a Verizon Wireless } Connecticut
application for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and }
Public Need for the construction, maintenance and operation of a } Siting
telecommunications facility located at 87 West Quasset Road, }
Woodstock, Connecticut. } Council

November 17, 2011

Opinion

On January 28, 2011, Cellco Partnership d/b/a Verizon Wireless (Cellco) applied to the Connecticut Siting Council (Council) for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need (Certificate) for the construction, maintenance and operation of a wireless telecommunications facility located at the Quasset Hill Farm, 87 West Quasset Road in Woodstock, Connecticut. The proposed facility would provide wireless service for Cellco to the southeast corner of Woodstock.

Cellco currently provides cellular service to the area via two omni-directional antennas mounted at the top of an existing 140-foot tower located at the farm. The existing tower, owned by American Tower Corporation (ATC), is not structurally capable of supporting Cellco's proposed antenna loading. No other telecommunication carriers are located on the ATC tower.

Cellco proposes to construct a new 150-foot monopole approximately 710 feet northwest of the existing ATC tower. The tower would be capable of supporting multiple antenna platforms, allowing Cellco to provide personal communication service (PCS) and long-term evolution service (LTE) to the area, as well as supporting additional carriers that may seek to locate on the tower in the future.

During the proceeding, the Council expressed concern that Cellco's proposal would lead to the unnecessary proliferation of towers in the state because Cellco was proposing a new tower on the parcel with the ATC tower remaining in place. The Council re-opened the record to hear evidence regarding the viability of installing a new tower, referred to as the ATC replacement tower, adjacent to ATC's existing tower. After the close of the re-opened hearing, ATC, an intervenor in the re-opened proceeding, indicated it would terminate its existing lease with the landowner and remove the existing ATC tower as soon as possible.

The proposed Cellco site is located in a wooded area in the central portion of the 29-acre farm. Active agricultural fields on the property are located south and east of the wooded area. The nearest property line to the proposed tower is approximately 350 feet to the north. The nearest residence to the proposed tower site is located approximately 820 feet to the southeast.

Access to the Cellco site would utilize existing farm paths leading to the edge of the wooded area where the compound would be located. A new driveway would be constructed northward, across a drainage ditch, and extending 30 feet into the woods to the compound site. Development of the new drive and compound would require filling 500 square feet of the drainage ditch and removing 11 trees.

The proposed ATC replacement tower would be installed approximately 20 feet from the existing ATC tower, which is located in the southeast corner of the Quasset Hill Farm parcel, 120 feet west of West Quasset Road. The property line and residence nearest to the ATC replacement tower are approximately 35 feet to the south and approximately 235 feet to the east, respectively. The ATC replacement tower setback radius would extend onto the abutting property to the south by 120 feet and onto the abutting property to the east by 50 feet.

Development of either site would have no effect on any cultural, historical or natural resources identified within the area. There are no records of any state or federally endangered, threatened or special concern species in the area of either proposed site. Development of the Cellco site would require minor clearing and the filling of a farm drainage ditch. There are no wetland impacts or clearing related to the development of the ATC replacement tower.

In regards to Cellco's proposed service objectives, the Council finds the existing Cellco coverage insufficient in providing service needs to the area, particularly given the array of services typically presently offered by cellular and PCS networks.

Cellco's proposed site would be capable of supporting the company's LTE service when it is deployed in this region of the state. Coverage from the proposed ATC tower replacement tower would be similar, and would also meet Cellco's service requirements; however, given the slightly lower elevation at that location, Cellco would require the tower to be 160 feet.

The visibility impacts of the two proposed sites are similar. The main difference is that the proposed ATC replacement tower would be more prominent from the east shore of Wappaquasset Pond, where numerous dwellings front the pond. Overall, the Council finds the visibility impact of the proposed Cellco tower less than that of the proposed ATC replacement tower. With the exception of the Wappaquasset Pond area, the surrounding area can be characterized as rural residential with large tracts of farm fields and woodlands. The Council finds the Cellco tower to be non-obtrusive to the surrounding area, given that there is already an existing 140-foot tower on the property and that the Cellco tower would be located in a wooded area in the center of the farm, where trees would buffer the view from neighboring properties.

According to methodology prescribed by the FCC Office of Engineering and Technology Bulletin No. 65E, Edition 97-01 (August 1997), the combined worst case radio frequency power density levels of Cellco's antennas proposed to be installed on the tower have been calculated to amount to 17 percent of the FCC's Maximum Permissible Exposure, as measured at the base of the tower. This percentage is well below federal and state standards established for the frequencies used by wireless companies. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 prohibits any state or local agency from regulating telecommunications towers on the basis of the environmental effects of radio frequency emissions to the extent that such towers and equipment comply with FCC's regulations concerning such emissions. If federal or state standards change, the Council will require that the tower be brought into compliance with such standards. The Council will require that the power densities be recalculated in the event other carriers add antennas to the tower.

Based on the record in this proceeding, the Council finds that the effects associated with the construction, maintenance and operation of a telecommunications facility at the proposed Cellco site, including effects on the natural environment; ecological integrity and balance; public health and safety; scenic, historic, and recreational values; forests and parks; air and water purity; and fish and wildlife are not disproportionate either alone or cumulatively with other effects when compared to need, are not in conflict with policies of the State concerning such effects, and are not sufficient reason to deny this application. Therefore, the Council will issue a Certificate for the construction, maintenance, and operation of a 150-foot monopole telecommunications facility at the proposed Cellco site at 87 West Quasset Road in Woodstock, Connecticut. The Council denies certification of the proposed ATC replacement site.