DOCKET NO. 437 – New Cingular Wireless PCS, LLC application for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need for the construction, maintenance, and operation of a telecommunications facility located at 111 Second Hill Road, Bridgewater, Connecticut.	}	Connecticut
	}	Siting
	}	Council

September 5, 2013

Opinion

On March 5, 2013, New Cingular Wireless PCS LLC (AT&T) 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 111 Second Hill Road in Bridgewater, Connecticut. AT&T's objective for this facility would be to provide service along Route 67, Route 133 and adjacent areas in northern Bridgewater and western Roxbury.

AT&T proposes to construct a 160-foot monopole on a 4.5-acre residentially developed parcel on the east side of Second Hill Road. The tower site would be located in the wooded, northeast corner of the parcel, adjacent to a Connecticut Light and Power Company easement that traverses the northern portion of the property. The nearest property lines to the proposed tower site are approximately 110 feet east and north. The nearest off-parcel residence is 475 feet west of the tower. There are no schools or licensed day-care facilities within 250 feet of the tower.

AT&T proposes to install 12 panel antennas on a low-profile antenna platform at the 157-foot level of the tower. Additional space for tower sharing would be available for three other telecommunication providers. A fenced compound would be established at the base of the tower. An emergency diesel generator would be located within the compound, capable of supplying a 48-hour run time before refueling is necessary.

AT&T proposes to operate 850 MHz (cellular), 1900 MHz (PCS), and 700 MHz (LTE) service equipment at the site. AT&T does not have reliable coverage to the proposed service area, defined by AT&T as less than -82 dBm for roadways and -74 dBm for residential areas. AT&T's existing signal strength in the proposed service area ranges from less than -100 dBm to -82 dBm. The Council notes an AT&T facility now under construction in the southern part of Bridgewater on Wewaka Hill Road would not provide coverage to the northern part of Bridgewater, the objective of the proposed facility.

The proposed site would provide AT&T with 10.7 square miles of in-building and 8.3 square miles of in-vehicle coverage to the north part of Bridgewater, including the Route 67 area, Christian Road, Clapboard Road and the town center area along Route 133 that contains the town hall and The Burnham School.

Based on an examination of AT&T's coverage objectives and previous site search encompassing various properties in Bridgewater, the Council finds a need for the 160-foot tower at the site. The Council notes the existing 110-foot Department of Transportation (DOT) communications pole on Second Hill Road is not a suitable location for a new facility, given that the existing pole would need replacement and the open nature of the small DOT parcel would offer no screening to abutting residences.

Access to the tower compound would be from a new 350-foot long access drive extending from Second Hill Road along the edge of the CL&P right-of-way to the tower site. Utility service to the tower compound would be installed underground along the access road from an existing utility pole on Second Hill Road. Development of the access drive and tower compound would require the removal of approximately 70 trees and shrubs located within a wooded strip of land along the CL&P easement.

Development of the site would not directly affect any wetlands. A drainage system has been designed to convey storm water flows into a new catch basin on Second Hill Road.

The site is in the area of known records of the American Kestrel, a State threatened species. Upon recommendation by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), AT&T planned to perform a survey for kestrel nests in and adjacent to the project site and submit the results to DEEP for comment. AT&T would implement any recommendations from DEEP to protect this species, and detail such implementation in its D&M Plan.

The site is also in an area with known records of the wood turtle, a State species of special concern. To reduce potential impacts to wood turtles that may be in the project area, AT&T would develop a turtle protection program prior to construction that would be submitted to DEEP for comment, and included in its D&M Plan. Similar protection plans have been developed for other projects within the State.

Year-round views of the tower within a half-mile of the site would mostly occur from open fields north and south of the tower site. Although these fields are part the State's farmland preservation program and are considered open space, public access is not permitted. Year-round views of the tower from residential properties within the half-mile radius would be mitigated by planting spruce trees along the south edge of the compound and at other points on the landowner's property appropriate to provide screening. At an historic farm on Second Hill Road that abuts the site to the south, representatives from SHPO observed a balloon-fly simulating the tower height and determined the tower would have no effect on this resource. Otherwise, given the hilly terrain of the area, the tower would be distantly visible year-round from a few residential areas and road sections more than a half-mile to two miles away.

Mixed seasonal and year-round views of the tower would occur from Second Hill Road, a town-designated scenic road, for approximately a half-mile as it runs along the crest of Second Hill. These views would be intermittent, however. Additionally, AT&T has developed a landscape plan that includes evergreen trees and shrub species along the proposed access drive as well as within the compound area to provide visual screening of the equipment compound from Second Hill Road north and south of the tower site.

As for stealth applications at this site, a flush-mount design in which antennas are mounted close to the tower to minimize the tower profile could limit the type and quantity of antennas a carrier could install. This limitation, in turn, could cause a tower to be extended to meet any future collocators' coverage and service needs. Although other stealth designs were not discussed in detail during the proceeding, the Council does not find this particular location suitable for a tree tower or faux silo, since the overall dimensions of such a structure would make it appear bulky and out of place relative to its surroundings.

According to a methodology prescribed by the FCC Office of Engineering and Technology Bulletin No. 65E, Edition 97-01 (August 1997), the combined radio frequency power density levels of AT&T's antennas proposed to be installed on the tower have been calculated to amount to 6.9% of the FCC's General Public/Uncontrolled 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 Council will require that the power densities be recalculated in the event other carriers add antennas to the tower, including the Town's emergency communication antennas. Also, if federal or state standards change, the Council will require that the tower be brought into compliance with such standards. 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.

Based on the record in this proceeding, the Council finds that the effects associated with the construction, operation, and maintenance of the telecommunications facility at the proposed 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, operation, and maintenance of a 160-foot monopole telecommunications facility at the proposed site.