DOCKET NO. 121 - An application of SNET Cellular, Inc., for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need for the construction, operation, and maintenance of a cellular telephone tower and associated equipment in the Town of Stonington, Connecticut

CONNECTICUT

SITING

COUNCIL

February 15, 1990

OPINION

On September 27, 1989, SNET Cellular, Inc., (SNET) applied to the Connecticut Siting Council (Council) for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need (Certificate) to construct, operate, and maintain a cellular telephone antenna tower and associated equipment building in the Town of Stonington, Connecticut.

The public need for cellular telephone facilities has been determined by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The Council must therefore balance the need to develop the proposed site as a cellular telephone facility with the need to protect the environment and minimize damage to the State's historic and recreational values. The proposed Stonington cellular site is planned to overlap with existing SNET cellular coverage to the north from an existing site in North Stonington, to the west with the existing Waterford site, and would provide future hand-off with a NYNEX site in Rhode Island. Coverage would be provided to Routes 1, 27, 184, and I-95 within Stonington, Pawcatuck, and Mystic. In addition, existing areas of weak coverage from the North Stonington cell site would be strengthened.

In its application, SNET includes both a proposed and an alternative site. The proposed site is adjacent to an existing SNET Central Office building on Pequot Trail. This property is owned by SNET and is zoned RR-80 Rural Residential. SNET proposes to erect a 130-foot monopole at this site. The cellular antennas and message alert antennas on this tower would result in a total structure height of 150 feet.

The proposed site is 70 feet from the nearest wetlands, and approximately 240 feet from the William Woodbridge House, a residence which could be eligible for the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

The proposed tower would be visible from the cul-de-sac on Taugwank Road, from the intersection of Taugwank Road and Pequot Trail, from the intersection of Runnymede Road and Pequot Trail, and from the intersection of Farm Holme Road and Pequot Trail.

To house its electronic equipment, SNET would use 400 square feet of office space within the existing SNET Central Office building.

The alternative tower site on Taugwank Spur is within an M-2 Manufacturing Park Zoning district and adjacent to an existing multi-tenant storage building. SNET would place their tower next to the existing storage building, in which SNET would lease space for their equipment. Because the alternative site is some 20 feet lower in elevation than the proposed site, a 150-foot monopole would be constructed. The total height of the structure at the alternative site, including antennas, would be 170 feet. The alternative site is approximately 250 feet from the nearest wetlands, and 1300 feet from the William Woodbridge House. The State Historic Commission prefers the construction of the tower at the alternative site. The alternative tower would be visible from Taugwank Spur, Taugwank Road, and Route I-95.

There are no existing records of federally endangered or threatened species or Connecticut species of special concern occurring in the area of the proposed or alternative sites.

Electromagnetic radio frequency power densities are a concern to many residents living in the vicinity of any telecommunications tower. In the present case, however, the power density levels at the base of the proposed and alternative towers would be well below the American National Standards Institute safety standards for the proposed frequencies.

Because of the technical design of the cellular system as required by the FCC, coverage from the existing North Stonington and Waterford sites could not be expanded to cover the Stonington area. Nevertheless, SNET evaluated the use of the existing 190-foot tower in North Stonington on which SNET has cellular antennas attached at the 135-foot and 165-foot levels. Modeling revealed that signal strength from this location would not be sufficient even using a 300-foot tower. In addition, interference with NYNEX signals on Long Island might also occur using such a tower.

The Council prefers the alternative tower site because it would be farther from wetlands, homes, nearby roads, and the possibly historic William Woodbridge House. In addition, the alternative site is in a manufacturing land use zone that is compatible with the proposed tower. The residential zone of the proposed site would be less compatible for development of the proposed tower.

Based on its record in this proceeding, the Council finds that the effects associated with the construction, operation, and maintenance of a cellular tower and

associated equipment building at the alternative 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 significant either alone or cumulatively with other effects, are not in conflict with the policies of the State concerning such effects, and are not sufficient reason to deny the alternative site.

Therefore the Council will issue a Certificate for the construction of the alternative Stonington tower site. The Council will require the Certificate Holder to submit a Development and Management Plan (D&M Plan) for approval to the Council prior to the commencement of any construction or clearing at the tower site. This D&M plan shall include detailed plans for erosion and sediment control; seeding, loaming, and landscaping around the tower site; and plans for the relocation of the storm drainage pipe at the tower site.

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