DOCKET NO. 131 - An application of Metro Mobile CTS of Hartford, 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 West Hartford, Connecticut.

Connecticut

Siting

Council

April 9, 1990

OPINION

On September 29, 1989, Metro Mobile CTS of Hartford, Inc., (Metro Mobile) applied to the Connecticut Siting Council (Council) for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need (Certificate) to construct, maintain, and operate a cellular telecommunications tower and associated equipment facility in the Town of West Hartford, Connecticut.

A determination of public need for cellular telephone service has been pre-empted by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Under Connecticut State law, the Council must balance the need to develop the proposed site as a cellular telephone facility with the need to protect the environment, including public health and safety.

In finding a proposed tower site, an applicant must locate a site or existing tower to share, offering the necessary coverage that would not have a substantial effect on the environment, and be adequately distant from wetlands, public recreation areas, and adjacent homes. Because Metro Mobile does not have the authority to take land through eminent domain, acquisition of a site requires consent of the property owners to lease or sell the property. These requirements restrict the number of potential tower sites within defined search areas.

The proposed or alternate site would function as a secondary cellular facility, located near the intersection of two existing, primary cellular facilities in Hartford and Farmington, Connecticut. The projected future cellular service demand is expected to exceed the call-handling capacity of these two facilities in 1990. The proposed West Hartford site would provide additional overlapping coverage between these cells for the continuous transfer of calls from Hartford to Farmington, from which there is presently inadequate call-handling capability, weak signals, interference, and dropped calls. The proposed and alternative sites, would provide improved coverage and call-handling capability throughout the area.

The proposed site would be developed on a parcel of private property located at 570 Park Avenue, West Hartford. The proposed 163-foot, self-supporting monopole tower and antenna structure would be located adjacent to and west of Conrail railroad property and 200 feet east of New Park Avenue. The fall zone of the tower would encompass the railroad tracks, three commercial buildings on three abutting private properties, and a building owned by the lessor. An existing brick garage would be used as an equipment shelter. Vehicle access to the proposed site would be over an existing driveway. Existing overhead utility lines on New Park Avenue would be accessed from a utility easement through the surrounding property. No vegetation would be cleared from the site.

The alternate site would be located on private property in the rear of 631 New Park Avenue, West Hartford. A 193-foot high, self-supporting steel monopole tower and antenna structure would be constructed on a 25-foot by 40-foot parcel owned by the lessor. The fall zone of the alternate tower would include buildings on the land of the lessor, commercial establishments on two adjacent private properties, and properties of two other adjacent property owners. A single story, concrete equipment building, measuring 20 feet by 22 feet, would be constructed on the site. Vehicle access to the cell site would be over an existing parking area. Existing overhead utility lines would be accessed across land owned by the lessor. No vegetation would be cleared from the site.

Electromagnetic radio frequency power density is a health and safety concern of the Council. However, the electromagnetic radio frequency power density levels, assuming all 90 channels are operating simultaneously at maximum allowable power and measured at the base of the proposed or alternate towers, would be 0.0636 milliwatts per square centimeter (mW/cm^2) at the proposed site and 0.0433 mW/cm^2 at the alternate site, both well below the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) safety standard of 2.92 mW/cm^2, as adopted by the State in Connecticut General Statutes 22a-162. The power density would rapidly decrease as distance from the tower increased.

Although tower visibility is an issue of concern, there are no residences located within 1,000 feet of the proposed tower site. There are six residential buildings situated within 1,000 feet of the alternate site. The nearest residential building, located approximately 450 feet from the alternate site, is an apartment building containing 72 housing units. Both sites would be partially screened by intervening buildings and vegetation located between sight-line vantage points and the tower site. Both towers would be visible from some surrounding areas.

Metro Mobile would consider sharing the proposed tower but no persons, agencies, or organizations have expressed any interest in using the proposed or alternate tower.

Metro Mobile investigated ten possible cell sites for a cellular facility, rejecting eight for various reasons. Consultation with West Hartford town officials regarding potential sites, indicated that the officials had no specific preference regarding the location of the proposed and alternate sites.

No wetlands or water courses exist on either site. No water flow and/or quality changes would be expected to result from the construction and operation of either the proposed or alternate facilities.

Neither the proposed or alternate site construction would have any significant impact on rare or endangered species or areas of unique historic or archaeological resources.

The proposed facility would cost an estimated $982,540 to construct, approximately $86,760 less than the alternate facility.

Although both the proposed and alternate sites would have fall zones in close proximity to commercial structures and would extend onto abutting property, the area of the sites is well developed with commercial and industrial services. It is unlikely that these establishments would be adversely affected, either visually or otherwise, by the presence of the proposed facility. The development of a cellular telecommunications facility at either of these sites would be compatible with adjacent landuses, and would have few adverse visual, health, or environmental effects. However, because the proposed tower structure would be 30 feet lower than the alternate tower structure, would cost less to develop, and would be less visible to nearby residences, the proposed site is the better choice for the facility.

Because the proposed tower's fall zone would be located approximately 30 feet from Conrail railroad tracks, an electric distribution line, and several commercial buildings owned by the site lessor and abutting property owners, the Council feels a stronger tower structure would provide an additional margin of safety. Therefore, the Council will order a tower strong enough to withstand 125 mile per hour winds with two-inch radial ice accumulation be constructed at the approved site.

Based on its record in this proceeding, the Council opines that the effects associated with the construction, operation, and maintenance of a cellular site and associated equipment building at the proposed site, including the 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 application.

The Council will require Metro Mobile to submit a Development and Management (D&M) plan for approval prior to the commencement of any construction at the proposed site or accessway. This D&M plan shall include detailed plans of the site's preparation with the final tower height in relation to the site elevation, erosion and sedimentation controls, plans for site access, soil boring report, and foundation design specific to the site.

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