DOCKET NO. 18

APPLICATION BY NORTHWEST CABLEVISION INCORPORATED FOR A CERTIFICATE OF ENVIRONMENTAL COMPATIBILITY AND PUBLIC NEED TO ERECT A VHF TROPOSCATTER PARABOLIC REFLECTOR IN THE TOWN OF WINSTED, CONNECTICUT	:	POWER FACILITY EVALUATION COUNCIL AUGUST 5, 1980

O P I N I O N

I. GENERAL

Northwest Cablevision applied for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need for the construction of a modification, consisting of a VHF Troposcatter Parabolic Reflector, to its existing head-end facility off Winchester Road in Winchester, Connecticut. The proposed facility modification is expected to improve reception of several New York television stations.

A public hearing was held at the Pierson Junior High School, 2 Wetmore Avenue, Winsted, (Winchester Township), Connecticut, on June 3, 1980. Prior to the hearing Council members and staff inspected the existing head-end and the surrounding area. Notice of the hearing was duly advertised and notice was mailed in accordance with law.

The applicant presented testimony and exhibits to support its claim that the tower will not have substantial adverse environmental effect and that it is needed to provide adequate and reliable service to their customers. Four residents of Winchester were made parties and the current chairman of the Winchester Planning and Zoning Commission made a limited appearance. Three of the four parties spoke in opposition to the proposed facility modification and one offered alternative suggestions. The existing facility was approved by the town Planning and Zoning Commission in 1972.

II. Environmental Impact

The Council considered the proposed modification to the company's existing head-end facility and concludes that the six towers supporting horizontal wires, on the applicant's property off Winchester Road, Winchester, will have substantial adverse environmental effect. Based on the record and on their field review of the site and surrounding area, the Council concludes that the modification, described as a Troposcatter Parabolic Reflector, will be highly visible from many nearby roads, residences, and public recreational facilities.

The reasons that the Council considers this modification to have a substantial visual impact are: the proximity of Platt Hill State Park which offers panoramic views of the surrounding hills and lakes of the area; the visual intrusion on private property, including nearby residences; and the potential for long term impact on the development and property values in the vicinity of the area, which is presently zoned as a rural area.

The Council recognized in their field review that the existing facility, consisting of four wooden poles with antennae, is visible from most of the areas to be impacted by the facility modification. However, the reflector addition will extend the total width of the facility from less than 90 feet to approximately 240 feet. The existing 90 foot poles extend about 50 feet above the tree canopy according to company estimates, but the new towers range from 90 to 120 feet. Thus some towers may extend as much as 80 feet above the canopy. As well, the necessary clearing will increase the prominence of the existing facility and the addition.

The facility modification will require clearing of a triangular area roughly 150 by 135 feet, but no chemicals will be used, no landscape or contour changes will be made, and no fill will be added. Access will be over an existing road which may be subject to erosion. Otherwise, the construction project is not expected to cause significant impacts on natural systems, and the entire facility will be enclosed by a six foot security fence. The power density of off-air signal received at the focal point of the reflector will be 2.12 millionths of a milliwatt per square centimeter, about 5 million times less than the OSHA standard of 10 milliwatts per square centimeter.

III. NEED

Having concluded that the proposed modification to the existing head-end facility will have a substantial adverse environmental effect, the Council considered the need for the modification to provide adequate and reliable public utility service (cable television) and concludes that the need is present.

The company utilizes off-air reception at its head-end facility to pick up signals from several New York stations. The company's service area, and thus its head-end facility, are approximately equidistant

from Boston and New York. Due to this location, the reception of television signals from New York is interfered with by signals from Boston, a condition known as co-channeling. The condition is aggravated by atmospheric conditions, particularly in spring and summer, and has precipitated numerous complaints from subscribers, including a petition to the DPUC regarding the poor reception. The company proposes a parabolic reflector design antenna, which will augment the existing antenna and which is designed to reduce the co-channeling interference.

They will invest approximately $45,700.00 in the modification, which they expect to virtually rectify the situation. It is expected to operate for ten years.

Three technological alternatives were considered by the applicant. Two alternate reflector designs were rejected as having greater potential for environmental impact, and the third alternative, establishment of microwave links was rejected on economic grounds. The company does not rule out technological advances that may provide different means of correcting co-channeling problems in the future.

No alternative sites were considered for the proposed facility, since the company considers their existing head-end to be the only economically and technically feasible site.

The technological and siting alternatives were not detailed regarding costs or environmental impacts to the same extent as the proposed facility modification, and the company opinions and cost estimates in these regards were not challenged.

IV. Conclusion

The Council concludes that although several vistas and private residences will suffer visual impacts from the proposed modification, the need to provide adequate and reliable service to several hundred subscribers outweighs these impacts. Tower structures are not new to the area; a substantial AT&T tower is quite nearby and, of course, the existing head-end has been present for several years. Other than visual, the environmental impacts of the proposed modification are expected to be insignificant. Potential does exist for erosion along the access road which may be accelerated by construction. The company has no plans to protect adjacent wetlands from erosion, so the Council will specify methods for this protection in their

Development and Management Plan.

In the future technological developments may provide a less intrusive means of improving the co-channeling situation at reasonable cost, or atmospheric conditions may change and alleviate the problem. In the event the reflector is no longer used, the Council will order it be removed.

None of these concerns, however, obviate the immediate need to improve the quality of service to the customers of Northwest Cablevision. Therefore, the Council concludes that a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need should be issued for the proposed modification to the company's head-end facility.