

DOCKET NO. 62

AN APPLICATION OF THE SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND : CONNECTICUT SITING  
TELEPHONE COMPANY FOR A CERTIFICATE OF  
ENVIRONMENTAL COMPATIBILITY AND PUBLIC :  
NEED FOR THE CONSTRUCTION, MAINTENANCE, : COUNCIL  
AND OPERATION OF FACILITIES TO PROVIDE  
CELLULAR SERVICE IN THE TOWN OF :  
CANTON, CONNECTICUT. : August 4, 1986

O P I N I O N

Southern New England Telephone Company (SNET) applied to the Connecticut Siting Council (Council) for a certificate of environmental compatibility and public need for the construction, maintenance, and operation of a telecommunications tower and associated equipment building in the Town of Canton on March 21, 1986. This application is an addition to the existing Hartford New England County Metropolitan Area (NECMA) system.

The proceedings in this application raised a number of questions regarding the possible effects of radiofrequency (RF) electromagnetic radiation on humans. Evidence presented in the hearings of this application underscored the present state of scientific uncertainty regarding the levels at which RF radiation may be harmful to human health. This places the Council, along with the federal government, in a similar state of uncertainty. While it is known that high levels of RF radiation are unsafe, it is not known at which levels, if any, they do become safe or tolerable. The technological advances of recent years have enabled scientists to detect biological changes in animal tissues at minute levels of exposure to RF radiation. It is unknown whether such observed changes bear long-term significance or not.

It is the understanding of the Council that, in general, scientists are far more concerned with the much higher RF radiation levels emitted by television and FM broadcast towers than the minute amounts emanating from cellular and microwave towers. Until steps are taken by federal, state, and local regulatory agencies to protect the public from the much higher RF radiation levels of FM and television towers, the Council cannot deny this application on the basis of the very low levels of RF radiation found in cellular telephone systems. The Council must base its decisions on its knowledge of facts, rather than on a fear of the unknown.

Aside from RF radiation concerns, the major effect of this 150' monopole would be visual. Although six homes would have direct views of the tower, the height of the trees surrounding the site and nearby homes will reduce visibility. East Hill Road quickly drops off as one moves away from the site, which will also attenuate visibility to a considerable degree. The applicant will plant additional evergreens for screening, as will be specified in a future Development and Management Plan.

SNET evaluated several other sites in the Canton area, but these would have led to a tower more widely visible than the tower proposed for Hoffmann Road. Another site, in an industrial area, would have been further removed from homes, ordinarily a desirable circumstance, but in this case a tower some 250'-300' taller than the one proposed would have been necessary, due to the site's low elevation.

SNET found no existing private or public service towers within its search area. SNET investigated Onion Mountain as a potential site, but this site presents problems of access, steep slope, and proximity to the Nature Conservancy and Town of Simsbury recreation properties. In addition, a tower atop Onion Mountain would be visible from a much wider area than one on Hoffmann Road.

In an effort to further reduce the visibility of the proposed tower, the Council inquired into the possibility of lowering the height of this tower, as has been done in other cases. A 20' reduction in tower height would result in significant coverage losses on nearby roadways, as well as a decreased coverage overlap with the existing Southington cell.

In its deliberations, the Council weighed the potential adverse environmental effects of this tower, such as RF radiation and visibility, against the public need for this facility, and found such effects not substantial enough to deny the proposed tower site. The Council will therefore grant SNET a certificate of environmental compatibility and public need for a 150' tower on Hoffmann Road in Canton.