

DOCKET NO. 150 - An application of the State of Connecticut, Department of Public Safety, Division of State Police for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need for the construction, operation, and maintenance of a telecommunications facility located on Butternut Hollow Road, in the Town of Greenwich, Connecticut.

Connecticut

Siting

Council

August 4, 1992

OPINION

On February 20, 1992, The Connecticut Department of Public Safety, Division of State Police (State Police) 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 telecommunications tower, associated equipment, and building in the Town of Greenwich, Connecticut.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has recognized a need for effective public safety communications and has therefore established a National Plan for frequency allocation in the 800 MHz spectrum. The State Police with other public agencies from New Jersey, New York, and New England states, cooperated in designing plans through both the Tri-State and the New England region for application of FCC licenses.

The State Police plan to replace their existing outdated, overburdened two-way radio system with a modern arrangement using point-to-point microwave and 800 MHz two-way mobile telecommunications system. This system would be able to support mobile data terminals, voice encryption, higher transmission speed for computer operation, operation of 2000 mobile units, and future expansion of the system which could not be addressed or upgraded in the current two-way radio system.

The proposed facility would consolidate the telecommunications equipment of five tower users: the State Police; Metro Mobile CTS of Fairfield County, Inc. (Metro Mobile); the Town of Greenwich; the Connecticut Department of Transportation; and the Fairfield County Chiefs of Police Association. Seventeen locations were investigated with sixteen sites rejected for various reasons including unacceptable coverage, environmental effects, and unavailability of potential sites.

The proposed application addresses the implementation of a point-to-point microwave telecommunications system linking centers of dispatch of existing State Police troops, district commands, headquarters, and other fixed locations; and would provide two-way radio service to the State Police in southwest Connecticut. Presently, this area is interconnected by leased telephone landlines which is susceptible to a greater number of potential outage risks. The proposed system would allow the State Police to operate an independent, efficient, and more reliable communications network than the existing system.

Metro Mobile, which has been issued a license by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to construct and operate a cellular telephone system in the Bridgeport New England County Metropolitan Area, which includes the Town of Greenwich, has demonstrated a need to provide additional cellular coverage to Greenwich, particularly in specific areas along the Merritt Parkway where reception is poor or nonexistent. Such coverage would supplement cellular coverage presently provided by the three Metro Mobile facilities sited in Greenwich. Metro Mobile entered into a license agreement with the Department of Public Safety to incur the costs of constructing and maintaining the facility for twenty-five years. The State Police would incur no cost to construct the facility and would receive ownership of the facility upon completion of construction.

The proposed facility would offer the Town of Greenwich an opportunity to upgrade its existing low band communications system which has not been sufficient to handle the requirements of the Town's fire and police departments. In addition, the facility would provide the Connecticut Department of Transportation and the Fairfield County Chiefs of Police Association an opportunity to improve their telecommunications systems in the area.

We are concerned that the placement of the State Police antennas on the tower is not scheduled until mid-1994 when the Connecticut Telecommunications System is activated. However, the placement of antennas on the tower for Metro Mobile and the Town of Greenwich would occur in 1992. Considering the combined efforts by the parties to find one tower site compatible with the radio coverage requirements of the several tower users, we believe the public would be best served by the construction of the proposed facility at the Butternut Hollow Road site at this time.

The Council generally prefers monopole type towers which have a thinner appearance and are less visually obtrusive. However, we believe the proposed 180-foot high lattice tower in this application is appropriate to support the proposed microwave dish antenna and other antennas to be used by the local, regional, State, and private entities. This relationship of sharing towers for the greatest number of users possible will ultimately eliminate the construction of additional towers at other locations. No other one site in Greenwich could fulfill the coverage requirements with lesser effects on the environment including the construction of a radio telecommunications facility at an alternate site on property of the Parkway School in Greenwich. Not only does tower sharing meet the Council's long term goal, but it fulfills a legislative intent for the purpose of the Council.

Electromagnetic radio frequency power density emitted by radio transmitters is a serious public health and safety concern of the Council and those who live in the area. However, the cumulative radio frequency power density of all 17 antenna systems intended for placement on the tower, operating simultaneously at maximum power, would total 2.5247 percent of the American National Standards Institute safe limit standards at the base of the tower, as adopted by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) as the State standard, and would become much lower as distance from the tower increases. We therefore believe the radio signal transmission system would not present an undue health or safety hazard to residents in the tower area. Nonetheless, we will order that if such State standards are changed, the tower and associated equipment must be brought into compliance.

Although the site is within a residential zone, the surrounding area is secluded and wooded on all sides, which would screen the facility from the view of nearby residences, the closest of which is approximately 850 feet distant. Visibility of the tower would be further minimized by the absence of air traffic warning lights and tower markings. Even though the tower is in near proximity to Highway Route 15, the fall zone of the proposed tower would encompass property owned by the State of Connecticut and the Greenwich Water Company, with the State Police equipment building the only structure within the fall zone.

Due to the presence of numerous trees along Butternut Hollow Road, extensive tree pruning and removal would be required for installation of the overhead utility line, thereby potentially causing considerable damage to the environment during construction. Therefore, we will order that the proposed utility line be placed underground from the nearest utility pole on Butternut Hollow Road to the site. The Connecticut Light and Power Company and the Town of Greenwich will be provided an opportunity to review these plans prior to the commencement of construction.

Nearby wetlands are not expected to be unduly affected by the construction of the facility and utility line. Nonetheless, Council policy requires that all construction areas be managed in accordance with Connecticut Guidelines for Erosion and Sedimentation Control to control sedimentation. In addition, we note that such controls will offer protection to Putnam Lake, a public water supply source located east and south of the site.

During the field review of the proposed facility site, we observed an area that appeared to contain an abandoned building foundation. Due to the potential historical nature of this site, we will order a Phase I archaeological survey be conducted by a professional archaeologist and a report of these investigations be submitted to the Council. All artifacts shall be made available for inspection by the Connecticut Historic Preservation Office and, if necessary, a Phase II archaeological survey shall be prepared and submitted to the Council.

Based on its record in this proceeding, the Council finds that the effects associated with the construction and operation of a telecommunications tower and associated equipment 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, 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 the State Police to submit a Development and Management (D&M) plan for approval prior to the commencement of any construction at the proposed Greenwich site. This D&M plan shall include detailed plans for the site's preparation, tower placement and foundation, architecture of the equipment building and fence, access road, underground utility line, erosion and sedimentation controls, and site landscaping. Selective removal of vegetation will be allowed to permit reconnaissance necessary to prepare the D&M Plan and the Phase I archaeological survey.

TEF/bd

6271E