

PETITION NO. 545 – Nextel Communications Inc. petition for
a declaratory ruling that no Certificate of Environmental
Compatibility and Public Need is required for the proposed
modification of an existing Connecticut Light and Power electric
transmission facility located off of Highland Avenue in
Wallingford, Connecticut.

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Connecticut
Siting
Council

September 5, 2002

Opinion

On February 13, 2002, Nextel Communications Inc. (Nextel) petitioned the Connecticut Siting Council (Council) for a declaratory ruling that no Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need would be required for the proposed modification of an existing Connecticut Light and Power (CL&P) electric transmission facility, tower no. 2498, located east of Highland Avenue in Wallingford, Connecticut. Nextel proposes to install a Powermount within the existing tower which would be consistent with the Council's charge to promote shared use of existing facilities and avoid the unnecessary proliferation of towers in the State as mandated by General Statute § 16-50aa.

The existing tower is owned by CL&P and consists of a 90-foot lattice tower supporting electric transmission lines. Nextel proposes to install a 110-foot Powermount within the structure and install 12 panel antennas at a not to exceed height of 112 feet above ground level. An equipment compound containing a single equipment shelter would be constructed at the base of the existing tower.

The existing facility is located in a CL&P right-of-way containing two separate transmission lines adjacent to residential areas. The Council is concerned about visual impacts of the installation to adjacent residences. While the proposed Powermount and equipment compound would be visible to adjacent residences and public ways, the Council believes adding a Powermount to the existing tower would have a marginal visual impact compared to potential impacts if another tower was constructed in this area. To reduce the visibility of the installation, the Council will direct Nextel to construct the equipment shelter to appear as a wood shed and enclose the equipment compound with a eight-foot high stockade fence surrounded by vegetative screening.

As part of its decision and order for this petition, the Council will require Nextel to obtain an aeronautical study from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for the installation of a 112-foot Powermount facility, including antennas. If the FAA issues a determination of no hazard to air navigation, the Council will allow Nextel to construct a Powermount facility with a not to exceed height of 112 feet. If the FAA determines a hazard to air navigation exists with a Powermount extending to this height; the Council will allow Nextel to construct a 100-foot Powermount, a height previously approved by the FAA.

Installing a 112-foot Powermount facility within the existing lattice structure would allow Nextel to provide adequate coverage in the area, particularly along Route 68, without the need to construct a new tower. In addition, space would be available for a second carrier to locate at the 100-foot level of the Powermount. This is consistent with the Council's objective of using existing structures for telecommunications use, when feasible, to prevent the construction of additional tower structures.

A 0.1-mile gap in coverage along Route 68 would result if antennas were installed on a 100-foot Powermount. Although service in the gap area may result in impaired audio transmissions and a slightly higher percentage of dropped calls, the Council nevertheless believes these effects would be secondary compared to potential environmental and visual effects from the construction of a new tower in the area.

Electromagnetic radio frequency power density levels are a concern of the Council. However, the radio frequency power densities at the base of the proposed facility would be below federal and State standards for the frequencies used by the wireless companies. If federal or State standards change, we will require that this facility be brought into compliance with such standards.

Based on the record in this proceeding, the Council will issue a declaratory ruling that the proposed modification of an existing electric transmission tower located east of Highland Avenue in Wallingford, Connecticut would not have a substantial adverse environmental effect and would not require a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need.