

Municipal Telecommunications Task Force
October 25th, 2010
Woodstock Town Hall, Room A

Meeting Minutes

Attendance: Jeffrey Gordon, Julie Anderson, Mary Weaver, Julie-Anne Goodwin, Don Goodwin, David Payne, Maurice Menards, Roland, Toutant, Sharon Leighton, Dawn Adiletta, David Hosmer, Bet Zimmerman, Joyce Hansen, Ken Baldwin, Sandy Carter, Michael Libertine, Lucia Chiochio, John Markus Oinard, Randy Howse, Alison Shea, and Jack Meltzer.

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by J. Gordon at 7:35 PM.

Report of the Chair: J. Gordon thanked the members of the Task Force for their continued work and for attending tonight's meeting. He welcomed the many members of the public who joined the Task Force for tonight's meeting. He introduced representative of North Atlantic Towers (formerly Florida Towers Partners), AT&T, and Cellco Partnership d/b/a Verizon Wireless. J. Meltzer from the the Villager newspapers and A. Shea from the Norwich Bulletin were introduced.

Approval of May 24th, 2010 meeting minutes: approved.

Verizon Wireless West Quassett cell tower:

This proposal is to replace an old whip antenna facility because the current tower has limited capacity and can service only cell phones. It is ~19 years old. The proposal is for a new tower to be located elsewhere on the same property. The new tower will provide more capacity and be able to handle different types of telecommunications services. There is current coverage in the area, but it is limited and cannot be upgraded on the current tower, according to Verizon Wireless.

American Tower owns the current tower on the site. It is not clear to what degree American Tower has sought to have the tower upgraded so a new tower elsewhere would not be needed. There currently are no other telecommunications companies on the "old" tower other than Verizon Wireless.

It is unclear what would happen to the current tower. Would it be taken down? Verizon Wireless says it does not own the tower so it would not be responsible for it if a new tower were to be built.

Verizon Wireless was asked if the new tower would have capability for other telecommunications companies to co-locate on it. The answer is "yes".

The new tower would be a 150-foot monopole structure. Questions were asked about visibility issues. VHB (hired by Verizon Wireless) stated that nearby houses would see the “old” tower more on the horizon than the “new” tower due to where the proposed tower would sit farther back on the property.

Questions were asked about alternative technologies and stealth approaches. Verizon Wireless says the “old” tower cannot be upgraded in this manner. A “tree” stealth look to a new tower may be possible, but the tower would be above the existing tree canopy and make look more conspicuous if disguised as a tree. Different colorations to a tower, such as brown or dull gray, may be possibilities to blend in the tower with the existing background. Digital array systems have been used by Verizon Wireless and would not need a large tower, but Verizon Wireless said such in this location would not provide enough coverage.

The Coatney Hill tower is ~3 miles from this new tower site.

Questions were asked about the tower/facility footprint and maps were reviewed.

Comments were made about the new tower being able to provide E911 services. Verizon Wireless said “yes”.

Verizon Wireless and VHB were thanked for taking the time to attend the meeting.

Verizon Wireless future plans for Woodstock:

Verizon Wireless said that no other planned project sin Woodstock within the next 3-5 years, but projects in neighboring towns could provide coverage for parts of Woodstock. The Task Force would like Verizon Wireless to keep Woodstock updated about projects in neighboring towns, especially any that would affect things such as the view sheds in Woodstock.

AT&T/North Atlantic Towers proposed Stoggy Hollow cell tower:

Discussion was held about AT&T’s current coverage for Woodstock and proposed expansion plans. Information was provided, but people present from the public asked for more detailed information which AT&T and North Atlantic Towers did not have available for the meeting. The Task Force requested such information be made available before any cell tower application is submitted to the CT Siting Council so the public would have adequate and appropriate time to review it.

AT&T and North Atlantic Towers said they were not at the “technical report stage” of things to be able to provide such information. They were “still doing their due diligence”.

Questions were raised about the accuracy of the coverage maps provided by AT&T and if more accurate and updated coverage maps could be provided.

Questions were raised as to why a new tower would be needed in the Stoggy Hollow location if other towers are in Woodstock, such as the tower by Verizon Wireless on Sherman Road. AT&T said they could co-locate on that tower, but that it would not provide the full coverage for the area they were seeking. No data was provided by AT&T to support or refute this statement.

It was noted that this area in Stoggy Hollow may be the same area proposed for a cell tower a number of years ago. That proposal was opposed by many people and the proposal was not pursued.

Many concerns were raised about the affects of the proposed tower in this historic and scenic part of town. VHB, hired by AT&T, commented upon visibility issues. A visual impact study would be done. Members of the public and the Task Force asked that such study information be made available in full in a timely manner. Many members of the public raised concerns about visibility problems from a 150-foot monopole structure that would be situated on the highest land in the Stoggy Hollow area. It was noted that barber Road, an officially designated scenic road by the town, is nearby. It was noted that many lake and valley communities are located nearby. It was noted that the Stoggy Hollow restaurant is located nearby.

Concerns were raised about the long proposed access road to get to the proposed tower site. Wetlands crossing concerns were raised, but no detailed information was provided by AT&T about such.

Residents who live nearby the proposed tower site raised concerns about construction affecting power and phone lines.

Concern was raised about the tower being in the flight path to and from Touton airport in town.

Questions were asked about alternative technologies, such as digital array systems, that would not require large/high towers. AT&T said that such may not work for the coverage needs it desires.

Questions were asked about AT&T coverage versus Verizon Wireless coverage vis-à-vis the two companies co-locating on towers already built or approved to be built.

AT&T said it has different coverage designs than Verizon Wireless, but no specifics about such were provided. There was strong support by the public present for telecommunication companies to co-locate on towers so as to minimize the construction of duplicative towers.

Questions were asked about the “public need” and “environmental compatibility” of the proposed tower. No details were provided by AT&T.

It was noted that many people had sent in letters opposing the proposed tower. Members of the public present at the meeting opposed the proposed tower. Many salient comments, questions and concerns were raised and discussed at the meeting with AT&T and North Atlantic Towers.

When AT&T and North Atlantic Towers has more information and answers to questions asked, the Task Force asked to meet again with them before any definitive plans are made to submit an application for a cell tower to the CT Siting Council.

It was noted that the meeting minutes would not be able to reflect every single aspect of the discussion held at the meeting, but that letters from the public would be made part of the record for reference. It was asked of AT&T and North Atlantic Towers that all such letters and the points discussed at the meeting be reviewed by them and taken into account for any plans they have regarding cell towers, especially the concerns raised about the proposed cell tower at the Stoggy Hollow location.

The towns’ current zoning regulations about cell towers, the town’s proposed draft zoning regulations about cell towers, and the state government’s designation of northeastern CT as a heritage area worthy of special protections regarding such were all noted.

The Task Force seeks further input from the various aspects of town government in a coordinated and comprehensive effort regarding the Stoggy Hollow proposed cell tower. Communication also with the CT Siting Council is important.

AT&T, North Atlantic Towers and VHB were thanked for taking the time to attend the meeting.

AT&T future plans for Woodstock:

Questions were asked about AT&T co-locating on existing or soon to exist Verizon Wireless towers.

Questions were asked about AT&T plans in neighboring towns that would also provide coverage for Woodstock.

Other business: None

Adjournment: the meeting was adjourned at 9:17 PM.

Respectfully submitted by
Jeffrey A. Gordon, MD
Chair, Municipal Telecommunications Task Force