

DOCKET NO. 86 - An application of Metro Mobile CTS of Fairfield County, Inc., for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need for cellular telephone antennas and associated equipment in the Towns of Greenwich, and Fairfield, Connecticut. : Connecticut : Siting : Council February 17, 1988

OPINION

Metro Mobile CTS of Fairfield County, Inc. (Metro Mobile) applied to the Siting Council (Council) on October 20, 1987, for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need (Certificate) for proposed cellular tower sites within the towns of Greenwich, Fairfield, and Wilton. On January 28, 1988, Metro Mobile withdrew its Wilton sites from consideration in this application. The Council is therefore being asked to select two of the three proposed Greenwich sites, and one of two proposed Fairfield sites, in the present application.

The sites proposed in this application present land use conflicts familiar to the Council. In heavily developed Fairfield County, suitable tower sites are at a premium. Metro Mobile was unable to find an existing tower to share, a rooftop site, or an industrially or commercially developed site that would meet their coverage needs. The result is five proposed sites in residential areas.

In Greenwich, Metro Mobile has two proposed and one alternative site. The Riversville Road site, on property owned by the Boy Scouts, is within 250 feet of a cellular tower previously certificated by the Council. The Council is concerned about the formation of a "tower farm" whenever one tower is built near another. The proximity of the proposed Riversville site to the Merritt Parkway has raised concerns of visual impacts by the State Historic Preservation Officer. Additionally, local residents are concerned about the visibility of the proposed tower; the existing tower is already visible to some local residents.

The proposed Greenwich Rockwood Lake site has again raised concerns of close visibility by nearby homeowners. The proposed site is on property which is under an enforcement action by the Greenwich Watercourses Agency for wetlands violations. Until these violations have been resolved, and wetlands intrusions mitigated, construction of a tower, equipment building, and access road into this site are inappropriate.

The alternative Banksville site, while not without potential visual impacts, appears to be less intrusive to its immediate surroundings in an area which is at least partially commercial in nature. Additionally, relatively few established homes are in the immediate vicinity.

The proposed and alternative Fairfield sites appear rather similar, except that the alternative Fairfield site is somewhat more removed from established homes in the immediate surroundings. Visual impacts would still be significant, especially from the nearby Merritt Parkway, but a buffer of trees around the alternative site, which is 400 feet south of the nearest residential street, would help screen the tower from residents. The use of a monopole at this site, and others proposed in this application, somewhat lessens the visual impact in the surrounding area.

As Connecticut continues to be developed, viable tower sites will become more difficult to obtain. One possible solution would be tower sharing by Metro Mobile and its competitor. The result might be fewer towers, less public opposition, shorter hearings, and a more rapid provision of cellular service to customers than would otherwise be the case. It is likely that such sharing might be opposed in principle, if not in fact, by both competitors, even though such tower sharing is not prohibited, but actually encouraged, by the Federal Communications Commission. However, the alternative to such good faith negotiations is a lengthy, contentious series of hearings with concomitant withdrawals and amendments by the applicants, all the while risking a denial of these sites by the Council. If the cellular providers are truly concerned with acting in the public interest, they will take steps toward such sharing in the future.

The Council considered the potential environmental effects of the alternative Greenwich Banksville site and alternative Fairfield site, and concludes that these effects are not sufficient to deny their approval. The impacts would be largely confined to the visual effects of these towers, as their effects on environmental components such as air, water, forest, and wildlife would be minimal. The Council considered the minimal electromagnetic radiation levels the facilities would produce, and concluded that, based on the best available scientific evidence, such power densities at the indicated frequencies are not of sufficient concern.

The construction of a new tower on the Riversville site would constitute the beginning of an unacceptable "tower farm" in a residential area near the scenic Merritt Parkway. The visual impact of the two towers in such a close proximity to each other would create adverse effects that cannot be justified. The construction of the Rockwood Lake tower site in a residential area, and on property which is the subject of a town wetlands violation, would create an adverse conflict. The proposed Riversville and Rockwood Lake sites in Greenwich are therefore denied.

The installation of a tower facility on the narrow strip of land between the Merritt Parkway and Congress Street in Fairfield would have a greater impact on its surroundings than the placement of such a site 400 feet south of Woodhouse Road at the alternative site. The proposed Fairfield site is therefore denied.

The Council will therefore issue a Certificate for the alternative Greenwich Banksville site and alternative Fairfield site.

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