

DOCKET NO. 429 - New Cingular Wireless PCS, LLC }
(AT&T) application for a Certificate of Environmental }
Compatibility and Public Need for the construction, }
maintenance, and operation of a telecommunications facility }
located at one of two Sites: Willington Tax Assessor Parcel ID }
#M23-P62 Tolland Turnpike, Willington, Connecticut; or }
Willington Tax Assessor Parcel ID #M18-19 Old South }
Willington Road, Willington, Connecticut.

Connecticut
Siting
Council
February 7, 2013

Opinion

On July 24, 2012, New Cingular Wireless PCS, LLC (AT&T) 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 wireless telecommunications facility to be located in the Town of Willington, Connecticut. AT&T is seeking to develop a facility at one of two possible sites; one of which would be located off of Tolland Turnpike (Route 74), the other of which would be located off of Old South Willington Road near Willington Hill Road (Route 320). Although the two Sites are on separate parcels of property, both parcels are owned by the same person who conducts a sand and gravel operation that straddles the two properties. AT&T's objective for this facility is to provide service along Routes 74 and 320 and in surrounding areas within the Town of Willington.

AT&T's Candidate A Site would be located on a 47.7-acre parcel with frontage along Tolland Turnpike. For this site, AT&T would construct a 40-foot by 80-foot compound and would erect a 160-foot tower. The site would require a 921-foot long access drive, of portion of which would use an existing gravel road. Underground utilities would be extended from an existing off-site utility pole to the site along the access road.

AT&T's Candidate B Site would be located on a 170-acre parcel with frontage along Old South Willington Road. At this location, AT&T would construct a 75-foot by 75-foot compound and would erect a 190-foot tower. This site would require a new 958-foot long gravel access drive. Underground utilities would be extended along the access drive from a proposed riser pole connected overhead to an existing utility pole on Old South Willington Road.

At either proposed location, the tower setback radii would lie completely within the respective host properties.

The 160-foot tower at the Candidate A Site would be visible just above the treetops from Willington's Historic District in the vicinity of the intersection of Routes 74 and 320. However, the town's Planning and Zoning Commission and the State Historic Preservation Office have judged that the presence of the tower would not be visually intrusive on the historic district. Although a tower at the Candidate B Site would be thirty feet taller at 190 feet, it would be visible from less acreage than the tower at the Candidate A Site due to forest cover and topography.

There are wetlands proximate to both candidate sites, but with proper erosion and sedimentation controls in place, neither site would be expected to have any wetland impacts. Candidate A Site would require the removal of 55 trees with a diameter at breast height of six inches or more, while Candidate B Site would require the removal of 115 such trees.

Neither of the proposed sites would impact any extant endangered, threatened or special concern species. Likewise, neither site would have any effect on historic or cultural resources.

After reviewing the record in this proceeding, we find Candidate A Site to be preferable. This site would provide better coverage than the Candidate B Site, which could require another tower in Willington to provide comparable coverage. The access drive to the Candidate A Site would be easier to design, build, and maintain since it would connect to a state highway rather than to the narrow, unimproved Old South Willington Road. Overall, the environmental impacts of developing the Candidate A Site, including the number of trees that would have to be removed, would be less than those associated with the Candidate B Site. Although the tower at the Candidate A Site would be visible from the Willington Historic District, its visual impact would be negligible. Another consideration is the Town of Willington's stated preference for the Candidate A Site, largely because of the problems that could arise from using Old South Willington Road for access to the Candidate B Site and that site's closer proximity to residential properties.

According to a methodology prescribed by the FCC Office of Engineering and Technology Bulletin No. 65E, Edition 97-01 (August 1997), the combined radio frequency power density levels of the antennas proposed to be installed on the tower at the Candidate A Site have been calculated by Council staff to amount to 5.2% of the FCC's Maximum Permissible Exposure, as measured at the base of the tower. This percentage is well below federal and state standards established for the frequencies used by wireless companies. If federal or state standards change, the Council will require that the tower be brought into compliance with such standards. The Council will require that the power densities be recalculated in the event other carriers add antennas to the tower. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 prohibits any state or local agency from regulating telecommunications towers on the basis of the environmental effects of radio frequency emissions to the extent that such towers and equipment comply with FCC's regulations concerning such emissions. As to potential harm to wildlife from radio emission, like the matter of potential health to humans, is a matter of federal jurisdiction. Instead the Council's role is to ensure that the tower meets federal permissible exposure limits.

Based on the record in this proceeding, the Council finds that the effects associated with the construction, maintenance, and operation of a telecommunications facility at proposed Candidate A 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 when compared to need, are not in conflict with policies of the State concerning such effects, and are not sufficient reason to deny this application. Therefore, the Council will issue a Certificate for the construction, maintenance, and operation of a 160-foot monopole telecommunications facility at Candidate A Site, Willington Tax Assessor Parcel ID #M23-P62 Tolland Turnpike, Willington, Connecticut, and deny the certification of Candidate B Site.