



UAC: Cell Tower Briefing

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Project Team – Cell Tower Task Force (September 2022)

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Situation

Current Cellular structures on City-owned Drinking Water Infrastructure are complex to manage and are taking staff away from their core responsibilities:

- Communication – City has 16 cell customers. They have internal associates (Finance, Legal), 3rd party contractors and/or consultants – no central point of contact for City staff.
 - Accounts are frequently overdue and require consistent follow-up from City staff.
 - No way to hold companies accountable to lease and code requirements (aside from removing card reader access.)
- Site Access / Security Concerns – Cell companies are not abiding by required 24-hour notice and permit application, showing up at odd hours unannounced, impacting neighbors, pulling staff away from their work.
- Process does not have an owner or expert on staff with the City to manage this process, resources are constrained.
 - Teams are working in silos and lack visibility to other parts of the process and the status.
- Equipment - Can inhibit maintenance of drinking water facilities, tracking down who needs to remove is time-consuming and frustrating.
 - Acquisitions and consolidation of Cell companies leave legacy equipment with unclear ownership that isn't decommissioned in a timely manner.

Background

- Olympia has a Telecommunications Master Plan from 2006 outlining criteria for new wireless locations and complies with requirements of the Federal Telecommunications Act.
- Spectrum Act governs State & local government approval and modification of Cellular facilities, mandates approval timeframes.
- Unsanctioned/unattended Site Access is an ongoing issue with potential to compromise safety of Drinking Water utilities.
- Turnover has left some parts of the process unclear, certain practices were discontinued.
- Process spans Public Works and Community Planning & Development departments and requires use of SmartGov for permitting; there's no central oversight of the process.
- Cell companies are giant corporations with whom communication is very difficult; high turnover and new staff/consultants require the City's staff to communicate the same information repeatedly.
- City is supposed to receive around \$300,000 annually from Cellular leases, does not charge for staff labor or disruption of normal operations.
- Lease requirements have become more complex over time, requiring more time to administer and create SOPs that will support the expanded requirements.
- Leases were negotiated by square footage / space needed, and as such appear inconsistent across customers, required amendments when space needed increased over time.
- Cost of City staff time (estimated) is \$105,000 to manage this process.
- Current process inhibits core job responsibilities of team members and erodes morale.

Assessment

- Cell companies are huge multi-national corporations and do not prioritize or communicate well with local jurisdictions.
- Cell companies mostly outsource maintenance, installation of equipment and lease negotiations, leading to communication breakdowns, access issues, unclear expectations and abandoned equipment.
- City staff spend a disproportionate amount of time managing this process, and there's no clear ownership of the process.
- Cell companies aren't following City processes, accounts aren't being paid on time, and leases are cumbersome to track and manage.
- Seattle has similar issues with cell companies, and charges for labor due to the impact on their teams.
- Plan Review & Inspection process is specialized and is outside the scope of CP&D Building Plans Examiner & Inspector roles.
- Gaps in the overall process are outside of Olympia's control due to the various parties operating on behalf of cell companies.
- Cellular equipment is obstructing the City from accessing Drinking Water infrastructure on the Hoffman Tank.
- Structural Engineering analysis has not been performed to ensure Drinking Water infrastructure can support the existing and/or additional cellular equipment.
- LBA Tank is the only tank intentionally designed to accommodate towers, but Land Use approval hasn't been granted to allow installation.
- Opportunity exists to generate revenue through this process.
- Existing leases are inconsistent; lease terms, requirements and rates vary, no standard lease/rate exists.

Recommendations

- Establish process owner for City, program needs dedicated resources. (Project Manager?)
- Add charges for labor to recoup staff time/cost.
- Increase /standardize lease rates. (Seattle charges \$35k regardless of equipment footprint)
- Analyze opportunity for monopole locations to remove from Drinking Water sites.
- Utilize LBA.
- T-Comm should be prioritized over cell companies.
- Require pre-construction meeting prior to permit issuance to align all involved parties.
- Expand card reader access to other sites and charge for it.
- Limit allotment allowance of equipment or prohibit installation of new equipment.
- Create strategic plan for this program.
- Update code to allow City to require more comprehensive and specialized inspection process. (what gets approved on plans vs. what's installed)
- Eliminate this program altogether.

Post Assessment: What are we doing now?

- Hoffman Tank – putting in fencing/card readers
- Addressed Hoffman Tank vent access via amendments
- Contracted with Gunnerson Consulting and Communication Site Services
 - New lease language – appropriate charges
 - Review of existing leases – equipment location
- Asked legal if we can charge a new lease fee now or is a change in OMC required
- Gunnerson in communication with cell companies & reviewing our sites against leases