



Planning Commission

Small Cell Zoning Code Amendments

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Title

Small Cell Zoning Code Amendments

Recommended Action

Briefing and discussion of proposed text amendment, provide feedback to staff as needed.

Report

Issue:

Verizon Wireless has applied for a zoning code text amendment to update Olympia Municipal Code Chapter 18.44, Antennas and Wireless Communications Facilities, to address the siting of a new wireless technology called "Small Cell." Existing city regulations create challenges for locating small cell facilities that make them effective.

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Presenter(s):

Tim Smith, Principal Planner and Paula Smith, Assistant Planner

Background and Analysis:

The proliferation of personal wireless devices and the increase of data usage have resulted in an ever-increasing need for small cell technologies to enhance coverage. The Federal Communications Commission and the telecommunications industry have identified existing utility poles and public rights-of-way as resources for the deployment of small cells. Small cells improve speed and capacity for both telephonic and data transmission, as well as reduced gaps in coverage. Wireless providers are targeting the public right-of-way for their facilities for both 4G and future 5G expansion.

Small cell facility is defined in RCW 80.36.375(2) as a personal wireless services facility that meets both of the following qualifications:

(i) Each antenna is located inside an antenna enclosure of no more than three cubic feet in volume or, in the case of an antenna that has exposed elements, the antenna and all of its exposed elements could fit within an imaginary enclosure of no more than three cubic feet; and

(ii) Primary equipment enclosures are no larger than seventeen cubic feet in volume. The following associated equipment may be located outside the primary equipment enclosure and if so located, are not included in the calculation of equipment volume: Electric meter, concealment, telecom demarcation box, ground-based enclosures, battery back-up power systems, grounding equipment, power transfer switch, and cut-off switch.

Illustrative examples of small cell antennae and equipment enclosures are shown in Attachment 3.

In September of 2017, MRSC issued an article about “Preparing for Small Cell Deployments”. The article provided information about small cell and gave recommendations for cities to consider as they respond to requests for these types of cell facilities located in the public rights-of-way attached to utility poles.

City staff from Community Planning and Development, Public Works and other city departments have had multiple meetings over the past year with a variety of companies within the industry to discuss proposals for locating small cell technology within the City of Olympia.

Currently, the City of Olympia has standards in Chapter 18.44 Antenna and Wireless Communications that address “Right of Way Attached Wireless Facilities” and provides direction as to where these would be allowed and what the development standards are.

Small cell facilities would be allowed in most areas in the city but the standards are not ideal for small cell technology. The primary obstacle in the City’s zoning code to the siting of small cell facilities in the right of way is a requirement that wireless facilities be on a utility pole or electrical transmission tower at least 50 feet in height. This height standard was presumably adopted to address potential visual impacts associated with the older wireless technology that consisted of large antennae attached to the tops of poles. Small cell facilities are designed to have less impacts, and function best when located between 25 and 40 feet above the ground.

The text changes proposed by staff and the applicant focus specifically on the siting of small cell facilities in the public right of way. The City will likely consider a more comprehensive update to its wireless telecommunications regulations as a future work program item. The City of Tumwater is currently conducting a comprehensive update and has hired a consultant to work with the telecommunications industry and City staff to prepare a set of changes to bring forward to their Planning Commission. The work by Tumwater can serve as a starting point for making code revisions to City of Olympia regulations in the future that could lead to a similar approach between the two jurisdictions in the regulation of telecommunications facilities.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

Neighborhood concerns may include visual impacts. Neighborhood interest may include faster wireless service and additional capacity that small cell facilities will provide.

Options:

None

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Financial Impact:

None

Attachments:

Staff Proposal

Applicant Proposal

Small Cell Facility Illustrations

Stakeholder Comment