

**CITY OF ALBANY
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda Date: January 17, 2012
Reviewed by: BP

SUBJECT: Feasibility of a Cellular Tower on City Property

REPORT BY: Anne L. Hersch, AICP, City Planner

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council receive the report and provide direction to staff.

BACKGROUND

Due to recent filings of wireless facility applications, as well as identifying potential long-term revenue sources for the City, City Council Members preliminarily discussed the idea to explore the feasibility of cellular tower installation on City-owned property, with Albany Hill (Albany Hill Park) being most frequently mentioned. To provide guidance for Council consideration of this exploration, staff has outlined the procedure necessary to move forward. If the Council were to direct staff to explore this option further, staff would need to:

- Prepare a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for carriers/tower companies to determine if there is interest in building a facility (cost is estimated to be \$500,000-\$600,000, this cost would be incurred by the carrier/tower company)
- Amend the existing Wireless Ordinance to accommodate facilities in the PF-Public Facilities District specifically for parks or recreation facilities and also increase height limits to allow taller facilities in order to achieve signal projection.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Feasibility of Cell Tower on Albany Hill

If the City of Albany were interested in developing a multiple carrier cellular monopole on Albany Hill, the following steps would be required:

- Determine if there is carrier/speculative tower company interest
 - This will depend on individual carrier needs for coverage in Albany as well as the long-term carrier construction plan
 - The City would need to create a Request for Qualifications to determine if there are interested parties

- Assess site feasibility-work with the carrier to determine if the site is feasible for a wireless structure
 - Identify physical space on the hillside which could accommodate a monopole, equipment cabinets, determine which existing utility line will provide power and a telecommunications line (landline).
 - This involves a site walk with a radiofrequency engineer, construction manager, the carrier representative, a leasing agent and City staff to determine the best/preferred location for the facility and coverage needs
 - For two (2) carriers, approximately 550 sq. ft. of land would be required (contains both the monopole and equipment).
 - The City's legal counsel/designated agent and the leasing agent work together to create a tentative lease
 - The cost for a two carrier (co-locatable) free standing monopole at Albany Hill would be approximately \$500,000-\$600,000.
 - Determine stealthing for the facility, ex. Slim line monopole, faux tree, etc.
- Initiate a Zoning Code Amendment to allow a wireless facility at a park
 - Section 20.20.100 (D) (2) (b) indicates that the PF District is preferred, "Except on site where there are schools and parks."
 - This requires both Commission and Council review (2-3 month process)
- Proceed with the entitlement Planning/CEQA review process
 - An Initial Study will be prepared
 - Design Review and a Conditional Use Permit
 - 6-8 month process
- Once approvals are granted, the Council will need to formally approve and execute the lease

Staff spoke with AT&T representatives about the Albany Hill site providing citywide coverage from this location. They indicated that if a tower were to be constructed in Albany Hill, it would primarily provide coverage to the north and northwestern part of the City. While the coverage would be expansive, they indicated it would not serve the south and southeastern portions of the City where they currently have an application pending.

Site Feasibility

To site a facility on the hillside, the antennas would have to be located above the existing tree line, as the trees would obstruct the signal. Given the existing tree line height, there are two options:

- Clear some trees to allow an obstructed antenna projection
- Amend the Zoning Code to allow additional tower height so that the tower would be able to clear the tree line (up to 80-100 ft., depending on the existing tree line height)

Additionally, site would have to comply with existing Code standards and be located the minimum required distance away from residential uses (50 ft. minimum).

Alternative City Locations

Community Center on Marin Ave.

The Community Center on Marin Ave. has the capacity to have roof-mounted wireless facility. The site would need to be rezoned to PF-Public Facilities to accommodate wireless equipment. Currently, it is zoned R-1.

Representatives from Kramer Firm (the City's wireless consultant) indicated that the site would work for a wireless facility. However, the antenna height would have to be taller than the existing BART tracks in order to project a signal. The maximum height for a wireless facility in the PF-Public is 50 ft. (40 ft. max building + 10 ft. allowance). The existing maximum height for the Community Center is 55'6", at the top of the tower element.

City Hall Parking Lot

The existing pole in the City Hall and Police & Fire Stations' parking lot is used for emergency communications equipment. Dispatch and other emergency communications equipment is critical to insuring that Public Safety receive calls for service and respond promptly. There is additional room on this pole which allows for future installation of dispatch and other emergency equipment as technology, regulations, and other requirements evolve. If this pole location were to be considered for a wireless facility, the dispatch equipment would have to be relocated elsewhere and there would be a loss of parking within the lot to accommodate equipment cabinets.

Staff does not recommend co-locating commercial carrier facilities with emergency services facilities on the same pole. If wireless equipment were to be collocated on the existing pole, the commercial carrier's maintenance workers would have to access the shared pole. The Police and Fire Departments and City Manager are not comfortable with outside personnel having access to the tower where dispatch and other emergency communications equipment is located, and believe the City cannot afford to have this safety equipment turned off while wireless maintenance is conducted.

An alternative is to allow an additional pole for commercial wireless carriers in the parking lot. This option would result in the removal of parking spaces at a site that is already tight for parking spaces.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT

N/A

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There would be a City investment of staff time and consultant time to advise on site feasibility, preparation of an RFQ, and pursuit of financial arrangements to cover installation costs.

If the City were to proceed with pursuing a wireless communications facility, the lease would need to be approved by the full Council after Planning approvals have been granted. The lease includes the terms (typically a 20-30 year lease) as well as the rent. Typically, a rent calculator is included in the lease and allows for a 3-5% annual rent increase from the date of lease commencement.

Currently, the monthly rent figure for a cell site is approximately \$3,000. The rent could potentially be negotiated higher depending on the needs of the carrier/tower company and their urgency to get a two-carrier tower on air in Albany.

Attachments

1. Albany Hill Aerial Map



Figure 3. Orthophoto of Site and Surrounding Area