

Albemarle County Planning Commission
July 11, 2017

The Albemarle County Planning Commission held a public hearing on Tuesday, July 11, 2017, at 6:00 p.m., at the County Office Building, Room #241, Second Floor, 401 McIntire Road, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Members attending were Tim Keller, Chair; Daphne Spain; Mac Lafferty; Pam Riley; Jennie More; Karen Firehock; Bruce Dotson; and Bill Palmer, UVA representative.

Other officials present were Will Cockrell and Wood Hudson (Charlottesville/Albemarle – MPO), Francis MacCall, Senior Planner; Bill Fritz; Manager of Special Projects; Andrew Gast-Bray, Assistant Director of Community Development/Director of Planning; Sharon Taylor, Clerk to Planning Commission; and John Blair, Deputy County Attorney.

Call to Order and Establish Quorum

Mr. Keller, Chair, called the regular meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and established a quorum.

Public Hearing Items.

SP-2017-00012 Verizon Wireless “Carters Bridge” (Llandaft LC Property) Tier III PWSF

MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT: Scottsville

TAX MAP/PARCEL: 11200-00-00-00900

LOCATION: 4319 Scottsville Rd (Route 20)

PROPOSED: Installation of a one hundred and six (106) foot tall steel monopole treetop tower with one (1) antenna array. Associated with the proposal is ground equipment which will be located within a 1,350 square feet fenced compound area and extension of an access road.

PETITION: 10.2.2.48 Special Use Permit, which allows for Tier III personal wireless facilities in the RA Zoning District (reference Section 5.1.40)

ZONING CATEGORY/GENERAL USAGE: RA, Rural Areas- agricultural, forestal, and fishery uses; residential density (0.5 unit/acre in development lots);

Entrance Corridor: Yes. Flood Hazard – Overlay to provide safety and protection from flooding COMPREHENSIVE PLAN LAND USE/DENSITY: Rural Areas – preserve and protect agricultural, forestal, open space, and natural, historic and scenic resources/ density (0.5 unit/ acre in development lots) (Francis MacCall)

Mr. MacCall addressed the Commission and stated that his position is in the Zoning Division, and the particular towers that were part of this application were new to him – but Bill Fritz and the applicant were available to answer additional questions – and he noted that this was a Tier III application under the County’s ordinance. Mr. MacCall reported that this application was for a personal wireless service facility on property

located near Walton Middle School on Route 29 South just north of the Carter's Bridge crossing. Mr. MacCall pointed out that the site is located in the Southern Albemarle Rural Historic District and along a Virginia Scenic Byway, which are the two factors pushing this application into the special use permit category.

Mr. MacCall said the property is about 19 acres and the site was about 800 feet from Route 20. He pointed out the entrance location from Route 20, noting that the facility was utilizing an existing entrance that services an existing tower, which is about 118 feet from the closest property line. Mr. MacCall stated that the tower is proposed to be about 106 feet and was just under 9 feet above the tallest tree within 25 feet, which would have allowed it to be Tier II, but the factors he had already mentioned regarding the district and byway location made this a Tier III. He explained that the antenna would be flush-mounted and there will be a lease area of 1,350 square feet at the bottom.

Mr. MacCall reported that he and other staff members had gone out to the site to do some balloon/photo tests of the site, with several locations used – one along Route 20 at Carter's Bridge, and one at Walton Middle School. He presented several images from the tests. Mr. MacCall noted that Walton Middle School actually had an existing facility on the property, and the proposed tower was highlighted in his presentation. He said that the photo simulation shows that the tower is a lot more visible from Walton, but given the distance it was not a major issue and it disappears from view. He also mentioned that Route 708 was not the entrance corridor or the byway.

Mr. MacCall stated that the staff report outlines favorable and unfavorable factors, and staff recommends approval with the one condition as outlined in the staff report.

Mr. Dotson commented that he was interested there was an existing facility and a new one, and that they were sharing an access road so there is less disturbance – but he was curious about the fate of the existing tower.

Mr. MacCall responded that it was a different provider, but that tower would continue its use and the regulations allow for three facilities within 200 feet.

Mr. Dotson asked if that was an attempt to avoid "tower farms."

Mr. MacCall responded that he thought that was the case, but Mr. Fritz would provide more details.

Mr. Fritz explained that when the policy was adopted, the idea was for both vertical and horizontal colocation – with vertical designed for multiple users on one tower and horizontal designed so there could be one access road and a clustered area with minimized visibility. He commented that this had been fairly successful, and staff felt that this was one of those sites that would take advantage of that horizontal colocation.

Mr. Dotson stated that he could not find the existing tower in the photos and simulation.

Mr. MacCall responded that the existing tower had been approved in 2012, and there had been some tree growth since then, but it was in the avoidance area and was not as visible in the photos. He mentioned that it was also not visible as you approach the site.

Ms. Firehock pointed out that the photos are taken this time of year, so when the leaves are off the trees, any cell tower was visible to some extent – and asked if staff still felt that it was within the conditions for approval.

Mr. MacCall responded that he did, stating that the facility met all the techniques to hide it – coloring, flush-mounting, etc. – so it was very similar to the proposed tower.

Ms. Lori Schweller of LeClair Ryan, the legal firm representing Verizon Wireless, addressed the Commission and stated that Stephen Waller, who prepared the application on behalf of Verizon, was also present to answer questions. Ms. Schweller reported that this site would comply with all the siting and design standards and restrictions of a Tier II treetop facility, and the reason Verizon is requesting a special use permit is its location in an historic district – which is an avoidance area under the ordinance and thus moves it into Tier III with a special use permit. She noted that they were not requesting any special exceptions because they do meet all the standards.

Ms. Schweller stated that the community meeting had only three individuals, including Mr. MacCall and Ms. Riley, and Supervisor Rick Randolph had asked Verizon to provide coverage details. She presented a propagation map of the area, noting current coverage levels and what would change with the new site, with this facility providing coverage in the northern area where there is unreliable or no coverage. She stated that the other sites proposed were being worked on by the RF engineer at Verizon Wireless, so there were additional efforts for better coverage. Ms. Schweller stated that only three trees would be removed to provide space for the new facility, and the tower was just 8.5 feet above the reference tree. She said they did meet the performance standards for distance to the back of the antennas for standoff, and both the pole and antennas would be brown. Ms. Schweller referenced the balloon test photos, stating that the middle of the six-foot balloon was the top height of the monopole, with photo simulations and views from Viewmont Farm and Red Hill Road, as well as from Secretary's Sand Road. She stated that it was difficult to see the facility from Scottsville Road and other locations, and for the most part, it was hidden in the trees.

Ms. Schweller offered to answer questions.

Mr. Lafferty stated that Verizon had done a good job of placing this facility, and he appreciated the propagation patterns presented to show the extra coverage provided.

Ms. Riley said she was able to attend the balloon test, which she found educational, and it took someone pointing out the existing monopole for her to see it – as it was camouflaged. She said that she had asked why Verizon did not just add onto the existing monopole and why another was needed, and asked Ms. Schweller to reiterate that point.

Ms. Schweller responded that if the facility were strong enough and built to be extended, it could be extended and another carrier could be added. She said the policy in Albemarle County is to prefer, as Mr. Fritz was explaining, horizontal colocation versus vertical colocation – which is different from most other localities in the state. Ms. Schweller stated that either with vertical colocation the initial monopole would be built at a required 199 feet or at a preferred 199 feet so additional carriers could be collocated on that pole, to reduce the proliferation of wireless sites. She said that Albemarle's policy is to make monopoles as minimally visible as possible.

Mr. Keller stated that he travels down Carter's Mountain Road weekly, and this is an area where calls are always dropped. He said that the other tower is not visible here, and he knows the parcel and has tried to see the monopole. Mr. Keller commented that given the rural qualities of Albemarle, the policy of having lower poles is important, especially in the rural historic districts.

Ms. Riley stated that she has heard from people who live in the area or travel Route 20 that very spotty phone service is an issue and they want better coverage. She said that she also feels the visibility issues are fairly minimized with this proposal, and the need for the service outweigh the visibility – with the "worst case" visibility issue being on Red Hill, where there is already a pole located right at the school.

MOTION: Ms. Riley moved to recommend approval of SP-2017-00012 Verizon Wireless "Carters Bridge" (Llandaft LC Property) Tier III PWSF with the condition as outlined in the staff report. Ms. Spain seconded the motion, which passed unanimously (7-0).

Mr. Keller said the meeting would move to the next item, ZTA-2017-00004 Farmer's Markets.

(Recorded and transcribed by Sharon C. Taylor, Clerk to Planning Commission & Planning Boards)