



Albemarle County

Legislation Details (With Text)

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Title: Review of the Personal Wireless Service Facilities Policy.
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AGENDA DATE: 3/20/2019

TITLE:
Review of the Personal Wireless Service Facilities Policy

SUBJECT/PROPOSAL/REQUEST: Prioritize the review of the Personal Wireless Service Facilities Policy

ITEM TYPE: Consent Information Item

STAFF CONTACT(S): Richardson, Walker, Kamptner, Herrick, Davis, Graham, Fritz

PRESENTER (S): Bill Fritz

LEGAL REVIEW: Not Required

REVIEWED BY: Jeffrey B. Richardson

BACKGROUND: The Board has recently expressed some interest in considering an update of its wireless policy, presumably to be followed with changes to regulations based on those policy changes. Staff notes this is not currently part of its work program and staff is fully allocated. In anticipation of a future request, staff is providing some information that may help the Board to prioritize this against other interests.

Cell phones first became available in Albemarle County in the late 80s. The increased usage of wireless communications is well known. Many sources state that 90% of adults have a cell phone. When the County adopted the Wireless Policy in 2000, use of cell phones was largely limited to voice. Use of phones has changed dramatically from voice to data. The County has not proactively engaged the community to determine if there has been a shift in attitude toward the infrastructure that supports the current and anticipated use of phones.

Bedford County developed a telecommunications policy in 2002. As part of developing the policy, the County conducted a survey to determine what was important to the citizens. In 2012 Bedford County updated the policy and conducted a new survey. Some of the results indicate a clear shift in attitudes.

-In 2002 60%+ of respondents were annoyed with cell towers. In 2012 72.5% said they do not find cell towers unsightly.

-In 2002 72% of respondents did not approve of taller towers. In 2012 75.5% said they would prefer taller cell towers as opposed to more short ones.

-In 2002 67% wanted towers of less than 199 feet. In 2012 36% said they like towers less than 200 feet.

Developing Albemarle's Wireless Policy in 2000 involved extensive public participation and involvement in order to determine what the community attitude was towards wireless infrastructure. The policy has not been updated and the public has not been actively engaged to determine if any change in community attitude has occurred in the 18 years since the adoption of the County's Wireless Policy.

STRATEGIC PLAN: Engaged Citizens: Successfully engage citizens so that local government reflects their values and aspirations.

DISCUSSION: While the Board updated the Comprehensive Plan in 2015 and the Wireless Policy is a component of the Comprehensive Plan, that policy has not been independently reviewed in 18 years. Staff believes that any consideration of changes to this policy would benefit from community outreach to determine how current community values align with the existing policy and ordinance. Following that outreach, the policy and ordinance would be evaluated by the Board to determine where modifications to the policy are needed. This would be based on the updated communities values, current and expected technologies and standards, and anticipated future changes in the community, consistent with other policies.

Based on similar experience with other County policies, staff anticipates this would be a significant effort, likely requiring one-half FTE of senior staff time for a period of 1-2 years and requiring a consultant be brought on board in a role similar to Bedford County's efforts. This would be a major effort and likely require prioritizing over other initiatives and/or finding additional resources to cover the gap.

BUDGET IMPACT: The development of the original Wireless Policy involved significant staff resources and the services of a consultant. The direct consultant cost in 1998 was \$72,250. A comprehensive review of the policy will require significant County resources. While staff anticipates a consultant could supplement and replace some of staff's effort, staff believes the management and oversight of the project would still require extensive staff resources. A detailed project plan and budget has not been developed at this time, but staff anticipates this would likely be in the range of \$50,000 - \$100,000 in consultant support and one-half FTE of senior staff for a period of 1 ½ years.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Board consider an update of the Wireless Policy and Ordinance as part of the next work program considerations, using the above information to help guide those considerations. Should the Board desire additional information or wish to consider adding this to the current work program, staff is prepared to assist the Board in those efforts.

ATTACHMENTS: None