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Rules Established for Cell Towers in Lafayette

By Cathy Tyson

While smart phone users prefer gap-free cell phone coverage, no one wants a cell tower in their front yard. Without specific rules on the books to corral the location, design and placement of cell towers in Lafayette, a Wireless Communications Facility (WCF) subcommittee was formed that has created guidelines to address those concerns. At a meeting last week, the Planning Commission adopted a resolution and will forward a recommendation to the City Council to approve Ordinance 613 - creating a new chapter in Lafayette's Municipal Code that covers all things wireless. The City Council is expected to officially adopt the ordinance later this month.

In mid-November of 2011, after prompting from concerned neighbors, the City Council came to the conclusion that there should be a moratorium on granting permits for WCFs because there was no existing municipal code that specifically regulated their design and placement. Existing Land Use permitting regulations governed cell towers, but didn't spell out conditions of approval. Given the significant increase in applications for modifications, violations at existing WCFs and a growing demand for data and wireless technology, the moratorium was approved to give the City some breathing room to get a handle on where existing equipment was, and to craft standards for location, design, placement and permitting.

After months of meetings with concerned residents and two representatives from both the Planning Commission and City Council, input was gathered to craft a new city ordinance.

Stealth facilities, co-location, vertical clearance, preferred sites and much more are clearly described in the ordinance. Commissioner Mark Mitchell explained that, "we built in a lot of safeguards," including periodic mandatory reviews of facilities. All of the Planning Commissioners agreed that enforcement is critical. Cellular providers are required to prove there is a significant gap in service in order to start the application process.

"The Wireless Communications Facility Ordinance Subcommittee established clear and concise regulations for the location, design, and appearance of WCFs while balancing community and industry expectations," said Assistant Planner Michael Cass in his October 1 staff report. The City of Lafayette is sending a clear signal to wireless providers - Can you hear me now?

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