

St. Charles Parish Department of Planning & Zoning

Land Use Report

Case Number: PZO 2017-02

Introduced by Larry Cochran, Parish President

To eliminate the requirement for co-locations to obtain a Special Permit

Background

St. Charles Parish adopted cell tower regulations in July 1997 (ord. 97-7-4). The ordinance defined co-location as "Locating wireless communications equipment from more than one (1) provider on one (1) site." The cell tower ordinance was amended two months later with the intent of encouraging "more efficient development" of the Parish's cellular network (ord. 97-9-12).

The amendment suggested co-locations are a permitted use on all existing towers and cellular site, but it required every co-location to obtain a Special Permit, a process that can take six weeks to two months to reach approval. For permitting additional equipment on an existing cell tower and site, this is not an efficient or necessary process.

Planning and Zoning context

Since the adoption of the State Uniform Construction Code (building code) in 2007, the Parish enforces standards for cell towers through building permits. New towers require a Special Permit then a commercial building permit which requires approval of engineered plans.

Co-locations on existing cell towers as well as for maintenance and upgrades of antennae and equipment also require a Special Permit, which requires an in-depth site plan review for an existing, developed site and also approval of engineered construction plans that certify the existing tower can accommodate the additional equipment. This building code review makes the requirement for a Special Permit for co-locations of new carriers (cellular service providers) on existing towers unnecessary. The permit process taxes projects six weeks to two months. These projects can be permitted more efficiently through the Special Exception process which calls for an in-depth review, but does not automatically require a public hearing or decision by the Planning Board or Commissioners.

In addition, maintaining records of the specific carriers that own and operate equipment on each cell tower is a burden.

Potential outcomes

The proposed ordinance will allow additional antennae and equipment cabinets to be permitted more quickly, but with a thorough review to ensure the cell tower sites they are using do not require structural enhancements to be able to accommodate them.

The process for permitting new cell towers will not be affected by the proposed change. New cell towers will continue to be permitted through the Special Permit process followed by a building permit.