

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING, TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY, MARCH 21, 2012, SCHOOLHOUSE, TOWN CENTER, 765 PORTOLA ROAD, PORTOLA VALLEY, CA 94028

Chair McKitterick called the Planning Commission regular meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. Ms. Brown called the roll:

Present: Commissioners Denise Gilbert, Arthur McIntosh and Alexandra Von Feldt; Vice Chair Leah Zaffaroni; Chair Nate McKitterick

Absent: None

Staff Present: Tom Vlastic, Town Planner
Karen Kristiansson, Principal Planner
CheyAnne Brown, Planning Technician
Councilmember Ted Driscoll, Liaison

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

None

REGULAR AGENDA

- (1) Status of Planning for Antenna Collocation, Verizon (CUP X7D-132) and AT&T (CUP X7D-138), Existing Facilities at 302 Portola Road, (Woodside Priory)

Vice Chair Zaffaroni recused herself due to the proximity of her home to the proposed project.

Mr. Vlastic explained that the purpose of this item is for the Planning Commission to provide direction for completing the conditions for collocation. Referring to the staff report of March 14, 2012, he said that it reviews the original approval conditions for both Verizon and AT&T for their facilities at The Priory. They had requested an extension of the time to complete the collocation process, and then came back to the Town with some suggestions that the Planning Department wants to share with the ASCC before bringing them to the Planning Commission with a recommendation as to how to proceed.

The ASCC conducted a site visit, with its conclusion echoing a number of comments ASCC members made when they considered the original proposal. The ASCC continues to consider the monopine approach appropriate, given the distance from key viewing areas. Even if the monopine is 70 feet tall, which is basically the design that's been shared with the Town over time, the ASCC position is consistent with its original review.

Upon being informed of the ASCC stance, the applicants indicated that they are prepared to move ahead. The staff report suggests a timeframe. Concerns detailed during the ASCC review were to ensure that whatever monopine is installed, its color must be long-lasting. The painting on the TowerCo pole, Mr. Vlastic explained, has faded, and the ASCC wants to avoid that. The ASCC also felt that the monopine collocation approach would help set a precedent for adjacent antennae, and concluded that a few additional pine trees – probably Monterey pines – would be appropriate to anticipate the loss of existing trees over time. ASCC member Danna Breen, in particular, stressed that in most cases the ASCC wouldn't support Monterey pines, but because a number of evergreens, including pines, are there already.

As Mr. Vlastic said, the ASCC concluded that the combination of some additional screen planting and the collocation monopine was appropriate.

Since the ASCC review, he said that staff has been working on some T-Mobile applications. T-Mobile has been asked for complete coverage information, including that associated with its relatively small pole in The Priory environment. T-Mobile is in the process of upgrading its overall facilities in Portola Valley, so the Town will try to pin down a particular timeframe on this pole. Mr. Vlastic explained that if we grant use permits for the other carriers, the Town wants a clear understanding of the coverage associated with all of the neighboring poles.

The T-Mobile applications for preliminary consideration will come before the Planning Commission in the not-too-distant future, he added.

Mr. Vlasic said that Sprint, which operates the other 50-foot pole at The Priory, recently approached the Town indicating a desire to obtain re-approval of its permit. Taking into account the ASCC considerations and the direction in which the collocation proposal is proceeding, he said that the Town is likely to present another monopine option to get rid of most of the poles on the site, and use it to accommodate another carrier if one comes in.

The ASCC's fundamental position is that the monopine approach is not only appropriate but will encourage other carriers to do the same. The ultimate combination of two monopines would blend in with the relatively tall background screen. Considering the view from a variety of locations, including an uphill vantage point, he said that it will work in this situation, in part due to the fact that typical views are distant.

Chair McKitterick asked about the dimensions of the alternate monopole. Mr. Vlasic said that a monopole would have to be a similar height to accommodate three carriers. The existing Verizon and AT&T antennas are in the 35-foot range. If the proposed monopine is approved, it would be sized for three carriers, but even with two carriers, he said, it probably couldn't be much shorter.

Chair McKitterick also asked about the health of the pine trees on the hill. Mr. Vlasic said that time has taken its toll on some of them already, and others are reaching the end of their lives. That said, he added, others will remain for quite some time. He noted that ASCC Chair Craig Hughes, in particular, raised the question of The Priory's position in terms of its use permit and responsibility for having a defensive landscaping strategy. Mr. Vlasic added that The Priory is likely to be coming to the Planning Commission for a use permit amendment, to include the Gambetta property it has acquired and accommodate a more detailed plan integrating the plaza area at the top of the campus.

In response to Chair McKitterick, Mr. Vlasic said that The Priory is aware of what's been going on in terms of the collocation plans but have indicated no concerns. The Priory obviously benefits from leasing the space, but it views it as a negotiation between the carriers and the Town. Regardless, the issue of landscaping will come up as part of any use permit amendment, Mr. Vlasic said. Antenna screening is part of it, but the pines will have to be considered in light of the loss of those trees over time.

Chair McKitterick asked how many carriers are expected to occupy the knoll at The Priory. Mr. Vlasic said there are five now. So, Chair McKitterick said, in the long run there would be at least two 70-foot monopines, but no poles. An alternative, he said, would be a 60-foot monopole accommodating two carriers. Poles can be as much as 36 inches at their base, Mr. Vlasic said.

In response to Commissioner McIntosh, Mr. Vlasic confirmed that Sprint leases the pole further up the hill, but TowerCo holds the use permit.

Commissioner Von Feldt asked whether neighbors had reached any consensus. Mr. Vlasic said that the one neighbor is in the audience (Commissioner Zaffaroni). Even the Larson subdivision project approved for The Priory doesn't have a direct view of any of these poles, Mr. Vlasic said, because it's screened by the trees near the top of the property. One of the key viewing points would be from the homes on Crescent Avenue, from which at this time a 50-foot Nextel pole with an antenna cluster on top is quite visible because of its light color; even painted dark green it would be less obtrusive at a distance because of the backdrop.

Commissioner Von Feldt also inquired about the whips. Mr. Vlasic said that the white whips are gone, having been replaced by interim installations. resume

Commissioner Von Feldt debated whether one 70-foot monopine was more aesthetically acceptable than two 30-foot poles. Mr. Vlasic said that one option would be to paint the two poles very dark green to blend in better with the background. TowerCo also will have to repaint its pole. The ASCC felt that even with painting, a faux tree would work better than these more "industrial"-looking elements. The ASCC concluded that having two faux trees and in essence dismantling five poles would be less visually intrusive than five dark-colored poles.

In response to a question from Commissioner Von Feldt, Mr. Vlastic said the two TowerCo poles and the Nextel poles are 50 feet tall, with the trees behind them rising to between 65 and 70 feet. When she observed that a new pine would take a long time to grow to 70 feet, Mr. Vlastic said that the additional planting isn't expected to screen the new monopine. The AT&T and Verizon monopine branches can't start too close to the building, but there would be fill-in planting around the base, near the fence and on the brow to help soften the lower portion.

Commissioner Von Feldt asked whether there had been discussion about staying with smaller poles and planting more appropriate species, such as oaks, that can reach 30 feet. Mr. Vlastic said that there were discussions about lower, dark-colored poles, but the ASCC seemed to prefer replacing the cluster of poles with two monopines. Different carriers have different needs, he pointed out, and considering the impact of bandwidth requirements and other circumstances, it's uncertain whether either the TowerCo or Nextel poles could even be lower than their current 50-foot height. It's also uncertain what other carriers might propose to use the site.

Commissioner Gilbert pointed out that the Planning Commission was the body that specified collocation and use of a monopine. Referring to a staff report comment that typically ASCC would not favor a faux tree, she asked the reason for that. According to Mr. Vlastic, ASCC member Jeff Clark, in particular, felt it's difficult to make faux trees look real when you're close to them. Accordingly, the ASCC might be less comfortable with a monopine solution in circumstances where people would have ongoing close-in views. The ASCC felt that the distance, the greenery backdrop and the objective of removing the industrial-type poles combined to make the monopines workable in this situation.

Commissioner McIntosh said it's clear ASCC spent a lot of time on this project, and he agreed that judging from the distance photos, the monopine looked good.

Chair McKitterick invited public comment.

Ms. Zaffaroni, Georgia Lane, said that, like Commissioner Von Felt, she is concerned about the pole height, and would like to explore having a shorter tree. She said that the Commission also must consider the intensity of use on that site and what will be workable as a long-range approach moving forward. With three carriers on a pole, it will be difficult to camouflage, she said. She added that although her personal preference would be for poles with a lot of natural screening, she said she understands that would be problematic for the carriers due to interference with transmission.

Jay Gruendle, Verizon Wireless agent, confirmed that the antennas operate on line-of-sight technology, and although a signal can travel through trees, the denser the trees the more it interferes with the signals.

Ms. Zaffaroni also observed that the convergence of expiring permits provides a good – and unusual – opportunity to implement the best possible solution for the long term. Because this site can serve as a precedent, another issue for the Town generally would be to ensure use of state-of-the-art camouflage. It would give residents an opportunity to see what they might expect as other carriers come to Town, and also give carriers an incentive to do the best possible job.

As for the monopine height, she said that a mitigating factor on The Priory site is the natural backdrop of trees that are further uphill and taller.

Mr. Gruendle said the carriers are willing to work with the Town to perfect a design that meets everyone's approval. In terms of the height, he said if the Town wants to remove poles and consolidate them into fewer structures, they will have to be taller. He pointed out that the carriers located at The Priory site have built their networks around the antennas at that height. They can go higher and operate their networks, but not lower. The 70-foot monopine would be taller than what both Verizon and AT&T now have, and he said the third carrier probably would locate 35 and 40 feet up on the proposed monopine. Thus, he said, there's certainly an opportunity for one of the carriers there now to at least have the same centerline measurement that it currently has.

Although faux trees don't quite look real yet, he said they've come a long way. He indicated that a number of vendors have done good work for Verizon in that regard, and the company is willing to give the ASCC samples of trees and bark. He also said that branch density can be maneuvered for fullness, to avoid the pipe-cleaner look.

Chair McKitterick recapped the scenario: 35- and 50-foot poles with a single carrier on each at this time, with the possibility of combining two carriers on 60-foot poles or three carriers on a 70-foot monopines, provided that the lowest-tier carrier can use a 35- to 40-foot centerline.

Mr. Gruendle said that a 10-foot separation from centerline to centerline is appropriate. He also said that on its original plans, the top of Verizon's antennas would be 65 feet, with 5 additional feet for tapering. That would provide an opportunity for another carrier at 53 feet and another at 43 feet.

With no further comments from the audience, Chair McKitterick closed the public hearing and brought the matter back to the Commission.

Chair McKitterick said he is somewhat concerned that the Monterey pines are non-native and not doing so well in the environment, but at the same time he defers to the ASCC. He said he went to the ASCC meeting, and Ms. Breen in particular is very serious about the trees. For the 10-year life of the CUP, Chair McKitterick said that he's willing to see how it works.

Commissioner McIntosh agreed.

Commissioner Von Feldt said that her main concerns are aesthetic, but she also defers to the ASCC, because that is the ASCC's purview.

Chair McKitterick said that deference to the ASCC isn't required, and a 70-foot monopine is pretty serious. On the other hand, he said, many people have looked at it and he respects their judgment – and as he pointed out, 10 years isn't forever.

Commissioner Von Feldt said that she doesn't like the idea of perpetuating something that the Town wouldn't support. She said that she feels she can support the proposal, albeit somewhat begrudgingly because she understands the points made. She said that she isn't entirely ecstatic about it because her personal preference is for shorter poles and more native vegetation.

Commissioner Gilbert said that she's fine with the proposal. She also said she's concerned about two monopines, because the Planning Commission originally included a condition in the CUP to have one.

Mr. Vlastic said that the Planning Commission made collocation a requirement unless it was determined that aesthetically that wasn't the right solution. The intent was to reduce the number of poles and create a collocation process. Even with the ordinance amendment, that's the direction the Town has taken. He said that if the monopine can be lower, that would be encouraged.

Chair McKitterick moved to support the ASCC's decision and direct staff to move forward with the project, with the timeframe specified in the memorandum. Seconded by Commissioner McIntosh, the motion carried 4-0.

Commissioner Zaffaroni returned to the dais.

(2) Preliminary Review of Permit Appeals Periods and Time Limits

Ms. Kristiansson said this is a pretty straightforward proposal to standardize the appeals period and change the established time limits for the various permits. She said that at this time, the Planning Commission is simply being asked to provide some direction so the proposal can be prepared for a formal public hearing.

Commissioner Zaffaroni asked what prompted bringing this issue forward. Mr. Vlastic explained that the Town Attorney has been concerned that the appeal period is too long, and is out of step with the typical process in most communities. Commissioner Zaffaroni said she doesn't have a strong opinion about it, and definitely agrees with

some of the suggestions made, particularly in terms of coordinating site development with architectural review. At the same time, she said, she does not consider 30 days overly long, and 10 or 15 days seems to be a very short time, especially if the issue is complex and the applicant has to consult with the Town, with their attorney, architect, designer or whatever.

Ms. Kristiansson said part of the problem is not that it's 30 days, but 30 days from receipt of notice of a certified letter. Commissioner Zaffaroni said that she agrees with that completely. Mr. Vlasic said that the biggest question from applicants is "What is the appeal period?" and not "How long is the appeal period?" He also noted that whether it's 15 or 30 days, people will file at the last possible moment.

In response to Commissioner Von Feldt, Mr. Vlasic said the time period is measured in calendar days rather than business days, but the deadline has been viewed as a close-of-business time.

Chair McKitterick said that he has questions about the site development permits, the overwhelming majority of which are for residential construction. He said that he's concerned about extending the time period that the applicant has to begin construction from six months to two years. As a neighbor next to a site under construction, he said that it's been important for him to know when construction would have to commence and when it was likely to end. A period of two years, he said, doesn't seem quite right.

Mr. Vlasic said that with the majority of the projects, the architectural review approval process continues for two years. At this time, someone who has a new house and obtains a two-year architectural review approval has two years to file a building permit. If a site development permit goes along with the architectural review, the site development permit must either be re-done or extended. In fact, Mr. Vlasic added, the Town has used the architectural review as the time limit, because the two time periods are not coordinated cleanly. At one point, he continued, the Town had an architectural review approval period of one year, which could be extended for a second year. One year did not seem to provide sufficient time after approval of the architectural review to do building permit plans, get bids and hire contractors, deal with budgets, file the building permit and then be ready to build. Because one year proved impractical, the Town modified the ordinance to give applicants a two-year life for an architectural approval, without the ability to extend it.

Chair McKitterick said that this change would then make the time period to begin development of the site itself coincide with the architectural approval. Mr. Vlasic said that no site development permit would be issued until the building permit has been processed.

Commissioner Von Feldt suggested that comparing old to new would be helpful. Mr. Vlasic said that would be done for the public hearing process.

Commissioner Gilbert suggested minor wording changes in the proposed language for Zoning Ordinance Chapter 18.34.150.B and 18.70.080.

Commissioner Zaffaroni also had comments about the language in Chapter 18.72.200. She said it would be helpful to use wording such as "date of decision" consistently rather than the more vague "immediately following." In addition to the language issue, she pointed out that this section also suggests that an applicant will receive a CUP before the appeal period has passed. Mr. Vlasic said they need to take a look at this language, and elsewhere in the ordinance, to identify and address similar problems.

NOMINATION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIRPERSONS:

Chair McKitterick said that he would support any of his fellow Commissioners as Chair or Vice Chair. He said that he hoped his successor would continue a more active Chair role in respect to three things: 1) interacting more with staff between meetings, to try to give staff direction as appropriate and advise on interim decisions that staff has to make; 2) interfacing more with the Town Council, and 3) communicating more openly with applicants, considering that the Chair is the Planning Commission's public face.

He said that working on those three points has helped the Planning Commission stay focused, matters that come from staff are more developed, and workings with the Town Council have improved.

Commissioner Gilbert nominated Commissioner Von Feldt as Chair.

Vice Chair Zaffaroni noted that the Commission has had a lot of different Chairs, each of whom brings his or her own personal perspective.

Commissioner McIntosh said that interfacing with staff or the applicant a good thing.

Chair McKitterick nominated Commissioner Von Feldt as Chair. Seconded by Commissioner McIntosh, the motion carried 4-0-1 (Von Feldt abstained).

Chair McKitterick nominated Vice Chair Zaffaroni to continue in her capacity. Seconded by Commissioner Gilbert, the motion carried 4-0-1 (Zaffaroni abstained).

COMMISSION, STAFF, COMMITTEE REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chair McKitterick reported having participated, along with several committee chairs and former mayors, in interviews for the new Town Manager. He said that all three candidates interviewed were very qualified, and he was impressed with the variety of selection. He also said that everyone's impressions about each candidate seemed very similar. A decision is expected imminently.

Mr. Vlastic said that Palo Alto has again contacted the Town about a summer concert series at the winery on Los Trancos Road. Last year, the Town expressed concerns about parking and noise, but last year's event seemed to be all right. This year, they are proposing doubling attendance (from 100 to 200), but indicated having reached agreements for parking at Alpine Hills. The Town has yet to receive specific information about that, but Mr. Vlastic said that he's particularly concerned if a swim meet or another Alpine Hills gathering would be going on at the same time. In any case, he said, the current CUP for Alpine Hills would not authorize that spillover parking.

A similar problem has arisen, Mr. Vlastic said, with Rossotti's being used for parking for Palo Alto University, which is located on Arastradero Road. Mr. Vlastic said that if there are use permits for these uses, the Town wants to find out how Palo Alto is viewing them and why all of a sudden Portola Valley is picking up burdens that weren't anticipated when the Town issued permits.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner McIntosh moved to approve the January 18, 2012 minutes of the Planning Commission meeting, as amended. Seconded by Commissioner Gilbert, the motion carried 5-0

ADJOURNMENT [8:38 p.m.]

Nate McKitterick, Chair

Leslie Lambert, Planning Manager