

Planning Board Public Hearing

Location: Strafford Town Hall Conference Room

Date & Time: January 12, 2022 7:00PM

Board Members Present:

Charlie Moreno – Chairman

Donald Coker – Alternate

Phil Auger – Vice Chairman

Terry Hyland

Tim Reed

Others Present:

Natalie Moles, Strafford Regional Planning Commission, Economic Recovery Coordinator

Jen Czysz, Strafford Regional Planning Commission, Executive Director (virtual via Zoom)

Robert Fletcher, Minutes Recorder

Public Hearing – Amendment to Strafford Zoning and Land Use, Article 1.4.2H Wireless Telecommunication Facilities

The Chairman, Charlie Moreno, called the Public Hearing to order at 7:00PM and indicated the purpose of the hearing was to address the proposed Cell Tower Ordinance. He stated that the hearing was being conducted both in-person and via Zoom internet link. The Chairman recognized Board members Phil Auger, Terry Hyland and Donald Coker as present. He also recognized as present Natalie Moles and Robert Fletcher. Jen Czysz was also present virtually via Zoom.

The Chairman began the hearing with reference to the 20 year old Town Master Plan which indicated the need to address Town telecommunications. This led to the current outdated ordinance for Telecommunication Facilities which simply addressed cell tower construction along with height and placement restrictions. Cell phone use today and the significant lack of cell service in Stafford led the Planning Board to convene a Committee of interested Town citizens to research the best way to provide cellular reception to Town residents. He introduced the Committee members, Scott Schroeder, Chris Garcia, Scott Hodgdon and Jim Rousseau (not present) and asked Scott to provide an overview and PowerPoint presentation of the Committee findings.

Scott began by indicating their research and findings were based solely on cellular technology. They did not address visual considerations, but complied with current cell tower placement restrictions. He stated that the Town should not rely on cell service providers or cell tower builders to do what is best for the Town to improve cellular reception. They may use one tower or multiple towers to achieve their own goals without consideration of maximum coverage for Town residents.

The Committee's goal was to determine the maximum coverage within Strafford boundaries with the fewest cell towers. Scott presented the Committee findings visually with the use of Power Point slides. Current cellular coverage is estimated to be between 10-15% and the Committee's goal was to achieve 95% or better coverage. Using maximum tower height of 160 feet, specific tower topographical placement, 85 degree azimuth, and 700mhz frequency, signal propagation overlays provided by a

national wireless carrier indicated maximum coverage could be achieved with four cell towers placed strategically within the Town to provide 4G service. Scott provided a visual depiction of cell coverage for each tower and possible tower location for each, called an overlay district, which indicated the affected property owners. He also indicated the required tower construction would be self-supporting lattice which provides the best structural strength without guy wires. He indicated the tower visible from Bow Lake, "Strafford West", would be reduced in height to 120 feet due to its unobstructed height and also for visual considerations (to reduce visibility from Bow Lake).

Scott indicated three significant reasons for improving the Town cellular coverage:

- Safety – Using a cell phone to contact appropriate Emergency Services during residential power outage, outdoor activities or when driving.
- "First Net" availability – Allocates a portion of AT&T cellular service on each tower to First Responders under a national contract with AT&T which enables immediate contact with follow-up Emergency Services.
- Dedicated space on each tower for Strafford Fire Department antennas for direct Fire Department communications when authorized by the tower owner.

Scott briefly addressed vehicular access to tower sites during tower construction, installation of electric service, emergency generator and cellular service equipment, and follow-up site access for maintenance and emergency generator fuel delivery.

Scott stressed the importance of having a maximum cellular coverage plan with specific tower locations. Tower builders and/or wireless carriers would be more likely to consider installing service in Strafford with such a plan rather than pursuing individual residential tower locations which would provide limited coverage.

The Committee wrapped up their presentation. The Chairman thanked Scott and the Committee for their work to determine maximum cellular coverage for the Town. He acknowledged the presence of in-person attendees and the available Zoom virtual connection and opened the Public Hearing at 7:45PM to allow discussion, questions or comments. The Chairman noted receipt of written comments: 1) Kurt Wuelper, writing on behalf of the Third Baptist Church – abuter to one of four tower overlay districts, expressed his support for the proposed Telecommunication Facilities Article, indicating it was extremely thorough, completely aligned with Strafford's expressed desire, and adequately prepares the Town for the coming of cell towers; 2) Phil Lovejoy questioned the restricted height of the Strafford West tower. The Chairman noted that Scott Schroeder addressed this during his presentation when he indicated the tower height reduction was recommended due to visual considerations.

The Chairman asked the Board if they had any questions or comments, and there being none, acknowledged the presence of Board member, Tim Reed, who had been in attendance during Scott's presentation, but had not been recognized. The Chairman then solicited Public comments: Robert Bennett, 643 Province Road, asked about assessment and taxation for a tower located on personal property. Phil Auger indicated that although the property owner does not own the tower they would be assessed and taxed; however, fees paid for lease of the property owner's land would include amount of expected tax.

Jim Anderson, owner of property bordering Province Road (a Zoom participant who lives in Connecticut), thanked the Board for being proactive regarding cell tower placement and coverage. He had not experienced poor cell coverage while on his property near Bow Lake and questioned who had provided the data for current cellular coverage as presented on the maps. Scott Schroeder indicated a national wireless carrier produced the propagation maps using real-time data based on criteria as described earlier in the presentation.

Daniel Courtney, 553 Barn Door Gap Road, asked about the need for a road to access the towers. The Board indicated a driveway rather than a road would be provided by the tower construction company to provide vehicular access during construction and follow-up services. The driveway would need to initially handle large trucks, but it was not clear what would remain for follow-up services.

Robert Bennett, 643 Province Road, asked about the type of fuel used and site access for generator fuel deliveries. Scott indicated that diesel fuel is used, fuel tanks and fuel spill collection barriers are designed with consideration for the environment, and small vehicles are used to deliver small amounts of fuel.

The Chairman stated, as a point of clarification, that there is no obligation for any property owner in Town, either within or outside a tower overlay district, to have a tower constructed on their property, unless they want it. Conversely, properties outside the tower overlay district may still have a tower, however, they must receive a Variance from the Zoning Board of Adjustment, and a Special Use permit from the Planning Board. Tower construction within an overlay district must receive a Special Use Permit from the Planning Board, but do not require a Variance. This approach incentivizes tower placement within the overlay districts for universal coverage with minimal towers.

Scott Schroeder, (as resident) 522 Parker Mountain Road, re-emphasized that the Cell Tower Ordinance is an incentive for tower placement which may prevent multiple tower construction with minimal coverage. He indicated eminent domain would not be used to acquire property for tower placement. He also stated that when beginning to consider improved cellular coverage in Strafford, he asked tower builders how many towers they thought it would take to provide coverage for all of Strafford. They indicated nine or ten, which began the research to achieve maximum coverage with minimal towers. He also indicated by analyzing coverage for the entire Town, the four tower combination provides uninterrupted coverage on all pass-through roadways within the Town.

The Chairman asked if there were any more questions or comments either in-person or on the Zoom connection. There being none, and in reference to the Cell Tower Ordinance, he indicated that there were no substantive changes and that the Ordinance would be available on the Town website and in-print at the Strafford Town Hall. Robert Bennett asked what the Planning Board's next steps were to carry the Ordinance forward. The Chairman indicated the Board would vote to approve the proposed amendment to Wireless Telecommunication Facilities for it to be included as a ballot question during the upcoming Town elections to remove and replace Article 1.4.2H. The proposed amendment incorporates the language from the current ordinance.

Once again the Chairman asked if there were any more questions or comments either in-person or on the Zoom connection. There being none, he closed the Public Hearing at 8:11PM. He asked for a motion to approve the proposed amendment to Article 1.4.2H Wireless Telecommunication Facilities

in order to move it to a ballot question, which was so moved by Phil Auger, seconded by Tim Reed. All Board members voted verbally in the affirmative, and the motion passed.

The Chairman thanked all those present for attending the Public Hearing in-person and virtually, and following a short recess, continued the meeting at 8:25PM for an informal discussion of the proposed "2022-2023 Master Plan Update Scope of Work, Budget, and Time Line" prepared by the Strafford Regional Planning Commission. Following extensive review of the proposal, the Board concluded no substantive changes were needed other than a possible modification to the level of Community Outreach Workshops, and it could be presented to the Board of Selectmen for review and presentation as a Warrant Article for the March 2022 Town meeting.

There being no further business before the board, Phil Auger made a motion to adjourn the Public Hearing, which was seconded by Tim Reed. The board voted unanimously in favor, and the meeting adjourned at 8:45PM.