



**COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO  
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND BUILDING  
STAFF REPORT**

**PLANNING COMMISSION**

Promoting the wise use of land

Helping build great communities

<b>MEETING DATE</b> December 10, 2015	<b>CONTACT/PHONE</b> Schani Siong (805) 781-4374 ssiong@co.slo.ca.us	<b>APPLICANT</b> Speers & Verizon Wireless	<b>FILE NO.</b> DRC2014-00101
<b>SUBJECT</b> A request by <b>RONALD SPEERS &amp; VERIZON WIRELESS</b> for a Conditional Use Permit to allow the construction and operation of an unmanned wireless communications facility. The proposed facility would consist of: a) nine (9) panel antennas mounted at a height of 36 feet above ground level within the cylinder portion of a new 45-foot high faux elevated water tank; b) one new 200 square-foot prefabricated equipment shelter; c) one 30kW permanent diesel back-up generator; d) one (1) GPS antenna; e) six (6) new Raycaps; and f) associated utility trenching for the installation of power and telco lines. The project is located on a 4.22 acre parcel and will result in the disturbance of approximately 1,050 square feet for the construction of the proposed facility. The proposed project is within the Agriculture land use category and is located at 5900 Templeton Rd., approximately 300 feet (east) of Rocky Canyon Road and approximately 0.13 miles east of the City of Atascadero. The subject property is in the El Pomar-Estrella sub-area of the North County planning area.			
<b>RECOMMENDED ACTION</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adopt the Negative Declaration (ED14-215) in accordance with the applicable provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act, Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.</li> <li>2. Approve Conditional Use Permit DRC2014-00101 based on the findings listed in Exhibit A and the conditions listed in Exhibit B.</li> </ol>			
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION</b> The Environmental Coordinator, after completion of the initial study, finds that there is no substantial evidence that the project may have a significant effect on the environment, and the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report is not necessary. Therefore, a Negative Declaration (pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq., and CA Code of Regulations Section 15000 et seq.) has been issued on September 25, 2015 for this project. Mitigation measures are proposed to address aesthetics and are included as conditions of approval. Anyone interested in commenting or receiving a copy of the proposed Environmental Determination should submit a written statement. Comments will be accepted up until completion of the public hearing(s).			
<b>LAND USE CATEGORY</b> Agriculture	<b>COMBINING DESIGNATION</b> NA	<b>ASSESSOR PARCEL NUMBER</b> 034-551-009	<b>SUPERVISOR DISTRICT(S)</b> 5
<b>PLANNING AREA STANDARDS:</b> NA			
<b>LAND USE ORDINANCE STANDARDS:</b> Communications Facilities			
<b>EXISTING USES:</b> Single family residence, grazing			
<b>SURROUNDING LAND USE CATEGORIES AND USES:</b> <i>North:</i> Agriculture/ agricultural uses, residences <i>East:</i> Agriculture/ agricultural uses, residences <i>South:</i> Agriculture/ grazing <i>West:</i> Agriculture/ agricultural uses, residences			
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED BY CONTACTING THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & BUILDING AT: COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER γ SAN LUIS OBISPO γ CALIFORNIA 93408 γ (805) 781-5600 γ FAX: (805) 781-1242			

OTHER AGENCY / ADVISORY GROUP INVOLVEMENT: The project was referred to: Public Works, Environmental Health, Ag Commissioner, Building Division, Cal Fire, City of Atascadero	
TOPOGRAPHY: Nearly level to moderately sloping	VEGETATION: Forbes, ornamental landscaping, oak and pine trees
PROPOSED SERVICES: Water supply: N/A Sewage Disposal: NA Fire Protection: Cal Fire	ACCEPTANCE DATE: July 15, 2015

## SUMMARY

### Project Site

The project site is located within a suburban/ agricultural setting at the eastern edge of the City of Atascadero. Surrounding landscape (north, south, and east) is characterized by rolling hills covered with a mix of oak woodlands, grasslands, vineyards, and dry farm grain fields. To the west (toward the City of Atascadero), landscape consists of low density residential developments.

The proposed unmanned wireless communications facility would be located on a 4.22 acre parcel in the Agriculture land use category. The subject parcel contains a single family residence and various agricultural accessory structures on a knoll near the southwest portion of the parcel. The property is accessed from a driveway off Templeton Road, which leads up to the knoll where the proposed wireless communications facility will be built south of the existing house. Several large oak trees are scattered on the property and adjacent parcels (refer to Figure 1: Project Site).



Figure 1: Project Site

### Proposed Project

The proposed unmanned wireless communications facility would be constructed near the existing storage building, where the residence and other structures are currently located. As viewed from public roads in the area, the project site is located in an agrarian visual context, characterized by rolling hills, scattered oak and pine trees, and agricultural activities. The proposed facility, which resembles an elevated water tank and barn, has been designed to blend (rather than contrast) with the existing visual context.

The proposed facility would consist of the following improvements:

- Nine (9) panel antennas mounted at a height of 36 feet above ground level within the cylinder portion of a new 45-foot high faux elevated water tank. The antennas, and all associated mounting hardware and coaxial cables will be completely screened from public view. The water tank cylinder and its four legs will be constructed of realistic-appearing, textured and aged faux wood, and will be painted a light earth-tone color with a matte finish. As conditioned, no signs, banners, or graphic displays will be painted or otherwise depicted on the tank;
- One new 200 square-foot prefabricated equipment shelter, designed with brown privacy slats to resemble a wooden storage adjacent to the existing storage building. This structure will not be seen from public roads;
- One 30kW permanent diesel back-up generator;
- One (1) microwave antenna mounted externally on one of the faux water tank legs at approximately 30 feet high above ground level. This antenna is approximately 4' in diameter and is visible from public views;
- Six (6) new Raycaps installed within the cylinder portion of the new 45-foot high faux elevated water tank and the equipment shelter. These will be completely screened from public view;
- Associated utility trenching for the installation of power and telco lines.

## Visual Impacts

Northbound travelers on Rocky Canyon Road will have limited views of the proposed development on this property.

The project's visual impacts are largely mitigated through its design as an agrarian type structure that blends with the character of the surrounding visual setting. The equipment shelter is fenced with faux wood privacy slats, painted to look like a storage building.

The applicant submitted photo-simulations to demonstrate the visual impacts of the proposed facility from key viewing angles from Rocky Canyon Road and



**Figure 2. View of the proposed facility on site.**

Templeton Road (see attached graphics Figure 3-5). Rocky Canyon Road is a narrow and occasionally winding collector road. The topography east of Rocky Canyon Road is generally

steep with rolling hills and scattered oaks. Due to the sloping terrain and existing trees along the hills, limited glimpses of the proposed facility can be seen due to the degree of setback on the hillside and the tree coverage intercepting the line of sight from the roadway.



Fig 3: View Northeast from Rocky Canyon Road



Fig 4: View Southeast from Rocky Canyon Road



Fig 5: View Southeast from Templeton Road

### ***Alternatives Analysis***

In addition to the Speers site, Verizon considered 3 alternative locations for the East Atascadero service area. Five parcels were investigated and four property owners were contact by phone and mail. Out of those five, three were responsive, which includes the selected property owner (Speers). All sites could potentially support a new stealth antenna support structure. Verizon evaluated the feasibility of each alternative using the following criteria:

- **Can a lease be obtained?** Verizon contacted the owners of each site to determine whether or not they would be willing to lease space for a facility. Without a willing landowner, a site is not considered a feasible alternative.
- **Would coverage be achieved?** Considers whether the site would meet the project's coverage objective, either individually or when combined with other alternative sites. Verizon's coverage objective is shown on the attached propagation maps.
- **Does it meet County ordinance requirements?** Considers whether a wireless communications facility is an allowed use on the site and whether the site has the visual context and physical space to support a stealth structure.
- **Could it be constructed?** Considers whether the site has the infrastructure (e.g. power, telco, and access) in place or, if not, whether infrastructure could feasibly be developed on the site. For example, in order to develop a facility on a remote undeveloped hilltop in the Paso Robles area, Verizon would have to grade on steep slopes and install miles of underground power utilities. This could make such a site financially and environmentally infeasible.

These alternative sites within Verizon's targeted East Atascadero search area did not meet the feasibility criteria:

- **Shelton Property (adjacent to Speer's Property).** Verizon considered locating a 60' camouflaged tower and lease area for equipment shelter and emergency back-up generator at this property, adjacent to the Speer's. At the time of search, this property

was in escrow to be sold to another owner and there is no direct access to the top of the hill except through the Speer's property. Due to the uncertainty of escrow transaction, the need for additional access agreement, and the potential additional site disturbances to create another access road up the hillside, Verizon did not pursue this site as a feasible option.

- **Thompson Property.** Verizon considered locating a 60' camouflaged tower and lease area for equipment shelter and emergency back-up generator on this site; however, a dispute of ownership claims and title documentation efforts rendered this parcel as a non-feasible option for Verizon.
- **Highland site, 3995 Highway 41.** The closest existing wireless facility is located on this parcel, approximately 1.39 miles from the Speer's property. Due to its distance from the East Atascadero service area, Verizon decided the desired coverage goals could not be achieved from this location.

## LAND USE ORDINANCE STANDARDS

### **Section 22.30.180 – Communications Facilities**

This section of the ordinance describes specific permit and application content requirements as well as siting and design standards for proposed wireless communications facilities. The requirements of this section apply to communications transmission and receiving facilities in addition to all applicable permit requirements and standards of the FCC. As described below, the proposed project meets these requirements:

#### Radio Frequency Analysis

Section 22.30.180(B) requires applications for communications facilities to include estimates of non-ionizing radiation generated and/or received by the facility. These shall include estimates of the maximum electric and magnetic field strengths at the edge of the facility site and the extent that measurable fields extend in all directions from the facility.

*Staff Response: The applicant supplied a report to evaluate the proposed communications facility for compliance with appropriate guidelines limiting human exposure to radio frequency (RF) electromagnetic fields. According to the RF report for this project (Hammett & Edison; February 17, 2015), the maximum level of RF emissions from the proposed facility would be equivalent to 3.9 percent of the applicable public limit. The maximum calculated level at any residence on adjacent properties is 1.9 percent of the public exposure limit.*

#### Permit Requirements

Section 22.30.180(C)(1) requires Minor Use Permit approval for proposed wireless communications facilities that share locations with their own or other carriers' antennas either on existing monopoles, existing structures (buildings, water tanks, signs, etc.) or any other existing structure.

*Staff Response: This standard allows new communications facilities to be reviewed through a minor use permit (rather than a conditional use permit) when the proposed facility is located on an existing structure (rather than a new antenna support structure). Based on this standard, the*

*proposed project would require conditional use permit approval since it would require the construction of a new antenna support structure: a 45 foot tall faux elevated water tank.*

#### Co-Location

According to Section 22.30.180(C)(2)(b), when co-location is not proposed, applications for communications facilities must provide information pertaining to the feasibility of joint-use antenna facilities, and discuss the reasons why such joint-use is not a viable option or alternative to a new site.

*Staff Response: The purpose of this requirement is to minimize visual impacts by concentrating telecommunications equipment in the fewest possible number of locations, rather than scattering facilities across the county. It is usually in a carrier's interest to comply with this requirement since "collocation" sites are strategically located to provide superior coverage, already have the necessary infrastructure in place (access, power, and telco), and are approved through the more expedient and less expensive minor use permit (rather than conditional use permit) process.*

*The closest existing wireless facility is the Highland site, located at 3995 Highway 41, approximately 1.39 miles from the proposed site. This is a multi-carrier site with numerous panel antennas mounted on an 80' tall lattice tower. According to Verizon's RF engineer, the project's desired coverage goals could not be achieved from this location.*

#### Development Standards

According to Section 22.30.180(C)(3), the preferred placement for new wireless communication facilities is on existing structures, completely hidden from public view or painted and blended to match existing structures. In addition, all facilities shall be screened with vegetation or landscaping. Where screening with vegetation is not feasible, the facilities shall be disguised to resemble rural, pastoral architecture (e.g. windmills, barns, trees) or other features determined to blend with the surrounding area and be finished in a texture and color deemed unobtrusive to the neighborhood in which it is located.

*Staff Response: As described in the attached alternatives analysis, the applicant evaluated the feasibility of locating the proposed facility at two other locations, but was unable to reach a lease agreement with two of the properties and the third did not have the necessary coverage required by Verizon's RF engineer to achieve maximum coverage for the identified area.*

*The proposed project meets the visual screening requirements of this section because it's a stealth design that blends and is consistent with the agricultural character of the surrounding area. As conditioned, the water tank cylinder and its four legs will be constructed of realistic-appearing, textured faux wood, and will be painted a light earth-tone color with a matte finish. Repainting will occur, as necessary, over the life of the project.*

#### Unused Facilities

Section 22.30.180(4) requires all obsolete or unused facilities to be removed within 12 months of cessation of communication operations at the site.

*Staff Response: The project is consistent with this standard because the applicant is required to enter into a performance agreement and financial instrument for site restoration.*

AGENCY REVIEW

Public Works	<i>No Comments (March 9, 2015).</i>
Ag Commissioner	<i>Per referral comments dated March 6, 2015</i>
Cal Fire	<i>Per Fire Safety Plan dated March 13, 2015</i>
Building	<i>Per referral comments dated March 3, 2015</i>

LEGAL LOT STATUS

The one existing lot was legally created by a deed or subdivision at a time when that was a legal method of creating lots.

Staff report prepared by Schani Siong and reviewed by Airlin Singewald, Senior Planner.