



Chatham County, NC

Legislation Text

File #: 19-2958, **Version:** 2

Vote on a Legislative request for approval to amend Sections 1-4, Definitions and Terms; 2-4 (4), Setbacks; and 2-4 (6), Height, of the Wireless Telecommunication Facilities Ordinance to provide a telecommunication tower height waiver for public safety service providers.

Action Requested:

Vote on a Legislative request for approval to amend Sections 1-4, Definitions and Terms; 2-4 (4), Setbacks; and 2-4 (6), Height, of the Wireless Telecommunication Facilities Ordinance to provide a telecommunication tower height waiver for public safety service providers.

Introduction & Background:

A legislative public hearing was held on February 18th 2019. The proposed amendment is to Sections 1-4, Definitions and Terms; 2-4 (4), Setbacks; and 2-4 (6), Height. Jason Sullivan spoke on behalf of staff in support of the matter. Mike Reitz, 911 Communications Center Director, was available to answer technical questions regarding the towers. No one spoke in opposition and planning staff has not received any further calls or comments.

The Chatham County 911 Communications Center has an approved Capital Improvements Program (CIP) project to replace the current emergency radio system infrastructure with a reliable and industry standard P25 radio system. To accomplish this replacement requires the installation of new telecommunications towers in the county in areas that are currently have limited or no coverage. To reduce the cost of this upgrade the telecommunications tower ordinance needs to be amended to provide tower height exception for public safety service providers.

Discussion & Analysis:

The 2020-2026 CIP includes the following description of the proposed replacement of the current emergency radio system:

“The existing VHF/UHF radio system used by county public safety agencies is approximately 30 years old. The system has been maintained by replacing and upgrading equipment as needed, but rapidly increasing communication demands and technology advancements have rendered the system obsolete. The county currently has seven different tower sites which transmit and/or receive communications to fire, emergency medical services, and law enforcement. The current radio system does not cover the entire county. Interoperability with surrounding counties and/or agencies is limited or non-existent due to disparate radio systems. The current radio system poses a serious safety risk for responders and citizens.

Upgrade the current system to a P25 700/800 MHz radio system and connect to the NC VIPER radio system. Eliminate four of the current tower sites that are outdated and not at a location that will

permit the countywide coverage that is needed. Build three new tower sites and share the new VIPER tower that the state is constructing in Pittsboro.”

The Chatham County Wireless Telecommunication Facilities Ordinance restricts telecommunication tower heights at 300 feet with the approval of waiver. The 911 Communications Center has identified two sites in the county’s jurisdiction for new towers that would exceed the 300 foot height limit. The request is to amend the ordinance to provide an additional height exemption above 300 feet for public safety service providers.

The County Attorney reviewed the proposed amendments to the Communication Tower Ordinance and made several minor changes. The proposed Ordinance Revision with the County Attorney notes is attached. Planning staff recommends approval of the proposed amendments.

The Planning Board discussed the proposed amendments at the March 5th 2019 meeting. Chair George Lucier recommended that the tower height be limited to 400 feet. The board agreed with his recommendation and planning staff edited the proposed amendments to reflect the Boards suggestion. The Planning Board, by a unanimous vote (11-0), recommends the amendments to the Wireless Telecommunication Facilities Ordinance.

How does this relate to the Comprehensive Plan:

Goal: Provide infrastructure to support desired development and support economic and environmental objectives. Recommendation 1: Support the desired development pattern with utility policies and public services. Utility Policy 1: Ensure adequate utilities and public services to support the desired development pattern. Strategy 1.3: Expand public services (including police, fire, health, and other county services) concurrent with demands.

Goal: Become more resilient by mitigating, responding, and adapting to emerging threats.

Recommendation 1: Prepare for and respond to acute natural events and man-made emergencies.

Resiliency Policy 2: Improve emergency response.

Natural Resources and Resiliency Action Item 8: Improve facilities and expand programs as needed.

Recommendation:

The Planning Board, by unanimous vote (11-0), and planning staff recommends adoption of an ordinance amending the Telecommunication Facilities Ordinance to amend Sections 1-4, Definitions and Terms; 2-4 (4), Setbacks; and 2-4 (6), Height, of the Wireless to provide a telecommunication tower height waiver for public safety service providers.