

**ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 21, 2013**

**TESTIMONY OF
CELLCO PARTNERSHIP d/b/a VERIZON WIRELESS
REGARDING RAISED BILL NO. S.B. 888**

AN ACT CONCERNING WIRELESS BROADBAND

Proposal:

Raised Bill No. S.B. 888 (“S.B. 888”) would require the Connecticut Siting Council (“Council”) to make a decision on an application for the construction of a telecommunications tower within 150 days of the date the application is filed, add telecommunications towers to the list of structures that are permitted to be constructed on water company land and require the State to develop a process to make state land and properties available to wireless service providers for lease.

Background:

As the Energy and Technology Committee is well aware, the Council is charged with reviewing and making decisions on applications for the siting of telecommunications towers, among other “facilities” defined in Section 16-50i(a) of the General Statutes. The Council maintains exclusive jurisdiction over these facilities and its authority preempts local zoning and wetlands regulations.

Since the 1980s, the Council has been responsible for the siting of telecommunications towers in Connecticut and has played an integral role in the development and deployment of Connecticut’s wireless and broadband networks; networks that the general public, emergency service providers and public safety officials rely on everyday. The need to maintain a robust and reliable wireless network was never more obvious than in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Irene, the 2011 October snow storm, and more recently Super Storm Sandy.

Although often faced with difficult decisions, based on the location of a particular tower site and its potential impact on surrounding land uses, the Council has done a remarkable job of recognizing the public’s need for these important wireless services while at the same time selecting the most suitable location from, in most cases, a limited number of alternatives sites available in any particular area.

Comments:

Wireless service providers like Verizon Wireless, AT&T, T-Mobile and Sprint do not have the power of eminent domain. Tower site selection in a particular area is wholly dependent on the carrier’s ability to find a landowner willing to lease it ground space for a tower or space on a building roof-top, inside a church steeple or on another tall structure for its antennas.

As these wireless networks have developed in Connecticut over the last 30 years, tower and telecommunications facility siting has found its way from the more developed areas in our cities and along major travel corridors, to areas less populated, more residential and therefore more challenging from a facility siting perspective. Willing landowners in these areas are harder to find, resulting in large areas of the State that, to this day, remain un-served or under served. Many of these same, more challenging areas, however, maintain hundreds of acres of open land owned by municipal and regional water companies and the State of Connecticut (State Park and Forest land). However, due to current statutory restrictions and department policies, none of this land is available for the siting of telecommunications towers.

The benefits of having this additional land available for consideration by the wireless carriers and the Council cannot be overstated. These generally larger tracts of undeveloped and heavily wooded land could allow for the siting of towers in more remote locations, further from nearby residences and other land uses, where existing vegetation can more effectively screen a tower site. Heavily wooded sites also allow for a more effective use of stealth tower designs more in keeping with that particular setting (e.g., water towers; pine trees; fire towers).

The physical environmental impact of a typical tower site is minimal. Leased areas are generally 100' X 100' in size while the "developed" portion of a tower site is a smaller area (50' x 50') known as the facility compound. Development of an access driveway and the installation of utilities can also be accomplished with minimal environmental impact.

Finally, while not providing any particular land owner with a financial windfall, the benefits of tower lease payments to a municipal water company, for example, cannot be ignored. A single tower site used by multiple wireless carriers can result in some meaningful income during these difficult economic times.

The proposed legislation would also further federal policies regarding the development of a robust and reliable wireless network nationwide. President Obama identified wireless telecommunications facilities as "critical national infrastructure" in part for the continuous service that can be provided during times of natural disasters. Connecticut has experienced this first-hand. President Obama also pledged to expand access to mobile broadband services to nearly all U.S. citizens. Specifically, the President said, "[w]ithin the next five years, we'll make it possible for businesses to deploy the next generation of high-speed wireless coverage to 98 percent of all Americans... This isn't about faster Internet or fewer dropped calls. It's about connecting every part of America to the digital age." This goal is not achievable if wireless carriers are prohibited from installing critical national wireless infrastructure (towers) in large geographic areas of the State simply because it does not have access to Water Company, State Park, and State Forest lands.

Conclusion:

For all of the reasons stated above, Verizon Wireless supports S.B. 888 and urges the Energy and Technology Committee to approve it.