

Wireless Communication Facilities

PRIORITY FOR LOCATION AND TYPE OF FACILITY

Preference for placement and type of new wireless communication towers and wireless communication facilities (WCFs) applies to the development of sites with wireless communication towers, antennas, and associated facilities. WCFs which are exempt from priority and development standards are listed separately on the third page of this tip sheet.

LOCATION*

Most Preferred
City of Tacoma rights-of-ways and attached to existing structures
Non-residentially-zoned sites that are developed as public or quasi-public sites and sites with existing WCFs, M-1, M-2, and PMI Industrial Districts
Mixed-Use Center Districts (UCX, UCX-TD, and CIX)
Other non-residentially-zoned property
Residentially-zoned sites with existing WCFs that are attached to multiple-family structures or residentially-zoned sites with existing WCFs that are developed as public or quasi-public sites
R-4-L, R-4, R-5, NCX, URX, RCX, CCX, T, HMX, and HM Districts, subject to TMC 13.06.080.Q;
Developed public sites and sites with existing WCFs in R-1, R-2, R-2SRD, NRX, and R-3 Districts
New facilities are prohibited in R-1, R-2, R-2SRD, NRX, and R-3 Districts, except as noted above
Least Preferred

TYPE OF FACILITY

Most Preferred
Collocation of facilities and the installation of concealed antennas and attached facilities
Free-standing facilities, which extend no more than 16 feet above adjacent existing vegetation or structures, only when the option listed above cannot be reasonably accomplished
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If the applicant chooses to construct a new free-standing facility, the burden of proof shall be on the applicant to show a facility of a higher order of preference cannot reasonably be accommodated on the same or other properties. The City may retain a qualified consultant, at the applicant's expense, to review supporting documentation for accuracy
Least Preferred

*All proposals are reviewed for critical areas and buffers, which should be avoided and are subject to TMC 13.11 – Critical Areas.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT OF 1996

The Federal Government adopted the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Section 704(a)(7)(B)(iv) states that "No State or local government or instrumentality thereof may regulate the placement, construction, and modification of personal wireless service facilities on the basis of the environmental effects of radio frequency emissions to the extent that such facilities comply with the commission's regulations concerning such emissions."

DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

Visual impacts – The pre-existing character of the surrounding buildings, land use, and the zoning district should be preserved, to the greatest extent possible, while maintaining the function of the communications equipment. The following are methods that the applicant should implement when possible:

- Existing on-site vegetation should be preserved, or improved, and disturbance of the existing topography

should be minimized, unless such disturbance would result in less visual impact of the site to the surrounding area.

- Towers or mounts should be screened by placement of the structure among and adjacent to, within 20 feet, of three or more trees at least 50 percent of the height of the facility.
- Facilities should be located close to structures of a similar height.
- Facilities should be located toward the center of the site. Roof-mounted facilities should be located toward the interior area of the roof and the screening should be used, in order to minimize view from adjacent properties and rights-of-way.
- The antenna, associated support structure, and equipment shelter should be incorporated as a building element or architectural feature.



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Wireless Communication Facilities

- Equipment facilities should be located within buildings or placed underground. When they cannot be located in existing buildings or placed underground, equipment shelters or cabinets shall be screened, insulated for noise, and limited to a maximum footprint of 400 square feet and a maximum height of 12 feet.
- Wireless facilities and related equipment shall generally be of neutral colors such as white, gray, blue, black, or green, or incorporated as part of the features of a building, unless specifically required to be painted another color by a federal or state authority. Other screening methods, such as the use of siding which is architecturally compatible with adjacent buildings, or site-obscuring fencing materials may also be utilized. Wooden poles are not required to be painted.

Setbacks – Towers up to 60 feet in height shall provide the setbacks required for the underlying zone. Where a conditional use permit is required, minimum setbacks of 20 feet from all property lines or the setbacks of the underlying zone, whichever are greater, shall be required. Towers over 60 feet shall provide one additional foot of setback for each foot of height over 60 feet.

Towers located in M-1, M-2, and PMI Districts, which exceed the height of the underlying zone, shall be setback from the abutting residential district one additional foot for each foot of height over the maximum height permitted by the zone.

All setbacks are measured from the property line to the base of the monopole, lattice tower, or equipment mount, or in the case of a guyed tower, to the base of the guy wires which support it.

Equipment structures shall comply with the setback requirements of the underlying zone. In the R-1, R-2, R-2SRD, NRX, and R-3 Districts structures must comply with the minimum setback of the zone or a minimum setback of 20 feet from all property lines, whichever is less.

Tower separation – An applicant will be required to demonstrate why it is necessary, from a technical standpoint, to have a tower within one-half mile of another tower, whether it is owned or utilized by the applicant or another provider, as well as why collocation is not feasible.

Security fencing – Security fencing a minimum of six feet in height shall be required around the perimeter of any tower site. No razor or ribbon wire may be utilized in conjunction with the fence installation.

Signage – No signs shall be permitted on towers. One non-illuminated identification sign, with a maximum area of six square feet for all faces, shall be required per site and shall include the name and telephone number of the provider(s).

Lights and signals – No lights or signals shall be permitted on towers unless required by the FCC or the FAA. All lighting, unless required by the FAA, or other federal or state authority, shall be shielded so that the direct illumination is confined to the property boundaries of the sight source.

Noise – Equipment facilities used to house equipment shall be insulated to ensure noise levels do not exceed a maximum sound pressure level of 40 dB, pursuant to the 1993 ASHRAE Handbook at any residential receiving property abutting the site. No equipment shall be operated so as to produce noise in violation of maximum noise levels set forth in TMC 8.122.

Waiver of development standards – The Administrator may waive any of the development standards upon finding:

- a) reasonable alternatives are to be provided to said standards which are in the spirit and intent of this section; or
- b) strict enforcement of the standards would cause undue or unnecessary hardship due to the character or use of the property.

Applications for waivers shall be processed in accordance with Chapter 13.05 of the TMC, or where a CUP is required the waiver shall be addressed under the CUP and shall not require a separate application and fee.

For more information about zoning development standards, please contact a Land Use Planner at (253) 591-5030.

EXEMPTIONS – ALLOWED IN ALL ZONING DISTRICTS

- Antennas and related equipment no more than 3 feet in height
- Wireless radios utilized for temporary emergency communications in the event of a disaster.
- Licensed amateur (HAM) radio stations not exceeding the permitted height requirements of the underlying zone
- Satellite dish antennas less than 7 feet in diameter
- Routine maintenance and repair, provided compliance with TMC 13.06.080.Q is maintained and no structural



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work or changes to height or dimensions of antenna, tower, or buildings are performed

- A COW “Cell On Wheels” or other temporary wireless facility shall be permitted for a maximum of 90 days during construction of a permanent facility or emergency
- Residential television antennas on residential dwelling units

SEPA (STATE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT)

WAC 197-11-800(25) requires an applicant to obtain a SEPA Determination or Addendum for certain wireless proposals. Triggers for this process include, but are not limited to: WCFs proposed to be located in a residential district, WCFs to be attached to a residence or a school, and wireless towers proposed to be 60 feet in height or taller. See Tip Sheet L-1200, for SEPA requirements.

USE CATEGORIES

Level 1: Modification, including the complete replacement of an existing tower or antenna to its existing height, to accommodate collocation, or the installation of a concealed antenna. Also, an antenna attached to the roof or sides of a building, an existing tower, water tank, or similar structure. This level is limited to the following types of antenna(s): an omni-directional whip antenna no more than 7 inches in diameter and extending no more than 16 square feet in total area per panel and extending above the structure to which it is attached by no more than 16 feet; or a parabolic dish no greater than 3 feet in diameter per dish and extending above the structure to which it is attached by no more than 16 feet.

Level 2: Towers with associated antennas or dishes to a height of 60 feet

Level 3: Towers with associated antennas or dishes over 60 feet up to 140 feet

Level 4: Towers with associated antennas or dishes exceeding 140 feet



COW “Cell on Wheels”



Antenna Attached to Roof of Existing Building



Wireless Tower Camouflaged as Flagpole



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ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT (CUP)

The use category of a type of wireless facility and the location of that proposed facility are considered when determining the extent of review that a proposal will be subject to. Administrative reviews are done when the applicant submits for a building permit. CUPs require about 120 days of processing.

Category	District Classifications			
	R-1; R-2; R-2SRD R-3; R-4; R-4L R-5; PRD; T; HM HMX; DR; NRX	PBD; C-1; C-2; NCX; CCX; RCX; URX; UCX; DCC; DMU; WR	CIX; M-1	M-2; PMI
Level 1	Administrative ^{1,3}	Administrative	Administrative	Administrative
Level 2	CUP ³	CUP ²	Administrative	Administrative
Level 3	CUP ³	CUP	CUP	Administrative
Level 4	CUP ³	CUP	CUP	CUP

Footnotes:

- 1 – Permitted on public facility sites, subject to administrative review and building permits
- 2 – Allowed 16 feet above underlying zoning district height limit, except in C-1, C-2, and NCX Districts
- 3 – New wireless communication towers and antennas prohibited in R-1, R-2, R-2SRD, and R-3 Districts, except on public or quasi-public property developed with existing public or quasi-public facilities and properties developed with existing wireless communication facilities.

SUBMITTAL MATERIALS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

“Administrative Review” occurs when the applicant applies for a building permit.

- A site elevation and landscaping plan indicating the specific placement of the facility on the site, the location of existing structures, trees, and other significant features, the type and location of plant materials used to screen the facility, including the related equipment facilities, and the proposed color(s) of the facility. The landscape plan shall address the required method of fencing, finished color, and, if applicable, camouflage and illumination.
- A signed statement indicating that:
 - the applicant for a new tower has provided notice to all other area service providers of its application to encourage collocation. Notice shall be published in a newspaper of general circulation once per week, for a minimum period of 30 days, and an affidavit of publication shall be provided at the time of application as proof that the required notice has occurred. This requirement shall not apply to the development of concealed or camouflaged towers; and
 - the applicant and/or landlord agree to remove the facility within one year after abandonment.
- Copies of all applicable environmental documents, including a SEPA Determination and an FCC environmental assessment or a statement that

describes the specific factors that obviate the requirement for an FCC environmental assessment

- An site plan with professionally designed drawings
- Legal description of the parcel and Parcel Number
- A letter signed by the applicant stating that the tower will comply with all FAA regulations and applicable standards, and all other applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations
- A signed statement indicating that activities by the wireless communication provider shall be lawful and in compliance with all applicable laws, orders, ordinances, and regulations of federal, state, and local jurisdictions
- The wireless service provider must demonstrate that it is licensed by the FCC or demonstrate that it has agreements with an FCC-licensed wireless communications provider for use or lease of the support structure, if such wireless communication provider is required to be licensed by the FCC.

SUBMITTAL MATERIALS FOR CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT

All application materials must be submitted in electronic PDF format on compact disc (CD) or online at TacomaPermits.org. See [Electronic File Standards](#).

- Completed Application for Land Use Permit and application fee
- All of the required submittals for administrative review
- Photo-simulations of the proposed facility from at least 4 line-of-sight views



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- A current map showing the location of the proposed facility, the location of other existing or proposed wireless facilities operated by the applicant that are in the City and within ½ mile of the City boundary
- The approximate distance between the proposed tower or antenna and the nearest residentially-zoned property
- Demonstration of how the proposed site fits into its existing overall network within the City
- Confirmation that a pre-application public meeting has been held or is subject to be held with the neighborhood council
- A narrative addressing the CUP criteria (See TMC 13.05.010.A)
- Applicable materials to address the site selection criteria

CUP SITE SELECTION CRITERIA

1. The applicant is responsible for demonstrating, with engineering evidence, that the proposed antenna will satisfy its function in the applicant's grid system. Further, the engineering evidence must demonstrate that the height requested is the minimum height necessary and that collocation is not feasible.
2. The applicant must be either an FCC-licensed wireless communications provider or demonstrate that it has agreements with an FCC-licensed wireless communications provider for use or lease of the support structure.
3. Proposed facilities shall be located and designed to minimize significant adverse impacts on residential uses. Facilities shall be placed in locations where the existing topography, vegetation, buildings, or other structures provide screening.
4. Location and design of the proposed facilities shall consider the impact of the facility on the surrounding neighborhood and the visual impact within the zoning district.

MINOR MODIFICATIONS TO AN EXISTING CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT

Minor modifications to existing wireless communication facilities, including the installation of additional antenna and associated equipment, for which a valid conditional use permit exists, may be approved, provided it is determined there is minimal or no change in the visual appearance and said modifications comply with performance standards.

APPLICABLE REGULATIONS

- Tacoma Municipal Code Section: [13.05.010.A – Conditional Use](#), [13.06.080.Q – Wireless & Section](#)
- Washington Administrative Code: [197-11-800\(25\) – Categorical exemptions & 173-60 – Maximum Environmental Noise Levels](#)



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