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To: Planning Commission  
From: Urban Design Committee  
Date: January 5, 2014  
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent Review of a telecommunications monopole at Fire Station #25, 8800 W. Huguenot Road**

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**I. APPLICANT**

David Krzemien, Department of Emergency Communications

**II. LOCATION**

Fire Station #25, 8800 W. Huguenot Road

**Property Owner:**

City of Richmond

**III. PURPOSE**

The application is for final location, character and extent review of a telecommunications monopole at Fire Station #25 at 8800 W. Huguenot Road.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

This project would allow for the construction of a 225' tall telecommunications monopole behind Fire Station #25 at 8800 W. Huguenot Road, to replace two existing monopoles on the site. Verizon Wireless, at its cost, will remove the existing 170' tower (which it owns), install the proposed 225' monopole, and remove the 80' monopole previously operated by the Richmond Ambulance Authority (RAA). The new pole will allow for the City to replace its 15+-year old public safety radio communication system to ensure that the local jurisdictions that make up the Capital Region Communications Steering Committee (the City and the Counties of Henrico and Chesterfield) and their emergency responders can communicate seamlessly with one another. In return, Verizon is able to install a pole that has the required structural capacity to handle their desired upgrades. Sprint will continue to co-locate on the new monopole and will also benefit from the increase in height and structural capacity.

The proposed monopole will be located in the existing fenced enclosure area, which is screened both by the Fire Station building and by mature evergreen and deciduous landscaping, which will remain. The Urban Design Committee notes that while the new monopole is taller than the existing one, this project will result in the removal of the two existing monopoles. The Committee is supportive of this project as it will allow for the necessary upgrades to the regional emergency communications capacity with minimal alterations to the existing condition. Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant final approval as submitted.

**Staff Contact:**

Jeff Eastman, (804) 646-6348

## **V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

### **a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

The subject property is located on the north side of W. Huguenot Road, between Chippenham Parkway and Stony Point Road. Fire Station #25 is located towards the front of the 1.23 acre property, which is zoned R-2 (Single-family residential). To the rear of the fire station are two existing telecommunications monopoles and associated ground equipment. One of the monopoles, 170' in height, is owned by Verizon Wireless, which grants the City the right to locate antennas and related equipment on the pole as part of the lease agreement for the use of the property (for which the City derives an annual payment). The monopole is also co-located upon by Sprint. The second monopole, 80' in height, was constructed for the Richmond Ambulance Authority but is no longer in use. In addition to the fenced compound for the ground equipment, the site currently provides four parking spaces located directly to the rear of the fenced area for park visitors and cell technicians.

To the rear of the subject property is another City-owned property, also zoned R-2, that contains a water tower and another telecommunications monopole. This monopole is 199' in height, is owned by the American Tower Company (ATC), and also has several carriers co-located on it. Further north and to the west are several other heavily wooded City-owned properties that comprise the City's Larus Park.

Adjacent to the Fire Station on the east is a gas station with a convenience store and a strip shopping center, all zoned B-2 (Community Business). Beyond that is a garden center and single-family detached residential uses, all zoned R-2. The area to the west of Stony Point Road is developed with a shopping center and office complex that are a part of the Stony Point Community Unit Plan. In this area, W. Huguenot Road is the dividing line between the City and Chesterfield County, with the single-family detached dwellings on the south side of the road being located in the County.

### **b. Scope of Review**

The project is subject to location, character, and extent review under Section 17.07 of the Richmond City Charter as a "public structure".

### **c. UDC Review History**

The Urban Design Committee reviewed and the Planning Commission approved, as submitted, the conceptual plans for the monopole in November 2014. The Urban Design Committee reviewed and the Planning Commission approved the construction of the existing monopoles at this location in March of 1998 and April of 1999. The construction of Fire Station #25 was reviewed by the UDC and approved by the Planning Commission in 1970.

### **d. Project Description**

This project would allow for the construction of a 225' tall telecommunications monopole behind Fire Station #25 at 8800 W. Huguenot Road. The monopole would be constructed by Verizon Wireless, but would accommodate equipment for Sprint and also emergency communications equipment for the City of Richmond. In 1998, the Capital Region Communications Steering Committee was formed by the City and the Counties of Henrico and Chesterfield to oversee

the development and implementation of an emergency radio communications system to replace the various independent systems in use and to permit the local jurisdictions and their emergency responders to communicate seamlessly with one another.

The applicant's report notes that the City, along with its partnering counties, is actively planning replacement of the now 15+-year old public safety radio communication system. A particularly significant problem facing the City and Counties is that the existing radio system equipment faces technological obsolescence and supportability challenges forcing modernization of the public safety system. To ensure the integrity, functionality and effectiveness of public safety emergency communications in the immediate and foreseeable future, a procurement process for the new radio system is planned to occur between 2015 and 2016.

There are two existing monopoles on the site, one that is 170' tall and a second that is 80' tall. Verizon Wireless, which owns the 170' tall pole, conducted a structural analysis that determined that the monopole did not possess the structural capacity for their desired antenna upgrades. Verizon Wireless contacted the City to discuss the replacement of the 170' monopole with a like monopole that would contain the structural capacity for its antennas. This request coincided with the City's project to upgrade its emergency communications equipment on the subject tower; as a result the City and Verizon began to work together to design a tower replacement structure to accommodate both groups' desired upgrades.

The new monopole, which will be located within the existing ground equipment enclosure, will be 225' tall with an 8' lightning rod for an overall height of 233' above ground level. The increased height proposed for the new monopole is necessary to accommodate both Verizon's proposed antenna installations as well as the City's proposed antennas for maximum coverage of emergency communications. The monopole will be composed of galvanized steel, and the antennas will be gray or silver in color to match. The new monopole will provide Verizon Wireless and Sprint each with an antenna array design that will enhance their coverage in the area as well as increasing their coverage footprints due to the increase in height and the increase in the number of antennas.

The proposed 225' monopole will require lighting as mandated by the Federal Aviation Commission (FAA) because its height exceeds 199'. Verizon Wireless will request the FAA to approve medium intensity dual mode lighting, which is standard in urban areas. The lighting consists of medium intensity white strobe for daytime and medium intensity red strobe for nighttime. Adjacent residential properties located on Huguenot Road and the adjoining neighborhoods to the south should not be directly impacted by the nighttime lighting as the lighting will be at a height of 225' on the tower and is not downward directed.

The base of the monopole and the associated ground equipment are screened by the Fire Station building and by the existing mature evergreen landscape buffer planted around the base of the equipment compound. The north or rear of the existing compound contains the site access and parking spaces so no landscaping is located in this area. The west side of the compound contains the ice bridge structure along with two mature deciduous oak trees that will remain.

The mature oak trees planted along Hayden Hill Lane also provide additional screening on the east.

In regards to parking, the current site utilizes the gravel area directly adjacent to the access gate of the equipment compound for parking for use by the technicians who service the site on a monthly basis or during a service outage. The four existing parking spaces located in the gravel area at the rear of the compound for use by the wireless service technicians and the public for access to Larus Park will remain. In addition, a handicap accessible parking space is proposed at the rear of the site on the north side of the compound adjacent to the landscape buffer.

Verizon has agreed to assume the costs of removing the existing 170' tower and installing the proposed 225' monopole tower as well as removing the 80' monopole previously operated by the Richmond Ambulance Authority (RAA). Verizon will also complete all of the required federal regulatory filings and file for any required state and local permits. This process typically takes five to six months and Verizon is forecasting early spring 2015 for its completion. Upon receipt of its federal approvals for the replacement tower, Verizon anticipates a construction period of three months beginning in late spring of 2015. City antennas and related equipment are scheduled for installation no later than year-end 2016 to ensure availability for coverage testing and readiness for cutover to the new system in early 2019. A temporary equipment shelter and generator may be required by the City to house its new radio equipment during the testing phase as the existing equipment is located in the basement of the fire station. When the new system is fully-operational and accepted, the existing 170' monopole will be dismantled and removed along with the second 80' pole located adjacent to the compound.

**e. Master Plan**

The subject property is located in the Huguenot District, as defined by the Citywide Master Plan, and is designated for Public and Open Space uses, a category that includes publicly owned and operated parks, recreation areas, open spaces, schools and other government and public service functions (page 135). There is no language in the Plan specific to the proposed telecommunications monopole.

**f. Urban Design Guidelines**

The Public Facilities section of the Urban Design Guidelines states that “whenever possible, new telecommunication devices shall be located on existing infrastructure” and further that “telecommunication devices that are able to be co-located on existing towers are encouraged” (page 16).

**VII. ATTACHMENTS**

- a. Vicinity Map**
- b. Application**
- c. Plans**