

equipment, and 168 linear feet of 6-foot chain link fencing. Staff discussed alternatives with the Applicant, reviewed alternative locations assessed by the Applicant, and concurs with development of the site currently proposed.

Regarding potential visual impacts, the subject property is not described as visually sensitive or an area where the 2010 General Plan requires public or visual access (Figure 15 - North County Visual Sensitivity Map). Despite this designation, staff still explored potential visual impacts of the project. The area immediately surrounding the project site is heavily forested, which will substantially screen the proposed mono-pine structure, and the mono-pine height will be similar to the surrounding trees. Also, the photo simulations submitted by the applicant demonstrate that the project would not result in an adverse visual impact to the surrounding community.

DISCUSSION:

Setting

The area surrounding the approximately 35-acre parcel is comprised of forest, farmland, a landfill, and rural residential uses. The nearest residence is over 500 feet from the proposed site. Access to the wireless communications facility would be from Lewis Road via an existing driveway.

Visual Resources and Design

The proposed site is screened by trees and vegetation. In addition, the proposed mono-pine would be camouflaged to resemble a pine tree, which would allow it to blend with the other pine trees in the vicinity that are of similar height to the proposed mono-pine. The Applicant also proposes to cover all panel antennas and remote radio head (RRH) units with pine “needle socks” to further camouflage the pole-mounted equipment. All antennas and pole-mounted equipment would also be painted non-reflective flat green, and the monopole would be painted non-reflective flat brown.

According to the Applicant, the proposed facility has been designed at its minimum functional height, and needs to be a total of 100 feet above grade for the signal to reach the intended service area. The antennas will be mounted at a 87-foot centerline, and the mono-pine pole will be 90 feet tall. The additional 10 feet in height will allow for a treelike “hat” to sit atop the pole, resembling the top of a real tree. Based on staff’s analysis, the project would not result in an adverse visual impact. The proposed facility has been designed to minimize visibility and to blend into the surrounding forest growth. The proposed colors and camouflage would ensure the facility blends with the other trees in the vicinity. Also, the proposed facility would not be highly visible from Lewis Road, and only the upper 20 feet of the mono-pine pole would be visible when viewed from the surrounding roads and residences. The proposed location for this tower is 1.83 miles away from the next closest wireless site, so there is no issue with a cumulative visual impact with other carriers. Lastly, the equipment enclosure at the base of the tower would not be visible from any common public viewing areas.

Location and Alternative Site Analysis

According to the Applicant, the proposed facility is needed to offload capacity from Pajaro Gap and provide improved wireless communication coverage to the greater Watsonville area, along Vega Road and San Miguel Canyon Road. The Applicant states that this section of the County currently suffers from poor signal strength due to a high volume of usage and distance between existing Verizon Wireless sites. The applicant has supplied a coverage map as part of their alternatives analysis which details this lack of coverage (**Exhibit D**). The proposed site would aid the surrounding sites with call volume and call hand-off, and would improve call quality, signal strength, and wireless connection services throughout the area. The improved wireless service will benefit residents, local businesses, public services, and roadway safety throughout the area.

The Applicant identified and analyzed alternative sites, and selected the proposed site as the best option to minimize visual impacts and achieve the wireless service objectives. Among the possible sites analyzed was

the proposed NGEN facility to be located on the adjacent Lewis Road Landfill property. This site offered co-location on a proposed/to-be-constructed 100-foot lattice tower in the eastern portion of the Applicant's search ring. The Applicant did not select this site because the higher terrain of the landfill would lead to ineffective coverage and potential incompatible RF interference in Santa Cruz County.

Co-Location

The proposed wireless facility has been designed to structurally accommodate additional antennas, and additional ground space is available within the lease area for at least one additional carrier.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Sections 15303 categorically exempts the construction of new, small facilities or structures, including structures not exceeding 2,500 square feet in floor area. The project involves the installation of a 100-foot mono-pole with 9 panel antennas, a 1,760 square foot equipment enclosure, associated equipment, and 168 linear feet of 6-foot chain link fencing. Therefore, the proposed development is consistent with the parameters of this exemption. The technical reports prepared for the project do not identify any potential significant or cumulative impacts, and no evidence of significant adverse environmental effects were identified during staff review of the development application. No unresolved issues remain.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

The following agencies have reviewed the project:

- RMA-Public Works
- RMA-Environmental Services
- Environmental Health Bureau
- Water Resources Agency
- North County Fire Protection District

The project was referred to the North County Non-Coastal Land Use Advisory Committee (LUAC) for review. The LUAC, at a duly-noticed public meeting on November 5, 2014, voted 3 to 0 to support the project as proposed.

Prepared by: Joe Sidor, Associate Planner, x5262
Reviewed by: Brandon Swanson, RMA Services Manager
Approved by: Carl P. Holm, AICP, RMA Director

The following attachments are on file with the RMA:

- Exhibit A Draft Resolution, including:
 - Recommended Conditions of Approval
 - Site Plan and Elevations
- Exhibit B North County LUAC Minutes (November 5, 2014)
- Exhibit C Vicinity Map
- Exhibit D Wireless Coverage Map

cc: Front Counter Copy; North County Fire Protection District; RMA-Public Works; RMA-Environmental Services; Environmental Health Bureau; Water Resources Agency; Joseph Sidor, Associate Planner; Brandon Swanson, RMA Services Manager; Complete Wireless Consulting (Michelle Ellis), Agent; Alvaro Gonzalez, Property Owner; The Open Monterey Project (Molly Erickson); LandWatch; Project File PLN140559