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**To:** Ted Jordan <ted.jordan@lacity.org>  
**CC:** Councilman Rosendahl <councilman.rosendahl@lacity.org>, <janice.hahn@lac...>  
**Date:** 1/6/2010 8:20 AM  
**Subject:** CF 09-2645/Cell Tower Regulation  
**Attachments:** Cell Tower on Via del la Paz Pacpalcalusa LR.jpg; Summary of Cell Tower Regulation....doc

Pacific Palisades Residents Association  
P.O. Box 617  
Pacific Palisades, CA 90272  
info@pprainc.org

To: Deputy City Attorney Ted Jordan

Re: CF No. 09-2645/Los Angeles cell tower regulation

Dear Mr. Jordan:

Pacific Palisades Residents Association (PPRA) has been researching cell tower proliferation and regulation issues for much of 2009. In the past year alone, our community has experienced an unprecedented 11 attempted cell tower installations, including the attached example of an unregulated utility pole cell site installation (erected without notice in a parkway only a few feet from homes). Six of the 11 attempts are still pending (negotiations are ongoing); one was denied a Coastal permit; and three were withdrawn only after strong opposition from concerned residents.

PPRA supports the efforts of Councilmembers Rosendahl, Hahn, Koretz and Garcetti to tackle this problem which is growing throughout Los Angeles. We appreciate that you are also investigating the City's regulations and practices and urge you to consider the following:

1. There is no local, independent regulation of utility pole cell site installations.
2. The JPA does not regulate utility pole cell site installations.
3. There is effectively no local regulation of free-standing cell towers or "monopoles" in PROWs.
4. The City has a constitutionally based police power to control the location and manner of construction of public utility facilities in PROWs.
5. The PUC recognizes that it is the City's function to regulate the installation, location and design of cell towers and poles.
6. In accordance with recent case law, the City can and should regulate the installation of all cell towers and poles in PROWs as well as on private property, with meaningful protections for residential areas and provisions for denial based on adverse aesthetic impacts.
7. Cell tower proliferation is rapidly growing -- as are serious concerns about inadequate or nonexistent regulation.

Attached is a detailed Summary supporting the above points, based on PPRA's extensive investigation. We hope that you will find this Summary useful.

PPRA submits that the time is right for a comprehensive new Los Angeles cell tower ordinance which provides protections for residential areas to the full extent of the law. At a minimum, the inadequate or nonexistent regulation of cell towers in PROWs -- a failure to exercise the City's power and duty to protect the public -- is a glaring and serious problem which should be immediately addressed.

We emphasize that we do not oppose all cell towers; however, if they are to become "ubiquitous" in society (as the FCC anticipates), Los Angeles clearly needs stronger regulation, as permitted under the most recent decisions interpreting federal and state law, to provide for rational planning, sufficient notice and hearings, community input, meaningful protection for residential neighborhoods, and clear and

consistent standards as to placement, design, height and aesthetics -- on all types of property, including PROWs.

We hope and trust that your report and Councilman Rosendahl's motion in the above-referenced file will be taken up by the Council Public Works Committee at the earliest opportunity.

Thank you for your continuing work on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Barbara Kohn, President  
Christina Spitz, Vice-President  
Pacific Palisades Residents Association

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Via De La Paz  
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## **Pacific Palisades Residents Association**

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1/06/10

### **Summary of Cell Tower Regulation/Proliferation**

#### **1. There is no local, independent regulation of utility pole cell site installations.**

- PPRA is unaware of any local permitting process for utility pole cell site installations in public rights of way (PROWs) in Los Angeles; no officials have informed us of any such process when we have sought information as to how and why such installations are allowed to occur without notice; instead, we have repeatedly been told that the Joint Pole Agreement (JPA) allegedly controls or is the purported "authority" under which such installations are allowed.
- The above-ground facility (AGF) ordinance expressly *exempts utility poles* (i.e., poles which support overhead lines or wires) on the basis that their installation is supposedly regulated instead by the JPA or another authority (Muni. Code sec. 62.03.2.IX.C) -- a conclusion that is not shared by DWP or the Southern California Joint Pole Committee (SCJPC; see below).
- Excavation permits are not required for pole installations in sidewalk areas (sec. 62.02(a)); the City does not require prior notice if an excavation extends less than 100 square feet (sec. 62.04(b)); and although the work is nominally supposed to be performed in accordance with statutory requirements, there is no provision for a compliance review (secs. 62.02 and 62.04).
- It is unclear whether or to what extent discretionary "collocation" permits are required in cases of utility pole cell site installations (Gov. Code sec. 65850.6); to our knowledge the City does not engage in CEQA reviews or impose any location, height, design or aesthetic limitations on new or replacement pole installations in PROWs, as contemplated by sec. 65850.6.
- DWP confirmed to LANNC members in December 2009 that there is in fact *no independent regulation of utility pole cell site installations*.
- According to DWP officials, telecom companies who are JPA members are entitled to install utility poles *of any height anywhere they wish* in PROWs to support cellular equipment; DWP officials have seen unregulated pole installations as high as 110 ft.; no wind-resistance analyses or other safety tests (as far as we can tell) are conducted; and the location and total number is unknown because *DWP does not keep records of these installations* (some of which do not even involve DWP poles, lines or equipment).
- DWP officials "defer to the City Attorney" for an explanation of the basis for these conclusions and/or practices.

#### **2. The JPA does not regulate utility pole cell site installations.**

- DWP admits that the JPA is not regulatory in nature; at the recent LANCC presentation, DWP officials acknowledged that the JPA is *not* a regulatory document.



- The term "Joint Pole Authority" is a misleading misnomer often used by City officials.
- Staff of the SCJPC -- which administers and monitors joint use of poles -- explained to us that: the SCJPC is not a regulatory body; the JPA itself is administrative rather than regulatory in nature; the SCJPC does not become involved in monitoring usage until after a joint installation has already occurred; in most cases the SCJPC is not even notified of these installations for many years (if ever) and therefore does not have a complete or current list; and, to their knowledge, there is no regulation of the siting, construction, height or appearance of these installations other than "self-regulation" by the members' *own* in-house "joint pole" departments.
- The JPA has no provisions referring to or purporting to regulate the location, placement, construction, height or appearance of poles.
- The JPA provides that all members *shall* abide by local regulations (i.e., the JPA contemplates local regulation of poles); in any event, the City cannot contract away its police power and authority to regulate the use of property to protect the public health, safety and welfare (see discussion on pp. 5-6 of report by Jack Allen filed in CF No. 09-2645 on November 17, 2009 -- "Jack Allen report").
- DWP claims that it signed the JPA in 1918, yet there is no confirming evidence that it in fact did so (PPRA requested copies of all signature pages under a recent Public Records Act request of DWP, but no such pages were produced); DWP is not listed as a member under the most current 1998 version (only the City itself is a member). [Note: Although requested by PPRA, DWP also did not produce any other governing documents, such as a so-called "SCJPC Handbook" specifically referenced by DWP officials at the LANCC meeting, which may provide further insight into the JPA's role, *if any*, in regard to pole installation.]

### **3. There is effectively no local regulation of free-standing cell towers or "monopoles" in PROWS.**

- "Monopoles and antennas" which do not support overhead lines or wires are referred to only once in the AGF ordinance (i.e., as not within the definition of "utility poles" -- Muni. Code sec. 62.03.2.I); the ordinance's specific requirements as to height, dimensions, landscaping, anti-graffiti measures and the like refer only to power cabinets, and there are no particular requirements applicable to free-standing towers or monopoles.
- The ordinance calls for prior design approval of *cabinets* by the Cultural Affairs Commission (CAC); however, there is no requirement for design approval of free-standing towers or monopoles (sec. 62.03.2.III.C.5). CAC staff also told us that they do not issue design approval for "poles" but are supposedly "required" (unclear by whom or what authority) to approve all cabinet design proposals; in fact, CAC routinely issues bulk design approval for thousands of cabinets at a time, without actual notice or community input.
- "Pole-mounted facilities" are specifically exempt from the ordinance (sec. 62.03.2.IX.C).
- AGF ordinance drafters have confirmed to PPRA that the ordinance *was not intended to apply to towers or poles of any type*; it was intended to address the then-occurring problem of unregulated cabinets in PROWs (an intent supported by the ordinance's language); new poles or towers supporting antennas were not being installed in parkways, were not on the drafters' "radar," and were accordingly not addressed in the ordinance (other than the exemption for "pole-mounted facilities" and utility poles).

- We also note the argument on pp. 6-7 of the Jack Allen report to the effect that "pole-mounted facilities" may be subject to all other applicable requirements of law, including Muni. Code sec. 12.21.A.20 *et seq.* (the "WTF ordinance," or zoning regulations applicable to cell towers on private or other public property).
- Notwithstanding the above, BOE now requires telecoms to file AGF applications for free-standing towers or monopoles in PROWs; at the same time, Jeff LaDou of BOE has informed PPRA that he has been told (unclear by whom or what authority) that he supposedly "must" grant permission for free-standing towers, despite the lack of any standards and the inapplicability of the AGF ordinance on its face to such towers.
- With no specific standards for towers or poles in the AGF ordinance, the exemption for "pole-mounted facilities," the lack of design approval by CAC, the apparent "rubber-stamped" approval of all AGF applications for monopoles, and the failure to apply any other applicable regulatory authority to such installations, there is effectively no regulation of such structures under current City practices and procedures involving PROWs.

#### **4. The City has a constitutionally based police power to control the location and manner of construction of public utility facilities in PROWs.**

- It has long been recognized that although utility franchises in PROWs are matters of state concern, cities retain a constitutionally based power to do "such things in regard to the streets and the use thereof as were justified in the legitimate exercise of the police power." *Western Union v. Hopkins*, 160 Cal. 106, 118 (1911). Specifically, "the city still controls the particular location and manner in which public utility facilities are constructed in the streets." *Sprint v. Palos Verdes*, 583 F.3d 716, fn. 3 (9th Cir. 2009).
- In *Pac. Tel. & Tel. v. S.F.*, 51 Cal. 2d 766 (1959), San Francisco's public works code controlled the construction of public facilities in the streets and required *installation and excavation permits* showing location and manner of construction; the telephone company in that case "concede[d] the existence of the power in the city to exact these requirements." *Id.* at 773-774.
- As noted above, Los Angeles is not regulating utility pole cell site installations at the most basic level (i.e., issuance of installation and excavation permits) -- something that even utility franchise operators concede is within the City's police power. *In PPRA's opinion, it is outrageous that in this respect the nation's second largest city is completely failing to exercise its power and duty to protect the public health, safety and welfare.*

#### **5. The PUC recognizes that it is the City's function to regulate the installation, location and design of cell towers and poles.**

- As explained on p. 5 of the Jack Allen report, under General Order 159A the PUC defers to local governments as to regulation of cell sites and issuance of land use approvals (acknowledging that "local citizens and local government are often in a better position than the Commission to measure local impact and to identify alternative sites").
- GO 159A also states that the PUC's goals in connection with cell site construction are to ensure that a CEQA review will take place, that affected citizens and organizations are given notice and an opportunity for input in the process, and that public health, safety, welfare and zoning concerns are addressed -- none of which occur in Los Angeles in the case of utility pole cell site installations and only some of which occur in other installations.

- PUC Rule 94 -- the only other PUC regulation specifically concerning cellular facilities -- is entirely concerned with technical requirements for placement of equipment on poles and contains no provisions for installation or regulation of poles themselves.
- PUC staff advised us recently that if it is confirmed (as it now has been) that any cell site installations are in fact not being regulated by the City or DWP and the PUC's goals are not being addressed or achieved, the PUC would be authorized to accept a complaint about the lack of regulation and to take such actions as it deems appropriate to ensure adequate regulation as contemplated by GO 159A.

**6. In accordance with recent case law, the City can and should regulate the installation of all cell towers and poles in PROWs as well as on private property, with protections for residential areas and provisions for denial based on adverse aesthetic impacts.**

- Under *Sprint v. San Diego*, 543 F.3d 571 (9th Cir. 2008), it is now clear that cities do have the ability under the Telecom Act to regulate more extensively for location and appearance and to protect residential areas to a greater degree than had previously been understood or believed, subject to the Act's specific restrictions on local regulation.
- More recently, in *Sprint v. Palos Verdes*, *supra*, the 9th Circuit held that cities have discretionary authority to bar cell towers from state PROWs on aesthetic grounds (subject to Telecom Act restrictions) -- or, as the Court observed in fn. 3, "the City possesses constitutionally based police powers over aesthetics."
- According to commentary, this holding is a significant departure from previous case law and "represents a major blow to the wireless industry" (California Wireless Association newsletter, Dec. 11, 2009, pp. 3-4).
- As explained in PPRA's previous submission in this matter, neither the WTF ordinance nor the AGF ordinance has any particular protections for residential neighborhoods and there are no provisions specifically allowing the denial of cell towers (whether in PROWs or on private property) based on adverse aesthetic impacts -- protections and provisions which are now allowed under current decisions (subject to Telecom Act restrictions). Reform of the City's regulations should be undertaken to include these now-permitted protections and provisions.

**7. Cell tower proliferation is rapidly growing -- as are serious concerns about inadequate or nonexistent regulation.**

- In addition to those experienced in the Palisades, during the past year numerous cell towers and antennas were erected or proposed in PROWs and on private property near homes and schools throughout Los Angeles -- from San Pedro to Westwood to Tarzana, from Venice to Hollywood to Atwater Village -- many without notice or regulation, some seemingly overnight in parkways where there had been no poles before, and several in areas where residents claim that coverage is already good or where *other, less obtrusive alternatives* are available for antenna placement.
- Residents, community leaders and public officials are seriously concerned -- including the LAUSD Board, which unanimously passed a resolution in late 2009 (prompted by the erection of an "un-noticed" cell tower near a school and homes in San Pedro), condemning the siting of towers without notice near schools; these installations are continuing unabated in 2010 (outraged residents of West Hills saw yet another unregulated utility pole cell site installation attempt in late December 2009/early January 2010).

- Over 16 neighborhood councils, community councils and other associations have passed motions/resolutions or submitted letters to the City as of December 2009, expressing concern about cell tower proliferation and/or urging reform of the City's regulatory scheme (with most, including PPRA, calling for a comprehensive new ordinance and imposition of a moratorium).
- The City of Glendale responded to residents' concerns by imposing a moratorium on cell tower installations and drafting a new comprehensive ordinance -- with a "tiered" approach to tower siting, "preferred" and "non-preferred zones," and other protections for residential neighborhoods -- which is still in the public comment stage; the City of Burbank has indicated its interest in following suit.
- In November 2009, FCC commissioners publicly claimed a "pressing" need to "boost" cell tower installations, "cut local red tape," and "speed deployment" of "ubiquitous" antennas -- all to encourage many more antennas and towers to be built as rapidly as possible for enhanced broadband coverage.