



Legislation Text

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**PLANNING AND HOUSING COMMISSION  
STAFF REPORT**

DATE: 8/10/2020

TO: Honorable Chair and Commissioners

FROM: Community Development Department

**APPLICATION REQUEST:**

**CUP2019-0005:** Conditional use permit to construct a 90-foot high telecommunications lattice tower on 1.53 acres owned by the City of Corona for telecommunication purposes, located at 740 John Circle in the Open Space designation of the Northeast Corona Specific Plan (SP81-2). (Applicant: Tracy Martin with City of Corona Department of Water and Power, 755 Public Safety Way, Corona, CA 92880)

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

**That the Planning and Housing Commission** adopt the Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring Plan and approve Resolution No. 2558 GRANTING CUP2019-0005, based on the findings contained in the staff report and conditions of approval.

**PROJECT SITE SUMMARY**

**Area of Property:** 1.53 acres

**Existing Zoning:** OS (Open Space) of the Northeast Corona Specific Plan (SP81-2)

**Existing General Plan:** U (Utility)

**Existing Land Use:** City communications site and utility infrastructure

**Proposed Land Use:** 90-foot high telecommunications lattice tower

**Surrounding Zoning/Land Uses:**

**N:** ES (Estate Residential) district of the Corona Ranch Specific Plan (SP85-3)/Water storage tank

**E:** OS (Open Space) district of the Northeast Corona Specific Plan (SP81-2)/vacant hillside

**S:** OS (Open Space) district of the Northeast Corona Specific Plan (SP81-2)/vacant hillside

**W:** OS (Open Space) district of the Northeast Corona Specific Plan (SP81-2)/vacant hillside

**BACKGROUND**

The 1.53-acre project site is a natural hillside known as Grape Hill located approximately 1,600 feet south of Hidden Valley Parkway and Corsica Drive. The site contains an existing 70-foot high lattice communications tower owned and operated by the City of Corona. The existing communications tower was approved in 2002 under Conditional Use Permit 02-018 (CUP02-018). The tower contains

communications equipment which allows the city's Department of Water and Power (DWP) to provide radio signal citywide to utility facilities that provide water and wastewater. The tower operates on the Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system, which enables DWP to remotely control and monitor utility facilities. The SCADA system is critical for safety and efficiency reasons, especially during emergency events. The tower also contains communications equipment for the city's Public Safety Enterprise Communications System (PSEC), which allows city departments, including Police and Fire to communicate via their two-way radios during emergencies. The existing tower, however, is at capacity and in need of additional equipment to expand current signal reach for the SCADA and PSEC systems. Additionally, the Police Department has identified coverage gaps in their PSEC system in the McKinley area.

Exhibit 3.F contains a propagation map that was prepared by DWP's consultant, Applied Technology Group, to show the current coverage for the area at the project site. The project site is located at the center of the map within the red area, which indicates where the signal strength is at its strongest. The red area indicates a signal strength ranging from 0 to -50 decibels (dBm). The signal strength from the existing tower decreases with distance and this is represented by the other colors. The blue color which is located primarily along the outskirts of the signal ring indicates the locations where the tower's signal strength is at its weakest, but also usable. These areas emit a signal strength ranging from -70 to -77 dBm. The areas in grey have a signal strength beyond -77 dBm which indicates that there is not enough signal for communication to function well or reliably. Construction of the second tower would enable the city to add additional equipment onto the towers to improve coverage.

The DWP is proposing to construct a second telecommunications lattice tower on the project site. The tower is proposed at a height of 90 feet and located approximately 65 feet from the existing tower (Exhibit 3.A). DWP intends to initially construct the tower at 60 feet, then raise the tower to 90 feet when needed.

The city's Telecommunications Ordinance under Chapter 17.65 of the Corona Municipal Code requires wireless carriers to investigate the feasibility of co-locating on the tops of buildings or existing structures before establishing a new structure. As it pertains to the project, co-locating was not an option for DWP because there are no existing buildings or structures in the area that could provide the needed height to communicate with facilities in other parts of the city, and the existing tower is unable to accommodate additional equipment.

DWP submitted the application to the city on July 25, 2019, which was reviewed by staff at the Project and Environmental Review Committee meeting on August 15, 2019. Staff issued an incomplete application letter to DWP on September 30, 2019, noting items missing from the application submittal. The DWP subsequently submitted the required items and Planning staff deemed the application complete on June 23, 2020.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The existing communications tower contains antennas for DWP and the PSEC system. The applicant intends to remove the DWP antennas from the existing tower and mount them on the second tower, to reduce the load on the existing tower. This will free up space on the existing tower when

additional equipment is needed.

### **Site plan**

The property is situated at the peak of a hill surrounded to the south, west, and east by open space property that is maintained by the Cresta Verde Hills Homeowner's Association. Existing residential properties are located at the base of the hill, approximately 170 feet below the project site. Abutting to the north of the project site is an approximately 4-acre residential property. The home within this property is situated at the bottom of the hill, approximately 400 feet west of the new tower. The portion of the property that abuts the project site is undeveloped hillside that will likely remain undeveloped because of the steepness of this area. In addition, the property's Residential Estate zoning requires a minimum lot size of 5.5 acres for newly created lots which precludes this property from being subdivided since the property is currently less than 5.5 acres. Farther north is the city's Yuma Water Tank which the project site takes access from, via Corsica Drive and Impresivo Drive. The entrance into the Yuma Water Tank property is gated and an existing paved road connects the water tank property to the project site. Entrance to the water tank property is only for authorized maintenance and repair personnel. Construction of the second telecommunications tower is not anticipated to create a traffic impact on the surrounding roadways, because vehicles to the site would only be for periodic maintenance. Exhibit 2 provides an aerial view of the project location.

As shown by the applicant's site plan in Exhibit 3.A, the telecommunications compound is located at the center of the property and secured by an existing 6-foot high chainlink fence with privacy slats. The existing 70-foot high lattice communications tower and three associated equipment shelters currently occupy the eastern portion of the compound. A city personnel parking lot occupies the western portion. The proposed 90-foot high tower will be constructed on the northwest portion of the compound, approximately 65 feet from the existing tower. The equipment associated with the proposed tower will be housed within the existing shelters.

### **Elevations**

The elevation plan for the tower at 90 feet is shown in Exhibit 3.C. The elevation plans for the tower at 60 feet are shown in Exhibit 3.D. The proposed tower will have three sides and designed to resemble the existing lattice tower. Three new 10-foot long omni whip antennas will be mounted at the uppermost portion of the tower. The tower also accommodates multiple panel antennas and microwave dishes at varying heights, as shown on the elevation plans.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS**

Per Section 15070 of the State Guidelines for Implementing the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and Section 6.02 of the City's Local Guidelines, a Mitigated Negative Declaration was prepared for the project based on the results of an Initial Study. The Initial Study identified that the project's potentially significant effects to the environment are capable of being mitigated to less than significant. Therefore, based on the mitigation measures identified in the Mitigated Negative Declaration, there is no substantial evidence in light of the whole record before the City that the project may have a significant or potentially significant effect on the environment. The Mitigated Negative Declaration is recommended for adoption (Exhibit 4).

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

The applicant has paid the application processing fees to cover the cost of the conditional use permit review, as required by City resolution.

## **PUBLIC NOTICE AND COMMENTS**

A 20-day public notice was mailed to all property owners within a 500-foot radius of the project site, as well as advertised in the *Sentinel Weekly News* and posted at the project site. As of the preparation of this report, the Community Development Department has not received any inquiries from the public in response to the notice.

## **STAFF ANALYSIS**

A second telecommunications tower is necessary on the project site for the city's Department of Water and Power to communicate with and remotely control the operations of its facilities. The tower is also necessary to enhance the city's public safety and emergency communications system for the Corona Police and Fire Departments. The tower requires a line-of-sight between the tower antennas and the receiving antennas which are located at facilities citywide. This requires the antennas to be visible and located at a certain height so that the antennas' signals are unobstructed. The project site is on a hill with no obstruction and currently contains a communications tower making the site ideal for the second tower.

The property is located within the Northeast Corona Specific Plan, which designates the project site as Open Space (OS). The OS designation does not prescribe traditional development standards or building setbacks. Instead, it requires a development to consider the following:

1. Appropriateness of the site for the proposed use;
2. The effects of the proposed use upon the adjacent properties and the community;
3. The need for the proposed use, and
4. The care taken to maintain the naturalness of the site by blending the proposed use with the site and its surroundings.

The proposed tower complies with the OS development standards, as the project site currently contains an existing lattice tower for communication purposes; thereby a precedent has established the use as appropriate. Also, the proposed tower is necessary to improve the city's SCADA and PSEC communications systems in order for the city to safely and efficiently serve the city. Lastly, the applicant has taken steps to maintain the naturalness of the hill side by remaining within the existing compound and designing a lattice tower similar to the existing onsite equipment, hereby maintaining the characteristics of the existing compound and distance from residential and commercial properties.

A Visual Impact Study and Site Propagation Mapping analysis was prepared by Applied Technology Group, Inc. (prepared June 24, 2019, revised April 3, 2020) to assess potential visual impacts to the surrounding area. The Visual Impact Study utilized photographs taken from 13 different locations surrounding the project site. The viewpoints are shown on page 8 of the study. The study provides images of current site conditions with one lattice tower, and proposed conditions with the second lattice tower upon project completion. The photosimulations in the study demonstrate that the second tower would be partially obscured by existing structures or trees, and in cases where the

tower is fully visible, it would not be significantly noticeable due to the tower's distance (Exhibit 3.E).

CUP2019-0005 is consistent with Infrastructure and Utilities General Plan Policy IU-8.2, which provides for the continued development and expansion of telecommunications systems for residential and nonresidential use. CUP2019-0005 also contributes to Public Safety General Plan Policy PS-5.1, by ensuring that police facilities and equipment are expanded commensurably to serve the needs of the City's growing population, business community, and visitor population. The Planning Division recommends approval of CUP2019-0005 based on the findings listed below and staff's recommended conditions of approval.

## **FINDINGS OF APPROVAL FOR CUP2019-0005**

1. An initial study (environmental assessment) has been conducted by the City of Corona so as to evaluate the potential for adverse environmental impacts. The environmental assessment identifies potentially significant effects on the environment, but:
  - a. The project applicant has agreed to revise the project to avoid these significant effects or to mitigate the effects to a point where it is clear that no significant effects would occur, as reflected in the Conditions of Approval attached as Exhibit 3.B.*
  - b. There is no substantial evidence before the City that the revised project may have a significant effect.*
2. All the criteria necessary for granting a Conditional Use Permit, as set forth in Section 17.92.110 of the Corona Municipal Code, have been met for CUP2019-0005, as follows:
  - a. The proposal will not be detrimental to the public health, safety convenience and general welfare, because any radiofrequency emissions from such installations are governed by limits placed by the Federal Communications Commission for human exposure. The proposed telecommunications facility is also required to adhere to FCC regulations and prior to construction the applicant shall obtain all required permits from the local and federal agencies.*
  - b. The proposed use is not detrimental to the existing and permitted uses in the general area of the project site and relates properly to the surrounding roadways because the wireless telecommunications facility meets the development standards of the zone. Additionally, the proposed tower will have minimal visual impacts on the neighboring properties, as the tower will be located at the top of a hill, which is approximately 170 feet higher in elevation than the surrounding properties, and the nearest residence is situated approximately 400 feet west of the new tower. Furthermore, the project site will have adequate vehicular access from Corsica Drive and Impresivo Drive, north of the project site through the Yuma Water tank property.*
  - c. Reasonable conditions as necessary are being imposed on the project to protect public health, safety, and welfare and to establish full compliance with the applicable development standards of the OS (Open Space) designation of the Northeast Corona Specific Plan (SP81-2).*
  - d. CUP2019-0005 will not impact the existing circulation system because a city vehicle is anticipated to visit the site periodically for routine maintenance, and will utilize existing on-site parking space, which is sufficient to accommodate this activity. Therefore, the proposed use will not impact the level of service on the surrounding streets.*

3. The proposal is consistent with the General Plan for the following reasons:

- a. The proposed project will fulfill the city's Infrastructure and Utilities General Plan Policy IU-8.2 which provides for the continued development and expansion of telecommunications systems for residential and nonresidential use.*
  - b. The proposed project contributes to Public Safety General Plan Policy PS-5.1 by ensuring that police facilities and equipment with respect to communications are expanded commensurably to serve the needs of the City's growing population, business community, and visitor population.*
4. The proposal is consistent with the Open Space (OS) designation of the Northeast Corona Specific Plan (SP81-2) for the following reason:
  - a. The proposed wireless telecommunications facility is consistent with the development standards of the Open Space designation of the Northeast Corona Specific Plan, as the project site currently contains an existing 70-foot high lattice tower for communication purposes; therefore, the proposed 90-foot high lattice tower is an appropriate use for the site. Also, the proposed tower is necessary to provide relief to the existing communications tower, which provides signal for the city's SCADA and PSEC systems and is currently at capacity. The applicant has taken steps to minimize potential visual impacts created by the second tower by designing the tower as a lattice structure to match the existing lattice tower onsite to help the proposed tower blend in with the existing facilities.*

**PREPARED BY:** LUPITA GARCIA, ASSOCIATE PLANNER

**REVIEWED BY:** SANDRA YANG, SENIOR PLANNER

**REVIEWED BY:** JAY EASTMAN, PLANNING MANAGER

**SUBMITTED BY:** JOANNE COLETTA, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

#### EXHIBITS

- 1 - Resolution No. 2558
- 2 - Locational and zoning map
- 3.A - Site Plan
- 3.B - Conditions of Approval
- 3.C - Elevation plan for 90-foot high tower
- 3.D - Elevation plans for 60-foot high tower
- 3.E - Visual Impact Study & Site Propagation Mapping
- 3.F - Propagation Map
- 3.G - Applicant's letter dated December 27, 2019
- 4 - Environmental Documentation

Case Planner: Lupita Garcia (951) 736-2293