



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
STRATEGIC PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE, MAYOR

STAFF

MADELEINE MASTERS, *PLANNING DIRECTOR*
CHRISTOPHER DI IORIO, *PLANNER/ZONING ADMINISTRATOR*
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FREDERICK J. LUND, *SENIOR DRAFTSMAN*

Case #: ZBA 2008-52
Date: September 19, 2008
Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 230 Highland Avenue

Applicant Name: Fiber Tower Corporation

Applicant Address: 202 Broadway, Providence RI 02903

Property Owner Name: Cambridge Health Alliance

Property Owner Address: 1493 Cambridge Street, Cambridge MA 02139

Agent Name: Michael Johnson

Agent Address: 202 Broadway, Providence RI 02903

Alderman: Taylor

Legal Notice: The applicant seeks Special Permit Approval under SZO §7.11.15.3 for the installation of a wireless communications facility.

Zoning District/Ward: Residence A / 3

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit under SZO §7.11.15.3

Date of Application: September 3, 2008

Date(s) of Public Hearing: ZBA: October 15, 2008

Date of Decision: N/A

Vote: N/A

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The proposed site of the facilities is the roof of the Somerville Hospital, a facility that occupies a full block, contains 96,679 square feet, and is bounded by Highland Avenue to the North¹, Crocker Street to the West, Tower Street to the East, and Crown Street to the South. The site slopes downward from Crown Street to Highland Street. Partially in response to this slope, the roof on the masonry hospital structure has several levels. The highest level presently has a penthouse, to which are

¹ Mistakenly labeled as "Broadway" on Locus Plan.

attached a number of antennas, some of which are visually prominent from surrounding streets. The signage for the building is also on this penthouse.



2. Proposal: The applicant is proposing to add one equipment cabinet (2' x 3' x 4'), and two pairs of pipe-mounted antennas, each containing a one-foot diameter dish mounted approximately two feet above a two-foot diameter dish, onto an existing penthouse that sits on the highest portion of the roof. One pair of antennas would be placed on the northern face of the penthouse (facing Highland Avenue), alongside an existing antenna; one pair would be placed on the western face (facing Tower Street); and the equipment cabinet would be placed on the southern face (facing Crown Street). New cable lines would run along the back (south) side of the penthouse, but otherwise the facilities would be supported by existing structures and utilities, resulting in no alteration to the structure. In response to a staff request to lower the antennas so that they are entirely below the roofline of the penthouse, the Applicant has stated that this would hinder access for maintenance. Nevertheless there are many examples of façade mounted antennas throughout the City.

3. Nature of Application: Under SZO §7.11.15.3 establishment of a wireless communications facility requires a Special Permit approval.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The hospital is surrounded on three sides by the RA district and faces the RC district across Highland Avenue. Properties along facing Highland Avenue feature a variety of commercial and residential uses, with a convenience store, liquor store, and restaurant as ground floor uses topped by housing immediately facing the hospital block. Crocker and Tower Streets are predominantly single- and two-family homes. Directly south of the site, across Crown Street, is a surface parking lot associated with the hospital.

5. Impacts of Proposal: The proposed antennas would be visible from Highland Avenue, Crocker Street, and Tower Street, but less visible from Crown Street. The proposed equipment cabinet is not expected to be visible. The addition of two small antennas on the site would not likely be noticeable, given the volume of antennas presently on the building.

Nevertheless, as noted in the attached findings, the Applicant should work with Planning staff to select colors with which to reduce the prominence of the new facilities; bright colors such as those presently seen on the facility should be avoided. In addition, the property owner has been made aware of their

obligation to remove abandoned facilities now on the site; staff have identified an abandoned facility on the south side of the side whose removal should be a condition of any approval.

6. Green Building Practices: The applicant stated that, “FiberTower’s small cabinet uses less power and energy than the typical equipment. (A micro cabinet requires 110VAC 20 amp circuit. The regular size cabinet requires 220VAC 30 amp circuit.) Additionally, there is no A/C used for the cabinets, thus eliminating potentially harmful refrigerants from the environment.”

7. Comments:
Fire Prevention/ Ward Alderman have been contacted but have not provided comments.

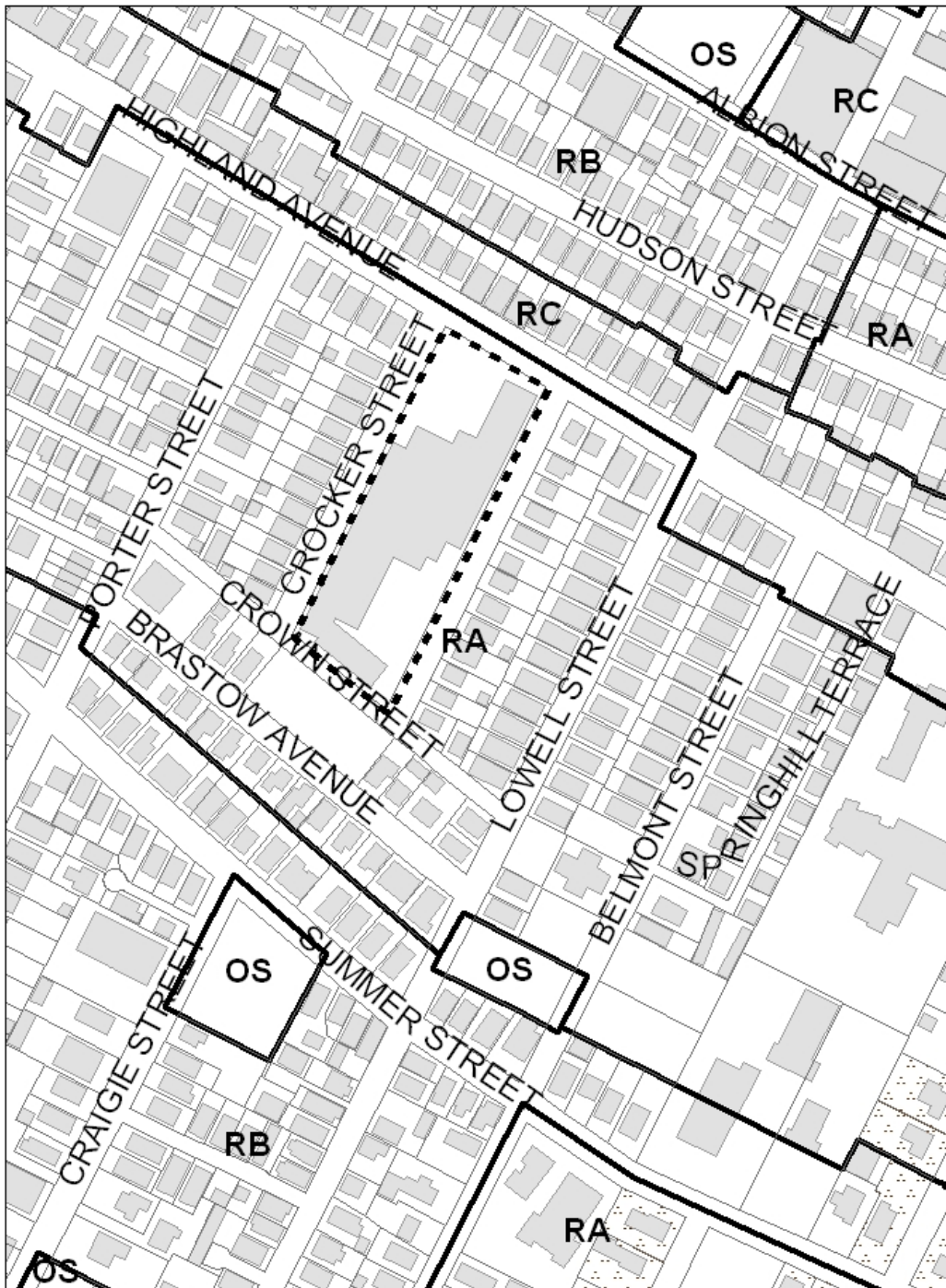
II. RECOMMENDATION (Special Permit under §7.11.15.3)

Based on the findings in Appendix A (attached) and subject to the following conditions, the Planning Staff recommends **CONDITIONAL APPROVAL** of the requested **SPECIAL PERMIT**.

#	Condition	Timeframe for Compliance	Verified (initial)	Notes				
1	Approval is for two pairs of antennas, an equipment cabinet on an existing penthouse, and associated cables as shown in the following materials and plans submitted by the Applicant:	BP/CO	ISD, Plng.					
	<table><tr><th>Date</th><th>Submission</th></tr><tr><td>9/19/08</td><td>Application and plans submitted to the City Clerk's Office</td></tr></table>				Date	Submission	9/19/08	Application and plans submitted to the City Clerk's Office
	Date				Submission			
	9/19/08				Application and plans submitted to the City Clerk's Office			
Any changes to the approved (plans and elevations) that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive ZBA approval.								
2	The Applicant shall lower the antennas such that they are not above the height of the elevator penthouse.	BP	ISD					
3	Paint or other materials used to reduce visibility of equipment shall be subject to Planning Staff approval.	BP	PLNG.					
4	A code compliant fire alarm system shall be installed.	CO	FP					

5	<i>Compliance with Noise Control Ordinance.</i> Prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Use and Occupancy Permit for the installation of the wireless telecommunications facility, the Applicant shall submit to the Inspectional Services Division, with a copy to the Zoning Board of Appeals, a sound level measurement certified as accurate by a professional acoustician and shall perform such sound level measurements six months after issuance of the certificate of occupancy, with subsequent sound level measurements annually on or before the anniversary date of the original six month measurement to document that all of the Applicant's installed equipment complies and continues to comply with the decibel level standards established by the City of Somerville, Noise Control Ordinance. The Applicant shall provide the results of such measurements and certify that the facility complies with the decibel level standards established by the City of Somerville, Noise Control Ordinance, with a copy to the Zoning Board of Appeals.	CO/ Cont.	ISD, Plng.	
6	Compliance with Federal Communications Commission Guidelines for Human Exposure to Electromagnetic Fields. To ensure compliance with the standards established by the Federal Communications Commission Office of Engineering and Technology ("FCC") in OET Bulletin 65 as adopted by Massachusetts Department of Public Health under 105 CMR 122.021, the Applicant shall perform measurements, within two (2) months of the date that the Applicant's wireless telecommunications facility commences operation and at intervals of twelve (12) months thereafter, to establish that the Applicant's wireless telecommunications facility complies and continues to comply with the FCC guidelines and applicable state regulations for human exposure to radio frequency electromagnetic fields for human exposure to radio frequency electromagnetic fields. The Applicant shall provide the results of such measurements with certification of compliance to the City of Somerville Health Department, with a copy to the Zoning Board of Appeals.	CO/ Cont.	BOH, Plng.	
7	Any abandoned antennas at the site, including those identified by Planning Staff during a prior visit, shall be removed prior to the installation of any new antennas.	BP	ISD	
8	Any antenna that is not operated continuously for a period of twelve (12) months shall be considered abandoned, and the owner of such antenna shall remove the same within ninety (90) days of notice from the City of Somerville informing the owner of such abandonment.	Cont.	ISD	

9	The Applicant shall contact Planning Staff at least five working days in advance of a request for a final sign-off on the building permit to ensure the proposal was constructed in accordance with the plans and information submitted and the conditions attached to this approval.	Final sign off	PIng.	
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Findings for SP for Wireless Communications Facility

230 Highland Avenue
ZBA2008-52
Applicant: FiberTower

The Planning Staff made the following findings:

7.11.15.3 Special Permit for Wireless Communications Facilities		Planning Staff finds that the condition is		Planning Staff further finds that:
	Requirement	Met	Not Met	Change / Mitigation Needed or Other Comments
1. Information Supplied	As required by 5.1.2. of SZO	X		The information provided by the Applicant allows for a comprehensive analysis of the project with respect to the required Special Permits.
2. Compliance with Standards	As required by §7.11.15.3 for the, "regulation of wireless telecommunications facilities so as to allow and encourage such uses in the City with minimal harm to the public health, safety, and general welfare."	X		See Section 5 below.
3. Consistency with Purposes	The Applicant has to ensure that the project "is consistent with (1) the general purposes of this Ordinance as set forth in Article 1, and (2) the purposes, provisions, and specific objectives applicable to the requested special permit which may be set forth elsewhere in this Ordinance, such as, but not limited to, those purposes at the beginning of the various Articles."	X		As conditioned, the proposal would not be more detrimental to the area than the existing structure. This proposal is consistent with the purposes of the SZO, specifically to "to facilitate the adequate provision of ...other public requirements; to ...increase the amenities of the municipality" (SZO §1.2), and with the specific purposes of Article 14 as noted below (not all purposes are applicable to the application).
	a) <i>Protect residential areas and land uses from potential adverse impacts of towers and antennas;</i>	-	-	The applicant has stated that this facility complies with all Federal and State regulations and the FiberTower Corp. is registered with the FCC.
	b) <i>Encourage the location of telecommunications facilities in non-residential areas</i>	-	-	Though residentially zoned, the site is currently host to multiple wireless facilities, and satisfies the objective of (d) below.
	c) <i>Minimize the total number of towers and antennas throughout the community;</i>	-	-	Staff have visited the site and conferred with the site manager and confirmed that there is one unused antenna on the facility. Staff have explained to the property owner that it is their responsibility to remove any abandoned facilities.

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	Requirement	Met	Not Met	Change / Mitigation Needed or Other Comments
	d) <i>Strongly encourage the joint use of new and existing tower sites as a primary option rather than construction of additional single-use towers;</i>	-	-	This site is a collocation facility used by other service providers. FiberTower utilizes a "point-to-point" form of technology as opposed to a broadcast coverage area. The applicant has stated that FiberTower is proposing to co-locate on an existing telecommunications site that will satisfy the desired line of sight coverage for their network. The site is appropriate due to the existing use of the property for wireless communications use and the location and overall height of the property.
	e) <i>Encourage users of towers and antennas to locate them in areas where the adverse impact on the community is minimal;</i>	-	-	This is a collocation of facilities.
	f) <i>Encourage users of towers and antennas to configure them in ways that minimize the adverse visual impact of the towers and antennas through careful design, siting, landscape screening, and innovative camouflaging techniques</i>	-	-	There are currently many antennas on the roof that are sitting above the elevator penthouse. As conditioned the proposed antennas would be lower than the top of the penthouse to reduce their visibility. They would also be painted to blend in with the penthouse.
	g) <i>Enhance the ability of the providers of telecommunications services to provide such services to the community quickly, effectively, and efficiently;</i>	-	-	The Applicant stated that the technology would enhance the wireless carrier's (AT&T) network and make their service more efficient and reliable.
	h) <i>Consider the public health and safety of communications facilities; and</i>	-	-	Standard conditions direct compliance with Noise Control Ordinance and FCC Guidelines for Human Exposure to Electromagnetic Fields, and require regular reporting.
	i) <i>Avoid potential damage to adjacent properties from tower and antenna failure through sound engineering and careful siting of structures.</i>	-	-	Structural drawings have been provided and will be subject to building code review.

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	Requirement	Met	Not Met	Change / Mitigation Needed or Other Comments
4. Site & Area Compatibility	The Applicant has to ensure that the project "(i)s designed in a manner that is compatible with the characteristics of the built and unbuilt surrounding area, including land uses."	X		The proposed antennas would not significantly alter the roofline of the building due to their small size and the presence of several much larger antennas. The conditions would require the rooftop antenna components to be lowered and painted to match the building. Several antennas placed by other companies exist on the rooftop; the addition of the proposed antennas and equipment cabinet will have limited visual impact.
5. Review Criteria for Telecommunications Facilities	In addition to those standards outlined in Section 5.1 for the granting of special permits, the SPGA shall consider the following factors in determining whether to issue a special permit for a telecommunications facility:			
	<i>a. Height of proposed facility</i>	-	-	The existing elevator penthouse is 74' tall and is one of the tallest buildings in the area.
	<i>b. Proximity of facility to residential structures and residential zoning districts</i>	-	-	The building at 230 Highland Avenue is in a residential zoning district and surrounded by residential properties. Although the building is in close proximity to residential structures and districts, it is an existing wireless communications facility that meets other criteria.
	<i>c. Nature of uses on adjacent and nearby properties</i>	-	-	The majority of the surrounding properties are residential, with some retail and restaurant use facing the site on Highland Avenue.
	<i>d. Surrounding topography and prominence of proposed facility</i>	-	-	The Somerville Hospital is located on a hill and is a prominent building in the area. This building was chosen as a receiving site for the FiberTower signal because of its height and location of existing antennas.
	<i>e. Surrounding tree cover and foliage</i>	-	-	The surrounding street trees are significantly lower in height than the proposed antennas and will be unaffected by this proposal.
	<i>f. Design of tower, with particular reference to design characteristics that have the effect of reducing or eliminating visual obtrusiveness, as specified in Section 14.3</i>	-	-	See 3 (f).

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	Requirement	Met	Not Met	Change / Mitigation Needed or Other Comments
	<i>g. Location of tower, with particular reference to the existence of more suitable locations, as specified in Section 14.3</i>	-	-	As described in 3(d) above, the site is a collocation facility, minimizing the impact of the individual facilities proposed, and of tower facilities around the City in general.
	<i>h. Proposed ingress and egress</i>	-	-	There are stairs and a door to access the roof.
	<i>i. Distance from existing facilities</i>	-	-	See map of 4 proposed locations.
	<i>j. Availability of suitable existing towers, poles, other structures, or alternative technologies, as discussed in Section 14.5.2</i>	-	-	The Applicant stated that the FiberTower utilizes a "point-to-point" form of technology as opposed to a broadcast coverage area. The applicant has stated that FiberTower is proposing to co-locate on 4 existing telecommunications sites that will cover the City.