

Item 2

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

Applicant: City of Bloomington

Request: Consider a City Code amendment to revise bell tower standards

**PROPOSAL**

In late 2007, the City Council established standards for bell towers, steeples, spires and similar auxiliary structures designed to house antennas. Currently, there are two such structures in Bloomington. Recently, staff became aware that wireless providers are planning four additional bell towers designed to house antennas in Bloomington. Given discussions on the proposed design and one provider's interest in simply replicating the CrossPointe bell tower design (9801 France Ave. S.) at multiple locations, staff became concerned that the intent of the Code standards to camouflage these facilities could be violated if identically designed bell towers were erected on numerous church sites. The attached ordinance would establish design standards for bell towers, steeples, spires and similar structures.

**ANALYSIS**

As demand for wireless services has grown, wireless providers have been forced to reuse their limited bandwidth more often by creating ever smaller cells. T-Mobile alone, for example, now has 24 cell sites simply to serve Bloomington. With large cells, it is relatively easy to find an antenna location, be it on a multi-story building or in a commercial or industrial area. As cells have become smaller, some cells consist entirely of low density neighborhoods with no commercial or industrial land and no buildings of sufficient height for antenna mounting. Until the cells become small enough to locate on light poles in the public right of way, the primary location options for providers in low density neighborhoods are park light poles, sirens, neighborhood schools and churches.

On church sites, Bloomington has historically allowed cell towers only when they are fully camouflaged as bell towers, steeples, spires or similar structures. To date, Bloomington has two bell towers that accommodate wireless antennas (see *Figures 1* and *2*).

Figure 1



9801 France Ave. S., CrossPoint Church, bell tower with hidden T-Mobile antennas, 63 feet tall with cross

Figure 2



927 E. Old Shakopee Road, Lutheran Church of the Redemption, bell tower with hidden T-Mobile antennas, 63 feet tall

One stated intent of Bloomington’s wireless policy is to “minimize adverse visual effects of towers through careful design and siting standards” (City Code Section 19.63.05 (a)). Church sites are typically located in residential neighborhoods and often have residential uses on all four sides. To minimize the visual effects of a wireless installation on a church site, it must be unobtrusive. Ensuring that such facilities are unobtrusive is essential to a church’s continuing compatibility with its residential surroundings.

Staff is aware that four additional bell towers are planned in the near future and that several more are likely longer term. Staff is also aware that at least one provider plans to simply replicate the basic design used at 9801 France Ave. S. at multiple sites. If numerous churches were to have highly similar bell tower designs that are not architecturally integrated with the church, staff is concerned that the structures would not be camouflaged, would stand out as atypical and would be obtrusive. To be unobtrusive, these facilities must blend in with the design of the church.

For these reasons, staff proposes adoption of an ordinance to establish design standards for bell towers, steeples, spires and similar structures.

**RECOMMENDATION**

In Case 10000D-08, staff recommends approval of an ordinance that would amend the City Code by establishing design standards for bell towers, steeples, spires and similar structures.

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