

Draft April 23rd, 2018 Ojai Valley MAC Meeting Summary

Steve Offerman of Supervisor Steve Bennett's Office called the roll. MAC members Terry Wright, Grace Malloy, and Chair Joseph Westbury, Jill Borgeson, and Chris Cohen were present.

Under public comment, Jennifer Scholl of the County Planning Division said that Starbucks had agreed to construct a wall, add landscaping, and install an automatic sound dimmer on the order speaker to address the MAC's concerns regarding noise levels at neighboring homes.

On a motion by Joe Westbury, seconded by Terry Wright the December 20th Meeting Summary was approved unanimously.

Steve Offerman introduced the application for a permit to construct a cell antenna at Forest Home. Planner Kristina Boero discussed the project description and conditions, and efforts to minimize biological resource and scenic resources, including a requirement to plant two trees and additional large bushes. She also discussed federal preemption of local authority over cell towers, and how the County's authority is limited to requiring aesthetic improvements of the antennas.

Joe Westbury asked who would be responsible for facility maintenance: Verizon. Chris Cohen asked if there were pine trees on the hill currently: No. Joe said he had done internet research and there are no disguised cell towers on the market that would look better than the selected pine tree. Grace Malloy said that it would look better if moved lower on the hill. Chris asked if it would be required to remove structure if not in use: Yes. Terry Wright recommended that the cross be removed to lessen the visual impact and noted errors in the site plan. Joe asked if the additional antenna panels would fit within the cross: No. Chris asked why a future height increase is not a possibility, and the Verizon rep, Alexander, said that because it would involve excavation to put a second antenna on the pole, that it would not be eligible for a ministerial height increase.

Judy Collins asked if new access is needed: No. John Brooks said the tree is too tall and obtrusive and is concerned about the ability to increase height in the future. Staff said Verizon has committed to not increasing height and says there would be no need to. Jill Borgeson asked if staff thought that John Brooks photo simulations were accurate: Unknown. Terry Wright said that the coverage maps do not show a significance between a 29' height and a 19' height and questioned the need for the 29' antenna.

Mr Abbot, a neighbor, said the height of the facility is very obtrusive from his home off Santa Ana Road and advocated for reducing the height and disguising as an oak tree instead of a pine.

Grace Malloy said that the MAC should express that the height of the antenna is unacceptable. Chris Cohen agreed. Grace said it appears that height could be reduced 15' to match the existing antenna. Terry said that other locations on the property that are less obtrusive should be considered. Alexander of Verizon said that other locations would require substantial fire brush clearance that would have visual and biological impacts. Jennifer Scholl of the Planning Division said that she would work with Verizon to reduce the visual impact.

Joe Westbury made a motion: that Verizon and the County explore minimizing the height of the antenna and look at other locations on the property because the visual intrusion is unacceptable. The motion was seconded by Chris Cohen and approved unanimously.

The next item of business was a presentation by County Planning staff regarding the proposal for an Ojai Valley Dark Sky Ordinance. Joe Westbury raised concerns regarding the cost and inconvenience to existing business and home owners of complying with the ordinance. Ruchita Kadakia of the Planning Division said existing facilities could either comply with the ordinance by shielding or replacing their noncompliant lights, or by turning them off at 10PM or putting them on motion detectors. Sean Paroski expressed concern for existing business owners and suggested that the compliance grace period should be lengthened from six months to one years as it had been in the City of Ojai. Grace Malloy asked what other differences there are between the City and County ordinances: the County proposes to also regulate light color as is the current best practice. Gail Topping noted many benefits to people from dark skies. Judy Collins suggests that the County prohibit the sale of noncompliant light fixtures and encourage merchants to stop stocking them. Joe Westbury said the ordinance amounts to a new tax on existing property owners. Deborah Pendry said this issue came before the MAC 44 months ago, and the MAC supported a Dark Sky Ordinance. Deborah said that studies show that bright lighting does not increase security as shadowed areas become invisible. Chris said that a lack of lighting regulation also causes problems in the community and that he supports the proposal and would like to see the ordinance when it is available. He also supports a longer time period for compliance for existing facilities, and noted that the MAC has long had a standard condition for shielded and downward facing lighting in all new and modified permits. Grace Malloy recommended that the County develop high quality outreach materials. Jill Borgeson said the County needs to articulate the goals and benefits of the program. Terry Wright said he supports the goal of improving lighting in valley.

The meeting adjourned at 10:00 PM.