

Department of Planning & Community Development



A meeting of the Franklin County Planning Commission was held on February 9, 2021 in the Board of Supervisors meeting room located in the Franklin County Government Center.

THOSE PRESENT:

Sherrie Mitchell- Snow Creek District
Debbie Crawford- Union Hall District
David Clements- Rocky Mount District
C.W. Doss, Jr.- Blue Ridge District
David Pendleton- Blackwater District
James Colby- Gills Creek District
Angie McGhee- Boone District (on phone)

OTHERS PRESENT:

Steven Sandy- Assistant County Administrator (on phone)
Lisa Cooper- Principal Planner
Hannah Powell- Clerk

The meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Mitchell at 6:00 p.m. The next order of business was the approval of the minutes from the January 12, 2021 meeting. Chairwoman Mitchell asked of the Planning Commission if there were any comments or corrections to the minutes as written; there were none. Chairwoman Mitchell announced the minutes would stand as written.

Chairwoman Mitchell introduced the next item on the agenda and asked for the staff report.

APPLICATION for SPECIAL USE PERMIT – Application of Blue Ridge Towers, Inc., Applicants, and Glade Hill School, Owners, requesting a Special Use Permit, with possible conditions, to allow for the construction of a eighty (80) foot monopole tower within a leased 50' x 50' compound area on an approximate 13.63 acre parcel. The property, currently zoned A-1, Agricultural, is located at 8081 Old Franklin Turnpike in the Union Hall District of Franklin County and is further identified by Franklin County Real Estate Records as Tax Map/Parcel # 0650004900. The property has a future land use designation of Agricultural Forestry/ Rural Residential and the proposed approximate tower location is shown in the County's Comprehensive Plan as amended in August 2019. Public utilities, such as towers, are a permitted use by issuance of a Special Use Permit by the Board of Supervisors in A-1 zoning districts. A modification to the 120% of tower height is requested to allow a side setback of 59 feet per Section 25-128(7)(b).

Mrs. Cooper began by explaining that Blue Ridge Towers, Inc., is proposing to construct an 80-foot monopole tower with a 50' x 50' (2500 square feet) leased area (compound area) for three feet (3') by two feet (2') cabinet, leased areas for carriers, and tower. The proposed communication facility and compound area will be constructed behind the Glade Hill Elementary School near to the school's track.

Mrs. Cooper went on to say that the proposed monopole tower shall have Briscnet's four (4) CBRS wireless antennas at the top location and also allow for two (2) additional cellular providers on the structure. The proposed monopole tower will provide new fixed wireless broadband internet service for residents in the surrounding Glade Hill area. This proposed monopole tower is part of Phase 1 of the Broadband initiative of the County to serve residents throughout the county.

Mrs. Cooper stated that the proposed tower is needed to serve fixed wireless broadband internet service to residents in the Glade Hill area of the County as part of the Broadband Assessment and Plan, which is an appendix to the Comprehensive Plan. The comprehensive plan along with the appendix "Broadband Assessment and Plan" promotes the intent to establish wireless internet services for all residents of Franklin County.

Mrs. Cooper remarked that the location of the proposed tower would not be substantial detriment to the surrounding property.

Mrs. Cooper concluded that staff recommends that the Planning Commission recommend approval of the request for a special use permit for the construction of an 80-foot monopole tower, in the A-1 zoning district subject to the following conditions:

- 1) The proposed monopole tower will not exceed 80 feet in height with a 50' x 50' leased compound area. Accupoint Surveying & Design for Blue Ridge Towers, Inc. entitled Glade Hill Tower. Referenced in Sheets 1 and 2 prepared by Fred Edward Willman, Land Surveyor for lease exhibit survey dated January 22, 2021; file number 2020-149 Lease Dwg and Sheets T-1, G-1, C-2, C3, C4, D-1, D-2, D-3, D-4, D-5, and D-6 prepared by Amy K. Igarta-Seipp, Professional Engineer dated October 14, 2020; file number 2020-149 Site.
- 2) The monopole tower will be structurally designed to accommodate up to a fixed wireless broadband and two (2) additional cellular providers and associated ground-based equipment.
- 3) The construction and improvement of the proposed access road to the monopole tower site will be as shown on the submitted site plan documents by Accupoint Surveying & Design dated August 27, 2020, last revised January 22, 2021.
- 4) The monopole tower shall not be lighted unless required by the Federal Aviation Administration. Any ground-based security lighting shall comply the Franklin County lighting standards contained in the zoning ordinance.
- 5) A modification to the 120% of tower height is hereby granted to allow a side setback of 59 feet.

Mrs. Cooper offered to answer any questions.

Mrs. Crawford asked how its decided where towers are built.

Mrs. Sandy answered that the Broadband Assessment and Plan laid out a series of tower locations throughout the County and that many are identified at school sites since fiber is already available at the school sites. He mentioned also since the property is already County owned it gives more flexibility. There were three school sites that are identified as tower sites; however, the Glade Hill school is the only one in a zoned area and requires a Special Use Permit.

Mrs. Crawford asked when each tower site was pinpointed at the school sites.

Mr. Sandy answered that roughly six months earlier there were meetings held at each school site with representatives from Blue Ridge Towers and Franklin County Schools Administrationz.

Mr. Colby questioned the modification to the side setback of fifty-nine (59) feet and stated that he felt they would be approving a violation with no justification.

Mr. Sandy clarified that a special exception process and special use permit process are considered the same and that the Board of Supervisors has the ability to grant that exception.

Mrs. Mitchell asked how to reach the Broadband Authority website.

Mrs. Cooper answered that it can be found through the County's website and offered to email each member the link.

Mrs. Mitchell asked if all the towers would be 80 feet.

Mr. Sandy answered that the heights of the towers would vary.

With no more questions, Chairwoman Mitchell asked to hear from the applicant.

Sean Cai, representative for Blue Ridge Towers, said that he didn't have a presentation prepared but that he would be happy to answer any questions.

Chairwoman Mitchell asked if the towers had the ability to bounce off of each other.

Mr. Cai answered that they absolutely could bounce off each other.

Mr. Pendleton asked if the towers had to be located at the schools.

Mr. Cai answered that the point was keep towers on County property so that revenues would be split between the County and the County schools.

Mrs. Crawford asked the applicant about the fence surrounding the tower and safety of the children that would be nearby.

Mr. Cai answered that the type of fence used could be negotiated to something that she could feel comfortable with. He added that they had placed towers on other school properties and have had no issues so far.

With no other questions for the applicant, Chairwoman Mitchell then opened the public hearing and asked if there was anyone present that would like to speak; there was not. Chairwoman Mitchell then closed the public hearing and the members had discussion among themselves.

Mrs. Crawford made a motion to table action, stating that she found that " the required information presented is unacceptable. I have concerns about the public health, safety, and general welfare to the community. I also feel the location is unacceptable because of the setback exception. But also, the location to the closeness to the activity area on the school property. I recommend a committee be formed by the BOS to explore such locations and would like to see someone from the Planning Commission on such committee. Therefore, I move to delay action until additional information can be provided to the Planning Commission".

Mr. Pendleton seconded the motion.

The motion to delay action was approved. Voting on the motion was as follows:

AYES:	Colby, McGhee, Clements, Pendleton, Crawford, Mitchell
NAYES:	Doss
ABSENT:	None
ABSTAIN:	None

Chairwoman Mitchell announced the next item as citizen comment and asked if there was anyone present that would like to speak on any topic; there was not.

Chairwoman Mitchell announced the next item on the agenda as a work session on solar utilities and asked for the staff presentation.

Mrs. Cooper reviewed with the Planning Commission the increased focus on renewable energy in the state. She discussed how the County is beginning to see some increased inquiries on developing solar facilities. Mrs. Cooper asked for direction from the Planning Commission on how they want staff to proceed and if solar facilities is something they would like to be involved with.

Mrs. Mitchell asked for some samples from other localities to demonstrate how they are handling solar facilities and Mrs. Crawford agreed. The members agreed that a site visit was not necessary at this time.

Mrs. Cooper informed the Planning Commission that this item would be further discussed at their April meeting and the additional requested information would be provided.

With no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:28 p.m.

Hannah L. Powell, Clerk
Franklin County Planning Commission

February 9, 2021
Date

