

WNBZ

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APA Staff Approves Duane Cell Tower Permit

Staff at the Adirondack Park Agency gave its stamp of approval Friday for the construction of a Verizon cell tower in the town of Duane.

Officials from Franklin County and the town have been recently overwhelmed with reports of stranded or injured drivers who were unable to contact emergency responders due to a lack of cell service in the region.

Earlier this month, an elderly woman was treated for hypothermia after being stranded on state Route 30 for several hours after getting her vehicle stuck.

In a letter to APA Chairman Curt Stiles, Franklin County Legislator Paul Maroun stressed the hazard that a lack of cellular coverage creates.

“I ask both Commissioners and staff members to remember the main mission of government is for the health, safety and police protection of all our citizenry,” Maroun writes.

Verizon originally submitted an application for a 110-foot tower.

But according to APA spokesman Keith McKeever, staff has instead approved a 90-foot structure that features an extra 10 feet for a police and emergency communication array. It will be located at the Duane Firehouse.

McKeever said there are plans for the construction of two more towers along state routes 30 and 3 that would fill many of the gaps in coverage between Paul Smiths and Malone.

Last week, APA Commissioners approved a massive 129-foot Verizon frankenpine tower in the Hamlet of Keene Valley.

During the discussion of the Keene Valley tower, APA Commissioners Lani Ulrich and Dick Booth both indicated they believe that within a hamlet, the agency towers policy should be interpreted differently than when applied to proposed projects that would be placed along the Northway or another rural setting.

The agency Towers Policy hinges on a requirement of “substantial invisibility” and Booth noted that the Keene Valley tower is very visible throughout the hamlet.

State Senator Betty Little and the green group the Adirondack Council have renewed calls for fewer, taller towers, citing larger coverage areas and less environmental impact.

Verizon Wireless spokesman John O’Malley recently told WNBZ that a tower’s height is a critical factor in determining the coverage area of a given cellular array.

In response, agency staff now considers two towers on the same parcel a horizontal co-location.

The horizontal co-location will likely be primarily applied for projects near scenic vistas and along Interstate 87.

Traditionally, co-location referred to at least two separate cellular arrays on the same tower. But cellular carriers have balked at the notion of sharing space with competitors and the agency is limited by its legislative mandate to protect the aesthetic character of the park.

-Jon Alexander, 2-22-10