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SERVING NASHUA AND SOUTHERN NEW HAMPSHIRE

Cell company seeks waiver for tower

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By **EMILY CAVALIER** Telegraph Staff, cavaliere@telegraph-nh.com

BROOKLINE – If US Cellular had its way, all town residents would abandon their “landlines,” and switch strictly to cellular service. This is one goal of many in the company’s proposal for a new 180-foot tall cell tower on Ball Hill Road.

But during the proposal’s public hearing before the Planning Board on Thursday night, the question of the hour was, “How low can you go?”

US Cellular is requesting a waiver of the town’s 100-foot height limit on such structures, in order to improve signal coverage and to allow room for other cell companies to build antennae rather than erecting new towers. US Cellular’s tower on Bear Hill cannot accommodate co-location.

The town has waived this requirement twice in the past: once for US Cellular’s tower on Bear Hill and again for the tower built by TCP Communications on North Mason Road. Ken Kozyra, a consultant with K & K Wireless, is assisting US Cellular in the planning process. He said US Cellular’s goal is to create a “seamless network,” filling every possible gap in the current coverage map. The largest gap in coverage is crossing the Milford line along Route 13.

Planning Board Member Judy Cook voiced the most concern about the proposal. “We knew the first tower (on North Mason Road) wasn’t going to cover everything. When the tower went up on Bear Hill, the (coverage) map covered everything, and now that (tower) is not good enough.”

Kozyra replied that changes in cellular technology have created a need for this new tower. With the advent of a wireless technology that converts speech into digital information, many service providers are now building compatible towers or upgrading existing ones to allow for increased voice and data traffic.

Wes Whittier, ambulance director and emergency management for the town, said this technology could be invaluable to the town.

“We still have very serious dead spots,” Whittier said. “Being given the opportunity at ground level to have US Cellular put our antenna on their tower will save us a lot of money in the town budget and improve our reception tremendously.”

Whittier also said a request for two new defibrillators is lined up for the town warrant next March. These defibrillators, using wireless technology, have the ability to transmit medical data directly from the ambulance to the hospital.

“The patient will have a much better chance of getting the care and lifesaving drugs as soon as we arrive,” Whittier said. “The way it is now, service for these defibs would be very spotty. I believe this tower is necessary for us.”

Steven Grill, an attorney for US Cellular, said the new tower would also enable US Cellular to prepare for E911, the technology that will soon allow emergency services to track the location of a

cellular caller to within yards.

Only a handful of people attended the hearing, which began about 10 p.m. Resident Jim Murphy said, "Brookline needs to watch its own view-scape, and not worry about providing coverage to Milford."

Concerning the view, Ken Kozyra said the tower would be located on the side of Ball Hill rather than the top to create a backdrop for the tower so it can blend in. Plans are also in the works to conduct another balloon test so people can see how the tower would look.

The next public hearing on the application is scheduled for the Planning Board's meeting, Jan. 22.

Emily Cavalier can be reached at 594-5833

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