CITY OF SAN DIEGO

M E M O R A N D U M

Date: September 14, 2007

To: Planning Commission Chair and Members of the Planning Commission

From: Karen Lynch-Ashcraft, Development Project Manager, Development Services Department

Subject: American Tower – Aviation, Project No. 92076
Planning Commission Agenda of September 20, 2007

At the August 9, 2007 Planning Commission hearing, the Commission had some concerns with the wireless communication facilities located at 6770 Aviation Drive (the site of the former Encanto Standpipe). The Commission continued the August 9th hearing to September 20th, in order to allow Staff time to meet with other City departments and collect additional information regarding this site. This property is owned by the City's Water Department. The American Tower pole is owned by Verizon, occupied by Verizon and managed by American Tower Corporation, an infrastructure provider.

One concern the Commission has is that the City Communications Division, of the Office of the Chief Information Officer (CIO), has a monopole at this location that does not comply with the Wireless Communication Facility regulations. Ideally the City would like their facility to comply with the applicable regulations. Legally, the City is immune from land use regulations, as are other government agencies. The City Attorney's Office will provide more information regarding this. If the City's site was upgraded, redesigned, or money became available, the Development Services Department would strongly encourage – but could not require – compliance with the Land Development Code.

The issue before the Commission today is to approve or deny American Tower's application for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) and a Planned Development Permit (PDP). Incrementally, existing wireless facilities, some with expired permits, are brought in to the City as redesigned sites that comply with the regulations. As time goes on, the goal would be for all wireless facilities – private and public – to comply with the City's regulations.

Development Services Staff is recommending denial of the proposed CUP and PDP because Staff has found that the project does not comply with the Land Development

Code (LDC), specifically the Wireless Communication Facility regulations. LDC Section 141.0405(f)(2) requires that, "Major telecommunication facilities shall be designed to be minimally visible through the use of architecture, landscape architecture, and siting solutions."

The Planning Commission also asked Staff to conduct an analysis of whether a single tall tower for all carriers would be preferable to separate towers. The Commission asked whether it was feasible, what it would cost, what the technological constraints would be, and whether city staff could support such a solution while keeping in mind that public safety is imperative.

Staff previously met with representatives of American Tower, San Diego wireless carrier representatives, and the Communications Division of the Office of the CIO, to discuss potential collocation solutions for consolidating the three existing monopoles into one single structure. The participants provided their technical needs to American Tower who took the lead in designing a tower that would accommodate all of the providers. Staff cautioned the group that the solution would also have to comply with the Communication Antenna regulations requiring it to be designed to be minimally visible through the use of architecture, landscape architecture and siting solutions. American Tower's solution was a proposal for a 180' high lattice tower, which is 50' higher than the existing poles. The findings to support a CUP and a PDP could not be made. As a result, staff recommended against pursuing the 180' tower design.

Following the August 9, 2007 Planning Commission hearing, staff arranged a second meeting with representatives of the Water Department, Real Estate Assets Department, and the Office of the CIO to further discuss a consolidated collocation option. It was decided by those in attendance that the City should maintain separation from the other commercial carriers at this time. A single support structure could cost approximately $150,000 or more. Such an endeavor would be extremely complex and not a direction the City would like to proceed in at this time as the City is in the middle of a major public safety radio upgrade project.

Would a single consolidated support structure be more acceptable than multiple support structures? It could be if it were designed in scale with the neighborhood. The difficulty is that the City antennas have to be at a minimum height of 105 feet. At that height, there is no way to alleviate the visual impact. Ideally, the Communications Division would prefer to maintain their antennas separately from the commercial carriers.

Although a single support structure sounds like it would be beneficial to having multiple structures, in reality it could end up being more of an impact. Another tower owned by American Tower Corporation is located near I-805 in Mission Valley adjacent to Friars Road. This tower was envisioned as a collocation site for many carriers. Today it does support many carriers, but it also poses a significant visual impact within Mission Valley and it does not comply with the regulations.

Staff's belief is that it is of greater benefit to the City to have more wireless facilities that comply with the regulations, and camouflage into the surroundings, than to have a few tall towers with significant visual impacts.

In this case, the matter is complicated by American Tower acting as a real estate manager for the Verizon facility. American Tower relies on leasing space on their infrastructure in order to realize financial benefit; their interest is in maintaining the height of the tower in anticipation of additional tenants.

Verizon could modify existing surrounding facilities to accommodate the loss of height at Aviation. Additional sites on nearby commercial or industrial properties could also be utilized to account for the loss of height. It is Staff's position that American Tower should reduce the height of the structure and utilize architecture, landscape architecture, and siting solutions in order to comply with the regulations.

Karen Lynch-Ashcraft