



Position Paper on Quality of Life

Introduction

Hillsborough has historically been a community notable for its “quality of life” – in terms of housing stock, schools, transportation, public safety and more.

In recent years, there has been a perceived or actual decline in all of these attributes.

We have a tremendous pool of talented individuals and families as we have grown from an aristocratic summer home destination 100+ years ago to a vibrant bedroom community for San Francisco and Silicon Valley.

Along with that growth have come changes in demographics, governmental budgets, public safety and in general “quality of life” expectations and realities.

Many of our neighbors are well-minded folks simply asking for the attention to such “quality of life” issues that the recurring Hillsborough city council has not acted on for the past 10 years.

This position paper will briefly discuss: gas-powered leaf blowers ban; aesthetic cell tower placement; and abatement of SFO runway noise.

One of the stated goals of Aaron Zornes as city council candidate is to convene working groups of both Hillsborough residents/experts as well as the pertinent city and county departments to define the problems, the solutions available to us, and action plans to accelerate their implementation in the next two years or sooner. Certain of the problem areas cited in this series of position papers can no longer be dangerously “kicked down the path” by our city government.

ISSUE #2 – Aesthetic Cell Tower Placement

In 2H2020, the community-based Hillsborough Citizens Alliance activist group plans to poll 3,800+ Hillsborough residents via an online survey made available via email sent to town residents as well as public postings in both Nextdoor Hillsborough and Hillsborough Together. As a member of that group, candidate Zornes will help develop the survey based on input from discussions with neighbors, telecommunication carrier professionals, Internet Service Provider experts and city personnel.

Suffice to say, the city council candidate position below is based upon several years of research, conversations and frustration with the “Hillsborough establishment” regarding a key topic that increasingly affects everyone in Hillsborough. Cell tower placement has been a necessary challenge affecting all of us regardless of whether you are heavy mobile phone user traversing our community or a homeowner whose fundamental home infrastructure is increasingly reliant upon dependable, high-speed Internet connectivity (home security, home automation, work- and study-at-home video, etc.)

FINDINGS

- The city needs to assist homeowners to determine if their “poor cellphone coverage” is due to lack of in-house WIFI or lack of adequate neighborhood cellular data capability. It is unclear based on the wide-ranging public hearings/debates hosted by our city council as to whether the problem of “poor cell phone reception” is a problem WITHIN the homeowner’s building or IN THE AREA of the homeowner’s house. The city government and activist groups should survey the town residents to determine WHERE the problem exists – in-house or around-neighborhood and then WHICH neighborhoods are suffering.
- In all cases, it is vital and proper that the city and activist groups jointly educate the community about the ease-of-use in setting up their WIFI CELLULAR capabilities. This capability has been available to the majority of cellphones sold in the US for the past 7+ years. That is, by turning on “Wi-Fi calling” on Android or IOS (Apple) mobile devices, both phone calls and SMS texts are sent and received using the WIFI capabilities of the homeowner. This provides reliable, clear connections for both cellphone calling and texting and is FREE. Neighbors should help their neighbors explore this solution, especially their less tech-savvy neighbors.
- Note that the US Federal government mandated during the Obama administration that 5G capability be fast-tracked within both rural and urban America. We are in the situation where federal law mandates that states and municipalities cannot prohibit cellular data infrastructure. But the US 9th District Court recently re-confirmed that municipalities *can* dictate reasonable aesthetics of such infrastructure. This should dictate our commonsense approach to an agreed-upon infrastructure that is vital to public safety, economic vitality and general quality of life that our affluent community expects and deserves – without sacrificing your property value or safety.
- Note that much of the heated public discussion around improving cellphone coverage has been mistakenly predicated around “5G WCFs are necessary to provide ultra high-speed Internet capability”). Wireless Communication Facilities (WCFs) are the antennas, support structures and other equipment necessary for providing personal wireless services and information services. The discussion of 5th generation (5G) capabilities promised by a proliferation of tall WCFs is off base. The WCFs that are being proposed by the carrier provides will not necessarily fix the cellular coverage dead spots (per consulted industry experts). The 5G capability as marketed by the carriers as “essential to the modern lifestyle” is *not* a solution to the poor cellphone experience our residents currently experience.
- The city must make every possible effort to incent and manage WCFs providers to provide capabilities for co-location of competitive services within the same WCF location. This is similar to Joint Pole Association (JPA) agreements wherein telecommunication carriers share physical poles. Otherwise, our bucolic neighborhoods run the risk of becoming “cell tower farms” with the current crop of cellphone/celldata providers (AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, Verizon) setting up competing systems similar to the physical chaos of competing telephone wire systems of the early 1900s. And that is not factoring in *future* 5G carriers expected such as Amazon, Comcast, FaceBook, Google, Microsoft, Yahoo, etc.
- The current recommendation from Hillsborough’s well-intentioned Wireless Communications Advisory Committee (WCAC) fails to address key issues and was thrust upon the community with minimal legal notice of hearings as well as conflicts of interest (known and yet-to-be-determined) by our sitting city council members in their dealings with Crown Castle specifically (the U.S.’s dominant WCF provider).

- Fire safety precautions must be defined and adhered to. For example, nothing was stated by the town’s recent WCAC committee on making WCF providers work to abate the wildfire risk of back-up generators and their 200 gallons of diesel fuel. There is no provision for the remediation of potential fire hazards similar to the current telephone pole infrastructure with their electronics that spark wildfires.
- Other California communities similar to ours such as Malibu and Rancho Palos Verdes have made major progress with the carriers in promoting “undergrounding” to the maximum extent possible. Where possible undergrounding and micro-trenching is essential to maintain our legally-guaranteed “aesthetics (~5” trenches in city streets, rather than sewer system-style earth removal). This was not covered by WCAC.
- Story poles are a common sense part of the process which the city has declined to undertake on behalf of a proposed WCF’s neighborhood. The \$2,500 or so cost is negligible and should be passed on to the carrier that is proposing to place a WCF at specific locations (i.e. West School, Marlborough water tank, etc.)
- Who would want to buy/resell a house if a tall and possibly supremely unattractive WCF was plopped in that home’s front or backyards, or the neighbors’?
- We recommend that city of Hillsborough pay for a formal “cell signal test” engineering survey to identify “cellular data dead spots” by neighborhood/major street to assist WCF providers with guidance as to where such dead spots exists; this is a cost of doing business in Hillsborough, which should be passed on to the carriers wishing to market their services in our community.
- Furthermore, the town of Hillsborough should work with Hillsborough City School District (HCSD) to provide free, viable WIFI access at all HCSD schools including parking areas and playgrounds. This would allow similar “Wi-fi calling” for parents and caregivers who must daily spend hours at these schools transporting children and helping with classes, extra-curricular activities and school lunch – currently they are “off grid” for those special hours.
- Near term actions for the city council should include:
 - Rescinding the current Crown Castle settlement agreement due to inadequacies in the changes plus conflict-of-interest legal issues
 - Appointing a cell tower planning committee with balanced-representation of cellular technology experts from different advocacy groups to define a more comprehensive cell tower plan that includes many if not all of the considerations identified in this position paper
 - Enlisting an independent consulting firm to evaluate different cellular deployment needs and options for different cellular reception gap areas – instead of relying on carriers’ own proposals that aim to maximize their own interests rather than Hillsborough residents’ needs

BOTTOM LINE: This is not a “no tech Luddite” or NIMBY (not in my back yard) vs. “bleeding-edge cell data capability at any cost” argument. We residents all mostly agree that cellphone coverage is problematic in different Hillsborough neighborhoods. However, it is not ethical to unilaterally drop ugly 50-100’ cell towers into our yards. Consumer education will go a long way towards providing reliable, fast cellular data for calls and texting within the home when the homeowner/consumer properly uses “Wi-Fi Calling” built into the current generation of mobile devices. Moreover, the 5G capability as marketed by the carriers as “essential to the modern lifestyle” is *not* a solution to the poor cellphone experience our residents currently experience. This candidate’s position is that the Town of Hillsborough should provide legal aesthetic guidance to cellphone service providers desiring to install wireless cellular facilities (WCFs) in our town such that all residents have equal reliable access to this key infrastructure capability. The process to determine such WCF guidance should follow “open government” regulations such as California’s Brown Act with open meetings and due notice of such meetings. Not via closed meetings with lack of expert WCF advice. Furthermore, we believe it is reasonable and legal to restrict such WCF installations to no closer than 150 feet of residences and no taller than 40’ height. Lastly, every effort must be made to incent co-location of equipment by different carriers, the installation of equipment that can be used by all carriers, and to ensure the equipment will meet our public safety and aesthetic requirements.

Aesthetic Cell Tower Placement REFERENCES *(click on links below to read other relevant articles/research)*

- [Good FAQ \(frequently asked questions\) by a similar affluent California city](#) including Joint Pole Association and other community aesthetic-supportive terms
- [Article with solid overview of 5G](#) by Brookings Institution – “5G in five (not so) easy pieces” – July 2019
- [Website for local Hillsborough Citizens Alliance \(HCA\)](#) – 800+ residents organizing to “Improve Cell Coverage and Maintain Safety, Aesthetics & Property Values”
- [Wireless Update in most recent Hillsborough town newsletter](#) (1Q2020)
- [July 2020 city council meeting agenda/minutes including several hundred pages of resident feedback on WCAC’s most recent proposal](#) – 226 pages
- [WCAC \(Wireless Communications Advisory Committee\) presentation to city council & residents](#) – “WCAC Review - Proposed Modifications to WCF Design Standards” – 15 pages
- [WCF \(Wireless Communications Facility\) community feedback to Hillsborough City Council](#) November 2019
- [Compendium of WCAC-specific Hillsborough City Council meeting minutes, email blasts, etc.](#) – hosted by town of Hillsborough’s website so that you can immediately browse the WCAC topic via this link
- [Compendium of Crown Castle lawsuit/settlement documents](#) – hosted by our town’s website
- [Overview of Crown Castle](#) – the firm that sued Hillsborough to allow their WCFs to be allowed in Hillsborough
- [Overview of 5G technology](#)
- [Ralph M. Brown Act](#) – State of California’s “open government” omnibus effort