



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

Staff Report

To: Council

File No.: 3010-00-2501

From: Director of Development Services

Date: March 12, 2025

Subject: Antenna System Applications and Process Policy DS-02

PURPOSE:

For Council to consider the “Antenna System Applications and Process Policy DS-02”. The intent of the proposed policy is to more effectively assess antenna system proposals, articulate the City’s preferences for siting and harmonize the City’s processes with federal government processes. It is designed to balance a number of community objectives regarding the need for advanced telecommunications infrastructure, aesthetics, health, safety, and environmental impacts. The staff recommend City Council adopt the policy as presented.

BACKGROUND:

Demand for wireless services has increased significantly over the last decade with wide spread usage on wireless devices such as smartphones and tablets. People, businesses and emergency services require reliable wireless coverage and to meet this demand new infrastructure is often needed. This increased demand has challenged the telecommunications industry to provide adequate infrastructure to ensure sufficient coverage and capacity. To meet this demand, and provide reliable wireless coverage to our citizens, new infrastructure is often required in strategic locations across the city. Telecommunications towers have evolved to come in many shapes and sizes, from small units on lamp and utility poles to the familiar tall towers. The industry now refers to these as “Antenna Systems”.

Under the *Radiocommunication Act*, the Federal Minister of Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada (ISED) has sole jurisdiction over inter-provincial and international communication facilities. ISED requires all proponents to consult with the local land use authorities and public, notwithstanding that ISED has exclusive jurisdiction in the licensing of telecommunication sites.

Local governments can communicate and provide guidance to the proponent on the particular sensitivities, planning priorities, and characteristics of an area and they can establish siting guidelines as outlined in the proposed policy accompanying this report.

ISED requires that companies first look at sharing existing tower infrastructure, whenever possible, to reduce the number of new towers needed in the community.

ISED provides certain exclusions from consultation. One example is that small cell installations on existing structures (towers and non-tower structures such as buildings, utility poles, streetlights) are excluded from consultation provided that the height of the structure is not increased by more than 25 percent.

Health concerns relating to radiofrequency, energy, and safety are cited by members of the public fall under the national jurisdiction of Health Canada. Municipalities possess no authority to regulate health and safety requirements related to antenna systems. Health Canada requires that all antenna system installations (including 5G installations) comply with all existing safety regulations, including Safety Code 6 (SC6), which determines exposure limits for wireless devices and their associated infrastructure. In addition, ISED requires

that all antenna systems meet Canadian limits on the amount of radio frequency energy that can be present in areas to which the public has access

DISCUSSION:

This Policy is to establish the local land use consultation process and a guideline in review and evaluating antenna system siting within the City of Courtenay. The Policy will assist the telecommunications industry, ISED, City staff, City Council, and members of the public in understanding the processes, preferences, and criteria used to evaluate antenna system siting in Courtenay.

Staff performed research on legislative authority, assessed best practices from other British Columbia municipalities, collaborated with other applicable City departments, major telecommunications carrier and referenced the ISED published Antenna System Siting Protocols designed to assist municipalities with developing local processes.

The proposed antenna system policy outlines a number of guidelines summarized as:

1. **Authority, roles and applicable definitions and exemptions**
The policy seeks to clearly and harmonize overarching framework under the current legislation for traditional towers, monopoles, and small cell technologies.
2. **Location preference and design**
The policy outlines the criteria for site selection, including co-location on existing structures where feasible, height, proximity to aerodromes, heritage sites, hazardous areas and environmental features. Special considerations are given for maximum height, minimal tree removal and to the visual impact of antennas on the surrounding area.
3. **Public notification and input**
In alignment with best practises and ISED consultation requirements, the policy includes public notification process that allows local residents and interest holders to help inform Council's decision to provide a statement of concurrence, non-concurrence or to provide no comment.
4. **Application process and fee**
The policy establishes current application fee (\$2500) and the required documents to form an applicable submission package, such as detailed site plans, landscape plan (where feasible), rationale for site location, proposed mitigation measures for aesthetic and environmental concerns. It also requires Proponents to notify K'ómoks First Nation of their application.
5. **Concurrence**
Outlines Council's options and procedural considerations for response to applications.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

Should Council approve the Antenna Systems Application and Process Policy DS-02, staff is seeking direction from Council to prepare amendments to Zoning Bylaw No.2500,2007 and Fee and Charges Bylaw No. 1673,1992. These amendments would be brought to Council for consideration in 2025.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

Official Community Plan Review

The subject property is designated *Institutional* within the Official Community Plan. The proposed development would support, among others, the realization of the following OCP polices:

- Municipal Infrastructure Objective 5: “Third party utility providers such as energy and communications utilities are low carbon and reliable”
- Municipal Infrastructure Policy #20: “Support the creation of high quality and assured communications links.”

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Approval of the Antenna System Applications and Process Policy DS-02 has no negative financial implications to the City’s Financial Plan. Implementation of this Policy will assist in recovering costs associated with managing requests for the installation of applicable antenna systems.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

Processing development requests, including telecommunication antenna systems and related structures, is a statutory component of the corporate work plan and a core duty of the Development Services Department. Work to date has primarily been carried out by Development Services staff, although senior leadership from other departments have provided referral comments such as Fire Services, Legislative & Corporate Services, Information System Services, Operational Services and Recreation, Culture & Community Services.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

- Local Economy - Review City processes that may be barriers to economic development
- Good Governance - Review and streamline development process and set targets for application processing times
- Public Safety - Build capacity for emergency planning and local response

OPTIONS:

1. THAT Council approve the Antenna System Application and Process Policy DS-02, dated February 28, 2025; and
THAT Council direct Staff to prepare the bylaw amendments for Zoning Bylaw No. 2500, 2207 and Fee and Charges Bylaw No. 1673, 1992.
2. THAT Council provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENT:

1. City of Courtenay Antenna System Applications and Process Policy DS-02

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