

**Minutes Rochester Planning Commission
December 17, 2025
Rochester Town Office and via Teams**

Present: Dan McKinley, Sandy Haas, Mary Fratini, Greg White, Dave Curtis, Christine Meagher

Guests: Lori Church, Ben Falk, Russ Jaquith (Teams), Bruce Jones, Deb Mathiesen, Richard Matheisen, Deb Moore, Don Murray (Teams), Jannah Murray, Jean Murray, Tara Murray, Alvina Risinger-Harvey, Deb Scherrer, Sharon Solomon (Teams), David Swedick.

Call to Order: Dan McKinley called meeting to order at 6:30pm

Dan reviewed the Rochester Municipal Meeting Rules for Participation.

Review and revise draft comments to the Public Utility Commission regarding Bell Atlantic Mobile Systems petition for a cell tower to be located at 1030 Route 100 South.

This was a special meeting to review and finalize comments from the Planning Commission to the Public Utility Commission (PUC) on the proposed cell tower project at 1030 Route 100 S (Case #25-2931-PET).

Dan thanked everyone for their participation over the last months since this process started, noting that it was thoughtful and, at times, passionate. He said that tonight's meeting was to review and revise the draft comments from the Planning Commission to the PUC. He noted that all board members had received and read the public feedback on the draft comments prior to this meeting.

Dan summarized the situation as follows:

- Section 8F of the Town Plan talks about utilities, facilities, and other services, including an indication that the community in 2020 leaned towards improving cell coverage in the town, but not at the detriment to Rochester's rural character. Specifically, page 36 included a recommendation that the "Selectboard should work with the Planning Commission to find ways to enhance cellular and internet services in Rochester."
- Some community members have seen this proposed tower as an opportunity; other community members have characterized it as an act of corporate greed.
- The Planning Commission finds its role in the middle: maintaining objectivity, looking at both opportunities and the Town Plan, which will be the basis of the board's decision.
- Thanked members of the Planning Commission for the work they have done, their civility and civic-mindedness, especially during the public participation process.

During a lengthy discussion, the commission then reviewed the draft comments, incorporating changes as recommended and agreed upon by the commission members, which included but were not limited to the following:

- revising the introduction to foreground concerns with accuracy of specific elements of the petition;
- revising the conclusion to summarize where the petition violates the town plan, and clearly identify what steps they were asking of the applicant, the state agencies, and the PUC;
- removing requests for specific mitigation measures throughout the comments; and
- adding public parks, trails, and recreation areas to section 5.

At the end of that discussion, Dan noted four specific issues mentioned in written feedback that were not discussed in the draft comments: fire risk, zoning bylaws, liability for damage to private property, and potential impact of construction on nearby private wells. After a lengthy discussion, the board agreed upon the following:

- would not add fire risk as a new issue in draft comments because there is no compelling argument or evidence that this is a significant risk for this project;
- the proposal as submitted abides by Rochester's zoning bylaws;
- liability for private property damage lies outside the Planning Commission's purview; and
- the Town Plan addresses risks to private drinking water supplies under Section 4B.3-Significant Areas, and that would be added to the revised comments under section 5.

Public Comment – limited to 3 minutes per person

Tara Murray asked about changes that were made to the conclusion, requested the commission change the mileage in section 5 of the comments from 0.6 to 1.9 miles, asked if the commission would be submitting photographs from Russ Jaquith with the comments, and requested that the commission include the following language in the conclusion: "therefore, the Rochester Planning Commission recommends against this project."

Lori Church requested that the commission replace requests for more information with statements that "the petition as submitted does not comply with the town plan." She also submitted maps that she said demonstrated that Verizon has sufficient coverage in Rochester already.

Jean Murray asked why the draft comments used the word "harmonious". She reiterated her position that if the project violates the Town Plan in even one place, the commission should reject it.

Ben Falk asked that section 3 in the comments be renamed from "fluvial erosion hazards" to "flood hazards and resiliency". He requested that the commission specifically mention impervious surfaces and steep slope development. He said he thought changing culverts would have no effect on increased flows. He requested the comments specifically include analysis from two community members about the slope of the road. He requested that the section on visibility replace the language "shall be sited to avoid" with "it should not be visible from those locations". He requested that the commission include a requirement that the tower not exceed the height of the existing canopy.

Sharon Solomon requested that the commission include a requirement for Verizon to include coverage maps from 2026 because she thinks they are already using small cell technology.

Debbie and Richard Mathieson said that they had been through this process before with the antenna in the church steeple. She said she and her family had concerns about the health effects of radiofrequency. She said that she and other businessowners had worked hard to get signs installed acknowledging Route 100 as a scenic byway. She reiterated her son's recommendation from the previous commission meeting [on December 2, 2025] recommending small cell technology.

Alvina Risinger-Harvey noted that the permit plans submitted during the advance notice phase mislabeled an unnamed stream as Rogers Brook, and said she thought that suggested the applicant did not do their homework.

Deb Moore asked for clarification about the process for commission members to receive written feedback. She asked if community members would be able to comment on the comments as revised at tonight's meeting before they would be submitted to the PUC. She requested that the comments include a sentence stating that "you have been given evidence from two professionals" regarding the slope analysis. She said she thought

asking the applicant to minimize visual impacts was the wrong approach. She asked the commission to reconsider adding fire risk as an issue because she thought any added risk was too much.

David Swedick said his analysis of the permit plans placed the tower too close to the property line and therefore he thought it violated the zoning bylaws. He asked how the commission would verify the distance in the permit plans.

Don Murray asked if the bond would include potential fire and flood damage from the project as well as the cost of removing the tower when it becomes obsolete. He said he thought the project violates the Town Plan in many ways.

Russ Jaquith said he thought the petition incorrectly stated the distance of the tower from Talcville as being more than 0.5 miles; he said he used the GPS coordinates between the tower and his house and came up with 2392 feet. He said he thought there were historic or potential historic buildings in the village of Talcville that were not acknowledge on the petition.

Bruce Jones thanked the commission for their work reviewing the Town Plan and drafting and revising these comments.

Jannah Murray reiterated her position that if the project violated the Town Plan at all then it should be rejected. She requested that the section on the bond should include language about the project violating the Town Plan. She requested that the conclusion include the following language: “as proposed this violates the Town Plan and we don’t recommend it.”

Deb Scherrer thanked the commission for revising a strong conclusion.

Board response to public comment/final revisions

In discussion after public comment, the board:

- declined to add language to the conclusion specifically recommending against the project;
- updated the distances referred to in section 5 of the comments to include that the proposed tower would be visible from approximately 0.8 miles along Route 100 when approaching from the south;
- noted that the discussion about maintaining a tree buffer, and other specific mitigation measures, had been removed from the revised draft;
- noted that the conclusion was fully revised;
- said they would not be submitting photographs with their comments;
- declined to specifically ask Verizon for 2026 coverage maps, stating that the requests listed in the coverage and propagation section were sufficient;
- explained that the language of “harmony” or “harmonious” was in the Town Plan on pages 15-17;
- retained the name of section 3 as “fluvial erosion hazards”;
- said they would not be including language about or from any specific individuals regarding the slope beyond the questions raised in the revised draft;
- agreed to add language about permeability to their comments;
- retained the language “shall be sited to avoid” in the section on visibility as that reflects the language in the Town Plan;
- said they would not add any additional language on potential health effects;
- noted that the plans submitted with the petition should have corrected the mis-labeling of the intermittent stream;

- explained that all written feedback on the draft comments received via email or hard copy were circulated to the entire board prior to tonight's meeting so that they had it in hand when making initial edits;
- said that there would not be another round of feedback on tonight's revised draft;
- said that the distance from the tower to the property lines came from the project plans; and
- noted that the revised draft already raised significant questions about the omission of historic sites from the petition's analysis.

The board then discussed whether the Planning Commission should include language specifically opposing the project in their revised comments.

Dan made a motion to add the following statement to the conclusion: "Due to these non-compliance issues, we recommend the project not move forward." Greg White seconded the motion. Three members voted in favor; three members were opposed. With a tie vote, the motion failed.

Sandy Haas made a motion to approve the draft as amended at the special meeting tonight. Dan seconded the motion. Four members voted in favor; one member voted against; and one member abstained. With a majority vote, the motion passed.

Dan said the next steps will include sharing these comments with the Selectboard, filing them with the PUC, and filing a form to retain the Planning Commission party status.

Adjourned: The meeting was adjourned at 10:25pm

NOTE: After the final version of comments have been filed with the PUC, they will be attached to an amended version of these minutes.

The next scheduled meeting of the Planning Commission will be Tuesday, January 6, 2026 at 6:30pm.