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Cell tower upgrades on table

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With an eye toward improving wireless phone and Internet coverage for customers, several cellular service providers are seeking to place new or upgraded towers on city-owned property.

The Fort Collins Current Planning Department is reviewing four proposals concerning cell towers at city recreation sites: Edora Park, Rolland Moore Community Park, City Park and Southridge Greens Golf Course.

For service providers, the motivation to build new facilities is meeting customer demand for better wireless connections and Internet speed.

For the city, the payback comes in annual leasing fees that help fund park maintenance projects, said Bill Whirty, parks manager.

An upgrade to an existing cell tower at Rolland Moore would include a new pole with light standards to illuminate the park's ball fields, he said. The new structure will cost about \$10,000.

"It's a dam good deal for us," Whirty said. "We don't have the money to do something like that on our own."

Three of the proposals are for changes to existing facilities. A new pole proposed at Southridge would be 50 feet tall and designed to look like a pine tree. The "monopine" cellular tower proposed by AT&T would be made of steel and have branches covered with a Fiberglas-like material.

The pole would be tucked behind the golf course's No. 7 green west of the railroad tracks and Platte River Power Authority's overhead power line. Its color would match the existing landscape: Four real evergreens would be planted nearby.

AT&T spokesperson Sandy Goldberg said the company hopes to enhance cell coverage in the area near the new tower.

"Our No. 1 priority is to continually improve our existing network," she said.

The City Council recently gave initial approval to an ordinance that would lease land at the golf course to AT&T for the tower and a shelter that would house equipment to operate the tower. The shelter would be surrounded by an 8-foot-tall cedar fence.

The lease would bring in \$16,800 annually to the city

for five years. The lease rate would increase 20 percent after five years.

The council also approved a lease agreement with Open Range Communications for space on an existing pole at City Park and a small ground station for the same rate.

Money from the leases would go toward replacing equipment at the golf course and the park as it wears out, Whirty said. The city has struggled with parks maintenance funding in recent years and has

deferred several improvements.

"We would be remiss if we did not pursue ways to bring in revenue to pay for some of these things," Whirty said.

Both proposals still have to be approved by the planning department. A neighborhood informational meeting on the golf course monopine proposal is scheduled for Dec. 6.

If the proposal meets the city's regulations for wireless telecommunication facilities, the approval would be done at the administrative level, said Courtney Rippy, a city planner working on the project.

So far, questions and comments for neighborhood residents have been mixed, she said. Some oppose the tower because of its appearance while others like the prospect of faster wireless Internet service.

Requests for cell towers are not limited to city-owned property, Rippy said. A new tower at the Drake Crossing Shopping Center at Drake and Taft Hill roads has been approved. It will replace an existing light pole near the Safeway store.

Additional Facts

What's next

At 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Dec. 6 at Southridge Greens Golf Course Clubhouse, 5750 S. Lemay Ave., city planning officials will conduct a neighborhood informational meeting about a telecommunications tower proposed for the golf course.
