

**EL DORADO COUNTY
PLANNING AND BUILDING DEPARTMENT
PLANNING COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT**



Date: September 12, 2024

Staff: Benjamin Koff

CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT

FILE NUMBER: CUP24-0004/T-Mobile Bell Tower

APPLICANT/AGENT: Jared Kearsley, 51 Wireless, LLC o/b/o T-Mobile

OWNER: Saint Stephen's Lutheran Church

REQUEST: Conditional Use Permit to allow the installation and operation of a freestanding wireless facility, designed as a 57'-8" church bell tower

LOCATION: Located on the west side of El Dorado Hills Blvd, approximately 420 feet north of the intersection with Olson Lane, in the El Dorado Hills area, Supervisorial District 1 (Exhibit A).

APN: 125-131-017 (Exhibit B)

ACREAGE: 4.46 acres

GENERAL PLAN: High-Density Residential (HDR) (Exhibit C)

ZONING: Single-unit Residential (R1) (Exhibit D)

ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT: Categorically Exempt pursuant to Section 15301(b) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines (Existing Facilities).

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends the Planning Commission take the following actions:

1. Find Conditional Use Permit CUP24-0004 Exempt under Section 15301(b) and Section 15303 of the CEQA Guidelines; and
2. Approve Conditional Use Permit CUP24-0004, based on the Findings and subject to the Conditions of Approval as presented.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Approval of this Conditional Use Permit would authorize the removal and replacement of the existing T-Mobile wireless telecommunications facility, disguised as a church steeple, on the rooftop of the existing structure. A freestanding structure, designed as a 57'-8" bell tower, will be constructed, providing concealment for antennas and associated transmission equipment. Associated ground mounted equipment, placed within a fenced leased area and surrounded with new landscaping, will be concealed from public view.

BACKGROUND/HISTORY

The original permit, Special Use Permit S97-0018, was approved by the Planning Commission on October 9, 1997. S97-0018 authorized the construction and operation of a fully camouflaged wireless facility, designed as a steeple, architecturally integrated into the existing church building. The steeple, affixed with a 3-foot-tall cross, was permitted to project 12 feet above the existing 33-foot roofline (to top of steeple: 45'-0", to top of cross 48'-0"). An equipment cabinet was installed on the south side of the existing building.

S06-0015, approved by the Zoning Administrator on February 21, 2007, authorized the co-location of a new wireless telecommunications facility on the subject parcel. The project involved the construction of a 15-foot-tall steeple, and the installation of six, four-and-a-half-foot-tall panel antennas. The new steeple, housing all antenna equipment, was designed to match the height, color, and design of the existing steeple (authorized under S97-0018). The steeple was constructed on the southwest corner of the church. Associated ground mounted equipment, including an equipment shelter and electrical panels, was installed on the southeast side of the church, within a 140-square foot lease area.

CUP-R21-0052, a cell tower eligibility request, was reviewed and approved at staff level on September 7, 2021. The project sought authorization to remove and replace existing equipment within the stealth, steeple structure. The proposed modifications were found to be in substantial compliance with the original entitlement and building permit no. 349292, finalized on May 25, 2022, authorized the modifications to be conducted.

This current application, CUP24-0004, is the latest action that would constitute the need for a conditional use permit.

EXISTING CONDITIONS/SITE CHARACTERISTICS

The project site is located on the west side of El Dorado Hills Blvd, approximately 420 feet north of the intersection with Olson Lane, in the El Dorado Hills area. The project site, home to Saint Stephen's Lutheran Church, features two buildings, a playground, a paved parking lot, and areas dedicated to landscaping.

Surrounding uses include El Dorado Hills Blvd to the east, and residential uses to the north, south, and west. Parcels to the north and west are zoned Single-unit Residential (R1), while the parcel immediately to the south, home to the El Dorado Village Apartments, is zoned Multifamily

Residential (RM). Across El Dorado Hills Blvd is a lot zoned for Open Space (OS), home to the El Dorado Hills Bowmen archery facility. Parcels to the north and west carry the same General Plan land use designation as the project site, High-Density Residential (HDR). The parcel to the south, carries a General Plan land use designation of Multifamily Residential (MFR), while the parcel to the east is Adopted Plan (AP).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project includes a Conditional Use Permit request for installation and operation of a freestanding wireless facility, designed as a 57'-8" church bell tower. The existing wireless facility, housed within a faux church steeple, will be removed from the building rooftop. A wooden fence and landscaping will be installed around the proposed lease area, concealing ground mounted equipment from public view. Tree removal and grading activities are not required.

ANALYSIS

General Plan Consistency: Staff has determined that the proposed project is consistent with the applicable policies and requirements in the El Dorado County General Plan, as discussed below in Section 2.0, General Plan Findings.

Zoning Ordinance Consistency: Staff has determined that the proposed project, as conditioned, is consistent with all applicable standards and requirements of Title 130 of the County Ordinance Code (Zoning Ordinance). The project parcel is zoned R1, and the project has been analyzed in accordance with all applicable development standards for this zone district. Further details are discussed in the Findings section below. The project was reviewed and recommended for approval at the July 18, 2024 Diamond Springs and El Dorado Community Advisory Committee (DSEDCAAC).

AGENCY COMMENTS:

The request for a Conditional Use Permit was distributed for review to affected departments and agencies including, but not limited to, the El Dorado County Building Division, El Dorado County Environmental Management Department (EMD), El Dorado County Department of Transportation (DOT), El Dorado County Air Quality Management District (AQMD), El Dorado County Surveyor's Office, El Dorado Irrigation District (EID), Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), CAL FIRE, El Dorado County Fire Protection District, El Dorado County Sheriff's Office, El Dorado Hills Area Planning Advisory Committee, and State of California – Public Utilities Commission. These comments have been included in the Conditions of Approval section.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

Conditional Use Permit CUP24-0004 has been found Categorical Exempt pursuant to Section 15301(b), Existing Facilities, of the CEQA Guidelines. This Class 1 exemption consists of the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. The proposed construction and operation of

a stealth wireless telecommunications facility would not result in expansion of a former or existing use.

Conditional Use Permit CUP24-0004 has also been found Categorically Exempt pursuant to Section 15303, for new construction or conversion of small structures. This Class 3 exemption consists of construction and location of limited numbers of new, small facilities or structures; installation of small new equipment and facilities in small structures; and the conversion of existing small structures from one use to another where only minor modifications are made in the exterior of the structure.

Filing of a Notice of Exemption is required in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15062 to initiate a 35-day statute of limitations on legal challenges to the County’s decision that the project is exempt from CEQA. **The applicant shall submit a \$50.00 recording fee within 48 hours of project approval to the Planning Division** in order for the County Recorder to file the Notice of Exemption.

SUPPORT INFORMATION

Attachments to Staff Report:

Findings
Conditions of Approval

Exhibit A.....Location/Vicinity Map
Exhibit B.....Assessor’s Parcel Map
Exhibit C.....General Plan Land Use Designation Map
Exhibit D.....Zoning Designation Map
Exhibit E.....Site Plan
Exhibit F.....Photosimulations
Exhibit G.....Radio Frequency Report