



OC DEVELOPMENT SERVICES REPORT

DATE: June 19, 2025

TO: Orange County Zoning Administrator

FROM: OC Development Services / Planning Division

SUBJECT: Planning Application PA23-0192 for a Use Permit

PROPOSAL: The applicant is requesting a Use Permit to remove an existing 40 feet temporary wireless tower, establish a wireless communications facility on Private Property with a new 35 feet monopole cell tower designed to resemble a pine tree (“monopine”) and associated equipment, and a 12 foot over height fence.

ZONING: A1 (SR) – “General Agricultural ” District with a “Sign Restrictions” Overlay

GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION: 1A Rural Residential

LOCATION: The project is located at 7431 1/2 Santiago Canyon Road, Silverado, California 92676 (APN 576-013-02) within the Third Supervisorial District

APPLICANT: Irvine Ranch Water District, Property Owner
David Elliott, Agent

STAFF CONTACT: Arturo Cervantes, Senior Planner
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RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

OC Development Services/Planning recommends the Zoning Administrator:

1. Receive the staff report and public testimony as appropriate;
2. Find that the project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Class 11 (Accessory Structures) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15311; and
3. Approve Planning Application PA24-0192 for a Use Permit subject to the attached Findings (Attachment 1) and Conditions of Approval (Attachment 2).

BACKGROUND AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

On July 30, 2004, Planning Application PA040057 was approved by the Director of Planning, for the installation of a forty (40) foot high telecommunication tower camouflaged as a faux pine tree with six (6) 4-foot panel antennas in three (3) sectors (2 antennas per sector), three (3) ground level equipment cabinets, one (1) telco panel cabinet and power cable connections located within a fifteen (15) foot square lease area in Irvine Ranch Water District (formerly Santiago County Water District) property.

Changed Plan CP130005 was approved on February 5, 2014, by the Director of OC Planning Services to remove six (6) existing 4-foot panel antennas and replace them with twelve (12) new 8-foot panel antennas in three (3) sectors (4 antennas per sector), add twelve (12) new Remote Radio Units (RRUs) stacked behind the panel antennae in three (3) sectors (4 RRUs per sector), add two new surge suppressors, add two (2) new ground-mounted equipment cabinets within the enclosed AT&T lease area, add one (1) new cable bridge extension, add one (1) new ground-mounted GPS antenna, and additional branching patterns to enhance the faux pine tree and to more effectively camouflage the increased quantity and larger size of the panel antennas.

Changed Plan CP180021 was approved on July 9, 2018, by the Deputy Director to remove and replace twelve (12) panel antennas, add fifteen (15) new RRUs, add one (1) new DC-6 Raycap surge protector, remove and replace twelve (12) batteries, and remove one (1) DUS-41.

On October 4, 2021, Site Development Permit PA21-0064 was approved by the Interim Deputy Director of Development Services, allowing the temporary relocation of the existing monopine wireless facility to the north side of the property. The project included the relocation of the cell tower antennas, RRUs, GPS antennas, and ground-mounted equipment. The approval allowed for the addition of a new ice cable bridge, two (2) GPS antennas, and a 6 foot-tall chain link fence to surround the equipment.

The site, which is owned by the Irvine Ranch Water District, is under active construction for water infrastructure improvements. The improvements include a new concrete water reservoir and pump station. The site currently has a concrete reservoir and accessory buildings.

PROPOSED PROJECT

The applicant is requesting approval of a Use Permit to install a new, permanent, unmanned monopine, along with associated ground-mounted equipment. The proposal includes the removal of the existing temporary monopine currently located on the property. In addition, the applicant is requesting approval of an over-height fence, up to 12 feet tall, to enclose the ground-mounted equipment in an area where the maximum permitted fence height is 6 feet.

The proposed project includes the installation of a new 35-foot monopine with nine (9) panel antennas, nine (9) RRUs, four (4) surge protectors, two (2) GPS antennas, an ice cable bridge, and supplemental ground mounted equipment within a fenced platform, as shown on the provided plans (Attachment 3 – Plans). The tower and attached equipment will be constructed to resemble a pine tree to minimize aesthetic and visual impact (Attachment 4 – Photo Simulations). The ground-

mounted equipment will be installed on a platform that extends over a slope and enclosed by a chain link fence with faux ivy on the exterior to help blend with the surroundings. When measured from the lowest point of the slope, the fence will reach a height of up to 12 feet. The project will include the removal of the previously approved temporary wireless facility (PA21-0064), which is located approximately 220 feet north of the proposed tower.

SURROUNDING LAND USES

Zoning and existing land uses for the project site and for other surrounding properties are as follows.

DIRECTION	ZONING DISTRICT	EXISTING LAND USE
Project Site	A1(SR) - "General Agricultural" District with "Sign Restriction" Overlay District	Water Reservoir Facility
North	SG(SR) - " Sand and Gravel Extraction " District with "Sign Restriction" Overlay District	Open Space
South	SG(SR) - " Sand and Gravel Extraction " District with "Sign Restriction" Overlay District	Open Space
West	A1(SR) - "General Agriculture " District with "Sign Restriction" Overlay District	Open Space
East	A1(SR) - "General Agricultural" District with "Sign Restriction" Overlay District	Open Space

Aerial of Project Site

An aerial photograph of the Project site is provided below.



DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:

Below is a table comparing the development standards for the A1(SR) - "General Agricultural" District with the Applicant's proposal.

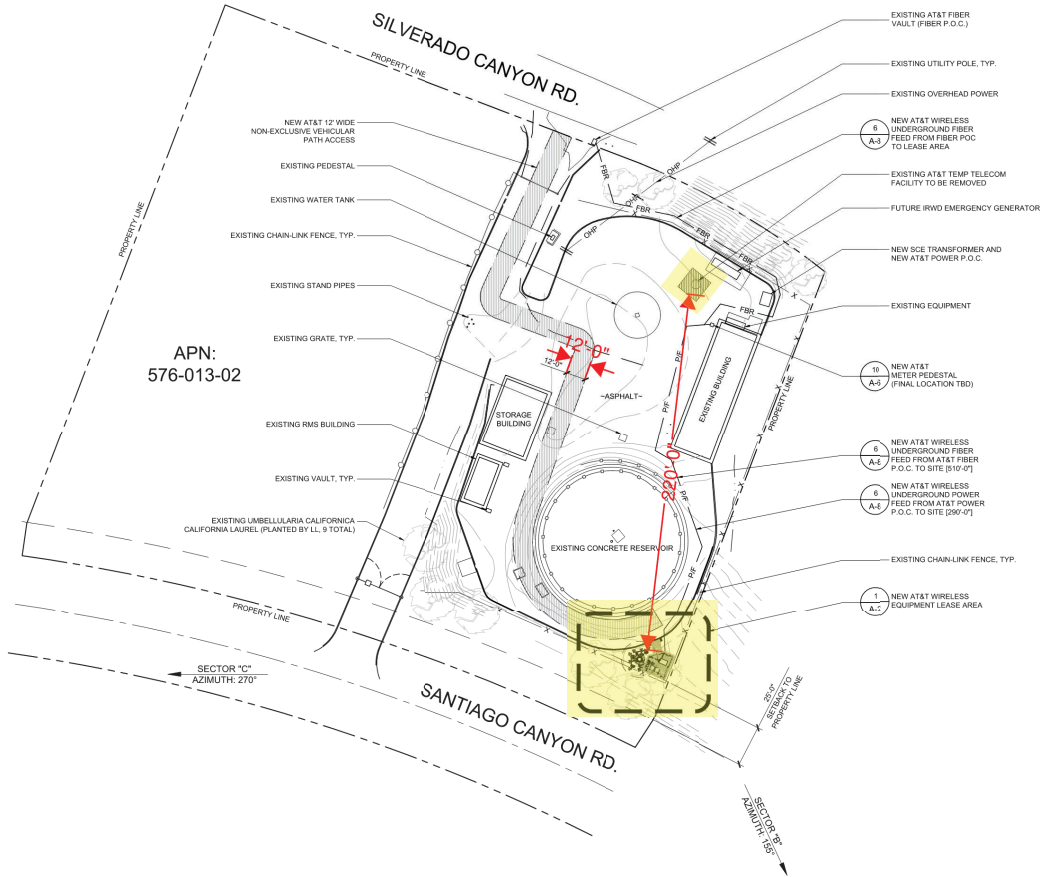
STANDARD	REQUIRED	PROPOSED
Building Site Area	4 acres	170 acres (existing)
Maximum Building Height	35 feet maximum	35 feet Tower Structure
Structural Setbacks	Front: 20 feet minimum Side: 5 feet minimum Rear: 25 feet minimum	Front: 25 feet Sides: 10 feet and 370 feet Rear: 260 feet
Building Site Coverage	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

Below is a table comparing the development standards for the Wireless Communications Facility on Private Property with the Applicant's proposal.

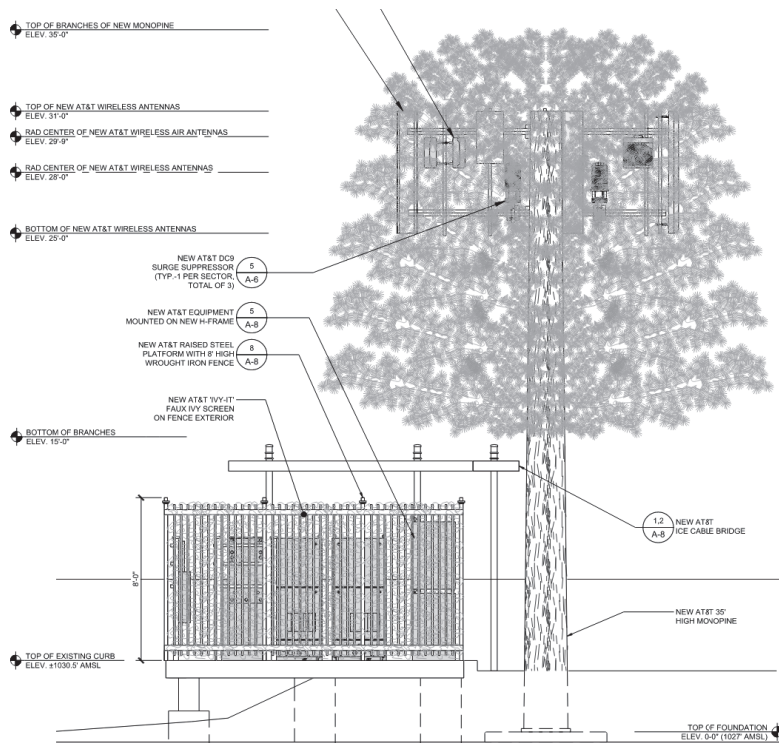
STANDARD	REQUIRED	PROPOSED
Maximum Building Height	No tower shall exceed the maximum permissible height for structures in the underlying zoning district. The Project is located in the A1 Zoning District, which has a maximum height limit of 35-feet.	35-foot Tower Structure
Fences and Walls	Fences shall not exceed a maximum height of six (6) feet unless valid safety consideration that justifies a taller fence.	Maximum total height from lowest grade shall be 12 feet (consisting of an 8 foot fence mounted on a pedestal base up to 4 foot high over sloped terrain)*
Stealthing	Facility designed with concealment elements, so visibility of any antenna or other transmission equipment is generally unnoticeable and fits into the context of its surroundings.	The proposed facility includes a monopole cell tower designed to resemble a pine tree
Screening	Ground-mounted transmission equipment and associated enclosures shall be located either underground or completely within a fenced area.	Equipment to be located within a new fenced area with faux ivy for stealthing.

* Subject to the requested Use Permit, intended to enhance safety and prevent theft and vandalism.

SITE PLAN



ELEVATION



Pursuant to the County of Orange's Zoning Code Section 7-9-109, Wireless Communications Facility on Private Property Ordinance ("Wireless Ordinance"), new wireless communications facilities, and substantial changes to existing wireless facilities, are subject to approval of a Use Permit by the Zoning Administrator. In addition, Section 7-9-64(f) of the Zoning Code permits modifications to fence and wall height standards above eight feet in height, subject to Zoning Administrator approval.

The applicant is requesting approval to remove an existing temporary monopine and install a new, permanent, unmanned monopine, along with associated ground-mounted equipment. AT&T previously relocated the monopine to its current temporary location, approved under PA21-0064, to accommodate the construction of a new concrete water reservoir and pump station by the water district. The proposed wireless communication facility shall be located approximately 220 feet south of the existing temporary site, in a location that avoids interference with the footprint of the new water tower (see Site Plan figure). The new location was selected by AT&T to ensure continuity of coverage and enhanced network performance in the area. (Attachment 5 – Justification Letter)

The proposed project includes the installation of a 35-foot monopine, with nine (9) panel antennas, nine (9) RRUs, four (4) surge protectors, and two (2) GPS antennas. The project will include a platform to accommodate ground-mounted equipment, including generators, telco cabinets, and an ice cable bridge.

Also, the applicant is requesting a Use Permit to install a fence which exceeds the 6-foot maximum fence height allowed in a side setback to adequately secure and screen the equipment. The Wireless Ordinance states that ground-mounted transmission equipment shall be located either underground or completely within a fenced area. Equipment fencing is limited to a maximum height of 6 feet unless the applicant demonstrates a valid safety consideration that justifies a taller fence. The applicant is proposing an increased fence height surrounding the ground-mounted equipment to completely screen the equipment, enhance site safety, and security.

The proposed project includes ground-mounted equipment on a platform that spans over a sloped area (see Elevation figure). The equipment will be within a chain link fence enclosure with a gate, and have faux ivy applied to the exterior for screening. Due to the slope, the fence height will be up to 12 feet, when measured from the lowest grade. The applicant has requested that the Use Permit include approval for a fence height of up to 12 feet within a required side setback to allow for the construction of the proposed ground-mounted equipment enclosure. In addition to the standard Use Permit findings required under Section 7-9-125, two further findings must be made prior to the approval of a fence or wall height modification. First, the proposed height and location of the fence or wall must not result in or create a traffic hazard. Second, the location, size, design, and overall characteristics of the fence or wall must not create conditions or situations that are objectionable, detrimental, or incompatible with other permitted uses in the vicinity.

Based on the location of the fence, the proposed height modification will not create a traffic hazard, as the fence is setback forty feet from the property line and will not obstruct sightlines or interfere with visibility along any roads or walkways. Additionally, the size, design, and placement of the fence will not create conditions that are objectionable, detrimental, or incompatible with other permitted uses in the vicinity. The faux ivy covering the fence will ensure that the enclosure blends with the surrounding environment, minimizing its visual impact and maintaining the aesthetic integrity of the area.

The project is in compliance with the County's General Plan Land Use Element, which recognizes that improvements in the Rural Residential (1A) areas be given special consideration due to topography and other site-specific factors. The proposed wireless facility will be located in an

unobtrusive area and has been strategically designed to minimize visual impacts on the project site and the surrounding community. The facility is essential to maintaining and enhancing network connectivity in the area. Its size, scale, and use of stealth design features ensure that it is compatible with adjacent land uses and will not result in any significant adverse impacts.

Furthermore, the project is located within the Rural Residential area of the Silverado-Modjeska Specific Plan ("Sil-Mod SP") and is adjacent to Santiago Canyon Road, which is designated as a Viewscape Corridor under the Scenic Highway Plan and the Transportation Element of the Orange County General Plan. The project has been designed to minimize visual impacts and to preserve the rural, scenic character of the canyon. The stealth monopine will resemble the appearance of a native pine tree and is sited in a manner that avoids obscuring the skyline of distant hills and ridgeline, consistent with policies of the Sil-Mod SP. The facility is setback forty feet from Santiago Canyon Road, no paved sidewalks are proposed, and all materials and finishes shall be non-reflective and incorporate earth-tone colors to minimize contrasting with the surrounding environment. No signage is proposed beyond that required for safety and identification, and any necessary signage will comply with SR zoning ordinance standards. Lighting fixtures shall be below any building roof line and shielded in a manner which minimizes their reflection onto adjacent property and public roads. The project site is currently under construction, and there is no existing vegetation or trees within the areas where the proposed wireless facility will be located. No removal of trees from the Modjeska Olive Grove or heritage trees is proposed.

Staff has reviewed the proposed project and determined that the design of the wireless facility complies with the County's Zoning Code, the General Plan's Land Use and Transportation Element, and the Sil-Mod SP.

Safety of Communications

The Sheriff-Coroner Department has reviewed the proposed project to ensure there are no potential conflicts with the Sheriff's emergency communications network (Attachment 6 - Sheriff's Communication). They have expressed no concerns regarding the proposed project or the need for a post-construction inspection.

REFERRAL FOR COMMENT AND PUBLIC NOTICE:

A copy of the planning application and the proposed site plan were distributed for review and comment to the appropriate County divisions, including Building & Safety and Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA). Staff has reviewed all comments received, and where appropriate, has addressed the comments through recommended Conditions of Approval, which are provided as Attachment 2. Public notices were mailed to all owners of record within 300 feet of the subject property, posted in front of the project site, in a local newspaper, and at the posting kiosks at the County Administration Buildings located in Santa Ana, at least ten days prior to this public hearing, as required by established public hearing posting procedures. As of the writing of this staff report, no comments have been received.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project is categorically exempt (Class 11) from the provisions of CEQA pursuant to Section 15311, because the exemption provides for placement of minor structures accessory to (appurtenant to) existing industrial facilities.

CONCLUSION:

Staff has analyzed the proposed project and concluded that the size and scale of the proposed project is not detrimental to surrounding land uses, and that it has been planned in a manner that is the least intrusive, both on the project site and to the surrounding community. Staff therefore supports the applicant's proposal and recommends approval of Planning Application PA24-0192 subject to the attached Findings (Attachment 1) and Conditions of Approval (Attachment 2).

Submitted by:

Concurred by:

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Arturo Cervantes, Senior Planner
OC Development Services/Planning

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Cindy Salazar, Planning Division Manager
OC Public Works/Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Recommended Findings
2. Recommended Conditions of Approval
3. Plans
4. Photo Simulations
5. Justification Letter
6. Sheriff-Coroner Review Comments, dated August 23, 2024

APPEAL PROCEDURE:

Any interested person may appeal the decision of the Zoning Administrator on this permit to the Planning Commission within 15 calendar days of the decision upon submittal of required documents filed online at myoceservices.ocgov.com or in person at the County Service Center, located at 601 N. Ross St., Santa Ana. If you challenge the action taken on this proposal in court, you may be limited to raising only those issues you or someone else raised at the public hearing described in this report, or in written correspondence delivered to OC Development Services.