

Dear Representative Kathleen James and members of the House Energy and Digital Infrastructure Committee,

My name is Martine Victor and I live in Manchester, VT.

My town, like many in Vermont, is a blend of commercial, recreational and historic attractions. Underpinning these attractions for residents and visitors alike is the beauty of our natural surroundings; the unobstructed mountain views, historic landmarks and by-ways, recreation in areas unspoiled by industrial intrusion. Invariably, these telecom proposals threaten core attributes that make our town desirable.

Since 2023, Manchester has faced two major cell tower applications, most recently, an application for four canister mounted antennas. These proposals are characterized by a blatant disregard for our Town Plan's zoning and ordinances prohibiting cell towers in Residential and Mixed Use areas. They routinely exceed permitted height and are sited to ensure maximum visual blight.

In March, 2023, AT&T sought to construct a 140-ft tower off of Side Rd, in the heart of downtown Manchester, a very visible location. It appears AT&T struck a deal with landowner Donny Dorr to site the tower on his land in a residential district, also close to the west branch of the Battenkill River. This residential area consists of mobile homes, many owned and leased by Dorr. As Dorr tenants, the inhabitants were in no position to oppose this project. Both the zone and 140-ft height were prohibited by the town. A petition to oppose the project was signed by 250 residents. AT&T withdrew their application after a community meeting with our Selectboard and Planning Commission showed the majority opposed.

In the pending case of Verizon's Hunter Park application, we see the same disregard. The site is zoned Mixed Use 2 which prohibits telecommunication towers. The 140-ft height would exceed the permitted height of 130-ft. This location is close to a mobile home community, the Red Fox Community School, the Riley Rink skating facility and the popular historic Rail Trail used by hikers, bikers, dog walkers etc.. Hunter Park hosts outdoor summer concerts, sports events, children's summer camps, charitable events and winter skating. A cell tower at this location would be visible for miles from every view shed. A petition opposing this project has 450 signatures.

In addition, our Planning Commission hired an outside propagation expert to determine gaps in coverage and to identify alternative sites.

AT&T recently applied for four pole mounted canister antenna, one in Manchester Village and three in the Town. Presumably land and building owners were notified, but I spoke with several area businesses, whose occupants had no knowledge of

these projects because they were renters. The Village Select Board objected to the one proposed in the historic district and it was dropped.

I understand our need to improve cell service in underserved areas. Mobile phone connectivity is important for safety purposes, and improving communication for first responders is key. However, a spokesperson for the Manchester Police Department said their communications were fine. When looking at the propagation maps regarding the canister antenna, they show a very small area of coverage in the immediate vicinity. It would appear the aim is to gather data, not improve far reaching connectivity.

It's also unclear what defines "de-minimus", a label used in the 248a process. De-minimus suggests something on a smaller scale, yet these recent 140-ft cell towers applications are considered "de-minimus".

What is meant by "substantial deference"? Those who craft our Town Plan put much thought and effort into establishing zoning and ordinances to protect and improve the quality of life for our community. These telecom companies swing into town like Godzilla with no respect for our carefully crafted Town Plan and the qualities that define Manchester. Why wouldn't these companies review town plans prior to submitting an application for a CPG?

It's time to sunset 248a for good as it is not serving Vermonters interests.

Thank you for your hard work addressing this critical subject. I hope you will place our communities first as we are your constituents who live here. Improved connectivity can be accomplished in a way that is less damaging and traumatic to Vermonters.