



# Georgia Planning Officials Newsletter

November 2006

## Regulating Cell Phone Antennas and Towers

As a result of the changing technology in the telecommunications industry, cities and counties across Georgia are facing an increase in the amount of cell phone antennas and towers being constructed in their jurisdiction.

This raises certain fundamental questions that planning commissions, zoning boards of appeal, and even city/county commissions must answer more and more frequently today, than ever in the past. Particular issues frequently associated with telecommunication antennas and towers are diminishing aesthetic and property value. Specific questions that planning officials wrestle with include:

- How can we address the problem of cell towers and their size in relation to the character of a particular area?
- Should the zoning ordinance be amended to specifically address what districts they are allowed?
- Are there any examples of where antennas could be added to current infrastructure?

The first step is to speak with your city/county attorney. They may be able to provide you with ideas that are specific to your community, and will be a vital player should you decide to take on adding regulations to your ordinance. In addition, the American Planning Association has provided commentary regarding the 1996 Telecommunication Act, as well as case law that pertaining to this federal legislation. It can be accessed at: [www.planning.org/PEL/commentary/wireless.htm](http://www.planning.org/PEL/commentary/wireless.htm)

## What are other jurisdictions doing to address this issue?

That was the question brought forth, and after some conversation and subsequent research the following is a list of best practices for you to consider. The following are links from neighboring communities in Georgia, as well as those outside the state. Should you have any other resources not listed in this newsletter, we would love to hear from you!

In **Gwinnett County**, an ordinance has been put into place to guide the location of telecommunication towers and antennas. The goals outlined include encouraging their location in non-residential areas, encourage the joint use for current and new towers, and encouraging design in order to minimize the "adverse visual impact." [co.gwinnett.ga.us/departments/planning/pdf/tower.pdf](http://co.gwinnett.ga.us/departments/planning/pdf/tower.pdf)

Similarly, the purpose of the telecommunication antenna and tower ordinances for both the **Cities of Hahira and Valdosta** seek to encourage the coexistence of telecommunication towers with other land uses. In addition, this ordinance seeks to encourage "innovative uses of alternative tower structures such as church steeples, outdoor advertising signs, electric transmission towers where technologically feasible." [sgrdc.com/GLPC/Ordinances/Valdosta%20Telecomm%20Ord.pdf](http://sgrdc.com/GLPC/Ordinances/Valdosta%20Telecomm%20Ord.pdf)

The telecommunication tower ordinance in place for **Albemarle County, Virginia** takes the unique stance of encouraging antennas and towers to be constructed as long as they do not rise above tree-top height. Since this height will ultimately fluctuate, the ordinance allows the height of the tower to increase in respect to the tree-top height. This is just one of the many objectives outlined in this ordinance, which serves as a best practice for its innovative technique. [www.albemarle.org/departments.asp?department=planning&relpage=2462](http://www.albemarle.org/departments.asp?department=planning&relpage=2462)

Dear Planning Officials,

We are pleased to report that 50 planning officials from across the state of Georgia attended the first-ever track for planning & elected officials at the annual GPA conference.

The day turned out to be a major success. It resulted in a significant amount of discussion about issues and challenges that planning officials across the state face.

As promised, this and future newsletters will attempt to address some of the issues that were discussed including an overview of the topic, resources and best practices being used to address these and other best planning topics.

IS THERE A TOPIC YOU WOULD LIKE PREVIEWED IN A NEWSLETTER?

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## Additional Planning Officials Resources

**American Planning Association membership for commissioners:** A good resource for resources, training and networking. [www.planning.org/effectivecommissions](http://www.planning.org/effectivecommissions)

## *The Good News About Takings*

APA Planners Press

This guidebook explains what commissioners and other officials need to know about the new takings standards in easy-to-understand language.

[www.planning.org/apastore](http://www.planning.org/apastore)

We want to hear from you! Please send us your thoughts, experiences and advice on being a Planning Official. E-mail or fax your submissions to Robbie Hayes at [rhayes@atlantaregional.com](mailto:rhayes@atlantaregional.com) or 404.463.3105