

## **Verizon cell antenna plan draws fire**

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Plans to put a 78-foot cell phone tower disguised as a plastic pine tree near the top of Mount Barnabe drew objections from Lagunitas and Forest Knolls neighbors, prompting officials to schedule a county Planning Commission hearing.

Verizon Wireless, which wants to put the tree and antenna on private property at the top of 1 Mountain King Road, says the project would improve spotty cell phone reception in West Marin.

Verizon's representative, Peter Hilliard of Sonoma, said the antenna also is needed for public safety and reminded planning staffers of a Sept. 28 accident in Woodacre in which a 27-year-old mother died in a car crash. She tried to make a cell phone call from the crash scene before dying, and she wasn't discovered for hours.

County planning staff decided Thursday that there were enough questions and controversy that the plan should be reviewed by the commission.

More than two dozen neighbors turned out for the zoning hearing, questioned the look of the fake pine and expressed concern about possible health problems from cell phone antennas. They also voiced concern that the narrow, winding road leading to the site can't safely handle crews that would service the tower.

The plastic tree would be erected about 200 feet downhill from a county fire lookout, which already sports an array of telecommunications antenna gear.

A consultant hired by Verizon said electromagnetic levels generated by the device would be within federal safety limits. But one neighbor, Robert Shiner, said the antenna would intrude on the "safe and wholesome" environment that he and others sought by moving there. He said that before the county approves the project, it should study the overall electromagnetic field levels of the antennas already in the area, along with those Verizon wants to erect.

Verizon tried to put an antenna on the lookout, but the county has capped the number it can hold, responding to health concerns raised by workers.

Shiner said the fake tree would be so tall that it would look out of place. "The nearest trees to the phony tree that's proposed are 15 feet in height," he said.

The San Geronimo Valley Property Owners Association also objected to the tower, asking the county to consider property values.

Hilliard told county planners that two other telecommunications companies, MetroPCS and Nextel, want to put antennas on the proposed tower. Verizon is also talking to AT&T and T-Mobile about adding antennas to it.

In an attempt to minimize the number of telecommunications towers, county policy encourages multiple antennas on towers.

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