



PLANNING BOARD RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT#: 26-47-ZTA

MEETING DATE: August 13, 2026

PETITION REQUEST: Small Cell Wireless (26-47-ZTA)

APPLICANT/PETITIONER: City of Hendersonville

PLANNING BOARD ACTION SUMMARY:

The Planning Board considered the proposed Small Cell Wireless Facilities text amendment over two meetings, first as an informational/public hearing item in July 2026 and then for recommendation in August 2026. The discussion focused primarily on balancing federal and state requirements for telecommunications infrastructure with local concerns regarding aesthetics, placement, abandonment, and neighborhood compatibility. [PB Minute July 2026 | Word], [PB Minute Aug 2026 | Word]

1. Local Authority is Limited

Staff emphasized that federal and state laws significantly restrict municipal regulation of small cell wireless facilities. The City cannot prohibit these facilities or treat them differently from other utilities. The City's authority is largely limited to regulating:

- *Design and appearance*
- *Placement preferences*
- *Spacing standards*
- *Abandonment and removal requirements*

Staff repeatedly noted that the ordinance was designed to work within these legal constraints. [PB Minute July 2026 | Word], [PB Minute Aug 2026 | Word]

2. Focus on Design Standards and Compatibility

The ordinance was developed primarily to address aesthetic concerns, particularly in Hendersonville's historic and economically significant districts.

Topics discussed included:

- *Preferred and prohibited locations*
- *Design standards for downtown and historic areas*
- *Camouflaging facilities versus allowing them to remain visible*
- *Requirements for review within historic districts*

The Board generally supported using design standards to reduce visual impacts where legally possible. [PB Minute July 2026 | Word], [PB Minute Aug 2026 | Word]

3. Spacing Requirements Were a Major Issue

Board members spent considerable time discussing the proposed 300-foot spacing standard. Questions included:

- How the distance would be measured
- Whether a larger spacing requirement could be imposed
- Whether municipalities could establish greater separation distances

Staff advised that spacing standards must remain legally defensible and cannot effectively prohibit deployment. The proposed 300-foot distance was tied generally to city block dimensions. [\[PB Minute July 2026 | Word\]](#), [\[PB Minute Aug 2026 | Word\]](#)

4. Public Concerns Focused on Health, Surveillance, and Appearance

Public comments raised several concerns:

- Potential health effects of electromagnetic radiation
- Fear of increased surveillance and association with camera systems
- Visual impacts, particularly in downtown and historic areas
- Reliability of communications systems during emergencies
- Potential removal of larger cell towers

Staff stated there was no proposal linking small-cell deployment to removal of existing large towers and clarified that the facilities are telecommunications infrastructure rather than surveillance devices. [\[PB Minute Aug 2026 | Word\]](#), [\[PB Minute July 2026 | Word\]](#)

5. Abandonment and Removal Standards Were Strengthened

Following comments raised during the July meeting, staff revised the ordinance to include clearer abandonment and removal provisions.

Additional discussion included:

- Shortening the removal timeline to six months
- Requiring notification when facilities are no longer in service
- Ensuring obsolete equipment does not remain indefinitely in the public right-of-way

These revisions appeared to address concerns raised by Board members. [\[PB Minute Aug 2026 | Word\]](#)

6. Historic District Treatment Received Special Attention

The Board explored how facilities would be handled in historic districts.

Staff explained:

- Small cell facilities cannot be prohibited in historic districts.
- Design standards can be imposed.
- A Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) would be required in local historic districts.

This was viewed as an important mechanism for preserving historic character while complying with state and federal requirements.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

The public concerns fell into four primary categories:

- 1. **Health and electromagnetic radiation concerns.** [PB Minute Aug 2026 | Word]*
- 2. **Privacy and surveillance concerns,** particularly references to Flock cameras and license-plate readers. [PB Minute Aug 2026 | Word]*
- 3. **Visual and historic character impacts,** especially in downtown and historic districts. [PB Minute Aug 2026 | Word]*
- 4. **Emergency communications reliability and infrastructure resiliency** if small cells were to supplement or replace larger towers. [PB Minute Aug 2026 | Word]*

Importantly, unlike the later Small-Scale Multi-Family discussion at the same August meeting, the Small Cell Wireless item generated relatively limited public comment, with only two speakers appearing in the recorded minutes

DELIBERATION:

By August, Board discussion shifted from whether facilities should be permitted to how they should be regulated. Members generally accepted that deployment could not be prevented and focused instead on mitigating impacts through design standards, spacing requirements, and removal provisions. [PB Minute Aug 2026 | Word]

The Chair also expressed interest in helping the public better understand the purpose of the installations and noted support from some members for making facilities visually distinctive rather than heavily camouflaged.

The Planning Board unanimously recommended approval of the Small Cell Wireless Facilities ordinance on August 13, 2026. The recommendation found the amendment:

- 1. Consistent with the Gen H Comprehensive Plan.*
- 2. Necessary to align with state and federal telecommunications requirements.*
- 3. Supportive of telecommunications infrastructure expansion and improvement.*
- 4. Effective in establishing standards for order, compatibility, and safety in deployment.*

Co-Pilot was used to generate this summary of the Planning Board discussion from minutes of the July and August minutes before being edited by staff for clarity.