Perquimans County Planning Board

MINUTES

Tuesday, October 13, 2026

The Perquimans County Planning Board held its regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, Oct 13, 2026, at 7:00 PM in the Community Meeting Room of the Perquimans County Library.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Antoine (A.J.) Moore, Chair
Lewis Smith, Vice Chair
Thelma Finch-Copeland
Teressa Blanchard
John Skinner

MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS PRESENT: Rhonda Repanshek, Planner
Selina Reyos, Planning and Zoning Technician
Susan Rabold, CityScape Consultant
Rui Da Silva, Applicant
Gary Bryant, Applicant's Attorney

Planning Board Chair, Antoine Moore, called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and opened with prayer.

Agenda Item I, Approval of Agenda:

Mr. Smith made a motion to approve the agenda. It was seconded by Ms. Blanchard. The motion passed unanimously.

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Agenda Item II, Consent Agenda/Approval of Minutes of Previous Planning Board Meetings: See *attached draft of Wednesday, September 9th, 2026, Rescheduled Regular Meeting minutes.*

Mr. Smith made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. It was seconded by Ms. Copeland. The motion passed unanimously.

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Agenda Item III, Business Item: Special Use Permit Request SUP-26-02, requested by Cellco Partnership d/b/a Verizon Wireless, to install and operate a telecommunications tower approximately 1,200 feet east of 1874 Center Hill Hwy. Subject property is tax parcel number 3-D048-3012-JBP and is zoned Rural Agriculture (RA)

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Mr. Moore called on Planner Repanshek to give a staff report.

Planner Repanshek introduced Special Use Permit request SUP 26-02 for CellCo Partnership (d/b/a Verizon Wireless). She explained that staff work and discussions regarding this site had been ongoing since January. She reported attending an on-site balloon test with Verizon representatives to evaluate visual impacts from neighboring properties and public rights-of-way, taking photographs and evaluating visual mock-ups.
Consultant Coordination & Public Response: Rhonda detailed staff's coordination with Cityscape, the county's telecommunications consultant. She noted that Cityscape conducted technical exchanges with Verizon and produced a 17-page summary report included in the board packets. She also noted that a full 52-page application is available on flash drive if anyone wanted to see it.

Attorney Gary Bryant presented the application. He explained that Verizon requires this 195-foot monopole tower (plus 4-foot lightning rod) to eliminate a major coverage gap along Center Hill Highway (SR 1110) for residents, local businesses, and emergency services. He detailed how the proposed site bridges a critical network gap between existing Verizon Site 315 (over 5 miles northeast on Ocean Highway / US 17) and Site 250 (over 5 miles southeast on Perry Long Road).

Bryant explained that co-location on an existing structure was evaluated first, but only one non-Verizon tower exists within a 5-mile radius (an SBA tower ~3.5 miles away). He pointed out that this tower is located too close to Verizon's existing Site 315 to provide the required coverage, making co-location technically infeasible.

Attorney Bryant stated that the equipment compound will be enclosed by a 7-foot-high chain-link fence topped with 1 foot of barbed wire for security. He emphasized that the tower will be naturally screened from view by the existing buffer of mature trees and vegetation, adding that the adjacent properties to both the east and west are owned by the same landowner, which provides an additional physical buffer from surrounding parcels.

He further explained that access to the tower will be from Center Hill Highway via a proposed 12-foot-wide gravel access road situated within a 20-foot-wide non-exclusive access and utility easement. Regarding property setbacks, Attorney Bryant noted that the tower is engineered with a breakpoint at the 150-foot level, which under county code reduces the minimum required setback distance to 49.5 feet. He outlined the specific proposed setbacks as being approximately 300 feet from Center Hill Highway, 1,022 feet from the northern property line, 293 feet from the eastern property line, 155 feet from the southern property line, 14 feet from the western property line, and 459 feet from the closest off-site habitable structure.

Bryant assured the board that the compound is unmanned, visited only 1–2 times per month by service technicians, generates no traffic, smoke, fumes, or glare, and operates at noise levels comparable to a residential HVAC unit. Addressing stealth/concealed designs (such as flagpoles), Bryant explained that enclosing antennas inside a pole significantly reduces wireless service performance and reduces service coverage. He explained that the tower will be a monopole tower made of galvanized steel and will not be marked or lit. The ground equipment will be neutral colors to blend with the surroundings.

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Mr. Smith asked for further explanation regarding landowner boundaries and how the setback requirements function.

Susan Rabold explained that county code typically mandates a standard 1:1 setback unless the tower incorporates engineered breakpoint technology, which accounts for 110% of the tower's fall zone. She clarified that because the developer provided breakpoint technology, the tower will not fall flat straight down instead, it is designed to bend. She noted that the distance between the top of the tower and the bend point is engineered so that the folded section falls within the designated 49.5-foot setback area.

Planner Repanshek asked for clarification regarding the 150-foot breakpoint, asking what prevents the tower from breaking at other locations during a strong windstorm and whether the design intends or expects it to break anywhere else.

Susan Rabold responded that it would take an unusual storm to bring down a tower in the first place, emphasizing that the structure is engineered to stay standing. She explained that the monopole is constructed with a specific structural weak point at the 150-foot mark, ensuring that the lower 150-foot base remains intact while the upper 40 to 45 feet fold over at the top rather than collapsing across boundaries.

Mr. Skinner followed up by asking **Susan Rabold** to define what constitutes an "unusual storm."

Susan Rabold replied that they have experienced Category 5 hurricanes with very few tower failures overall. She explained that telecommunications towers are typically engineered to withstand a minimum wind speed of 130 mph.

Mr. Smith asked to confirm if that meant the tower is built to survive a Category 5 hurricane.

Susan Rabold confirmed that the towers are indeed intended to withstand those extreme storm conditions. She noted that while she would need to check the final structural engineering analysis for this specific site's exact rating, 130 mph is the standard baseline for most modern designs. She added that many modern towers also co-locate public safety communications equipment, which requires structural design thresholds even higher than 130 mph.

Mr. Smith brought up comments from the Soil and Water Conservation District technician and the Technical Review Committee regarding the property being located within the Bear Swamp Drainage District. He asked for clarification on whether the tower or its power infrastructure would impede the district's ability to access and maintain their canals and ditches.

Mr. Da Silva explained that they will be using the existing access road that leads back into the woods, which crosses a large existing culvert pipe right at the right-of-way before turning onto the parcel. He stated that the drainage ditch will continue to function exactly as it currently does and that the project will not impact drainage operations.

Mr. Smith noted that the drainage district's main maintenance tasks involve mowing to keep vegetation under control and periodically cleaning out the ditch, though cleanout operations occur infrequently.

Mr. Da Silva agreed that none of those maintenance activities would be impacted. He added that he had attempted to reach out directly to the Bear Swamp Water District representative to clarify their comments but had not yet been able to get in touch with him. He confirmed that crews will use the existing entrance, will not disturb the existing culvert pipe, and will bury the utility lines underground.

Mr. Smith stated that if all parties involved are satisfied with those access arrangements, he saw no issues.

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Mr. Da Silva noted that in a similar project in a neighboring county, because their total land disturbance fell below 10,000 square feet, a DEQ permit was not required. However, he affirmed that he would double-check to ensure full compliance with all state and local environmental regulations.

Susan Rabold clarified her previous response. She stated that the proposed tower is engineered in strict compliance with the **2024 North Carolina State Building Code requirements** as well as **TIA-222-H standards** for telecommunications structures. While she noted that 130 mph is the standard design baseline typically used, she clarified that she did not know the exact wind speed definition for a Category 5 hurricane offhand, but confirmed the tower satisfies all required state building code and TIA-222-H criteria. Regarding structural performance during catastrophic storms, **Susan Rabold** shared that among all their client sites across the Southeast that have endured extreme hurricane winds, she was aware of only a single tower failure, an older public safety tower in Asheville during a recent hurricane. She highlighted that even in that isolated case, the tower bent back over on itself rather than collapsing flat or falling across property boundaries.

Ms. Rabold elaborated on the flush-mount antenna configuration and detailed Cityscape's recommended conditions of approval whereby Cityscape supported Verizon's request for standard pipe-mount arrays over flush mounts.

Susan Rabold then reviewed the potential conditions for the board to include in an approval recommendation:

- **Tower Color:** She noted that determining whether the tower should be painted or left as unpainted galvanized steel falls entirely within the board's purview, as Cityscape does not dictate aesthetic color choices.
- **Internal Cable Mounting:** She emphasized that all coaxial cables must be installed inside the hollow center of the monopole rather than banded to the exterior, as exterior banding negatively affects the long-term structural integrity of the pole.
- **Cable Port Sealing:** She specified that all cable entry ports must be weather-sealed and capped to prevent water infiltration and stop wildlife from establishing habitats inside the base of the tower.
- **Structural Analysis:** She stated that a full, structural engineering analysis should be submitted with the building permit application.
- **FAA Determination:** She required that an aeronautical study and Determination of No Hazard be provided prior to the issuance of a building permit.
- **Equipment Specifications:** She required that final construction plans specify exact manufacturer model numbers, dimensions, and technical details for all antennas and remote radio heads (RRHs).

Mr. John Skinner asked a follow-up question regarding tower lighting, asking whether the earlier statement that the tower would be unlit meant there would also be no aviation warning light at the top to prevent aircraft collisions, specifically inquiring if a red obstruction light would be present. **Attorney Bryant** responded that no light is proposed or expected due to the tower's overall height.

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Mr. Da Silva added that at 195 feet (199 feet with the lightning rod), the structure falls just below the height threshold where FAA lighting is automatically mandated, unless proximity to a nearby airport triggers a requirement. He stated that they do not expect airport proximity to be an issue in this location but confirmed that they will check with the FAA to ensure complete compliance.

Mr. John Skinner shared the context for his concern, noting that when wind turbines were erected across the sound, residents in neighboring Bertie County expressed significant frustration over the visual impact of dozens of flashing red lights at night.

Attorney Bryant pointed out that unlike large wind farms with hundreds of lights, if the FAA were ever to require lighting on a single tower, it would typically consist of a dual-lighting system (a white strobing light during the day and a dim red light at night) designed to minimize ground-level glare for nearby residents.

Chair Antoine Moore asked about network planning and coverage determination, asking how engineers calculate where coverage gaps exist and how they determine that a new tower is specifically required at a given location roughly every five miles.

Mr. Da Silva explained that network engineers use two primary methods: sophisticated computer propagation modeling software and physical drive-testing (often referred to as "root sites"), where technicians drive through rural corridors with specialized equipment to map actual signal strength and log dropped calls.

Ms. Blanchard asked how far the coverage area would expand with the tower placed at the proposed location.

Mr. Da Silva responded that while coverage distance depends on local conditions, a general rule of thumb for modern 5G technology is an effective radius of approximately three miles. He noted that in earlier years with 3G and 4G networks, individual towers could reach somewhat further with strong signal, but 5G operates over shorter ranges. He explained that while the local terrain is relatively flat, signal reach is still influenced by elevation, surrounding tree canopy, and dense foliage, but roughly three miles is the expected coverage radius for this site.

Planner Repanshek reviewed the requirement for a Land Use Plan Consistency Statement prior to the board's vote. She explained that under County Zoning Ordinance Section 903(C), the Planning Board is required to include a formal statement in its comments regarding the application's consistency with the county's currently adopted Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

Mr. Lewis asked what feedback or comments had been received from residents living near the proposed site.

Planner Repanshek replied that not a single person had contacted her or the planning department in any form regarding the tower.

John Skinner made a motion to find the proposed Specials Use Permit No. SUP-26-02 to be consistent with Perquimans County's Land Use Plan (LUP) due to its classification in the LUP matching its zone on the County Zoning Map, and the communication tower use will not create extraordinary public infrastructure and service demands. He added to his motion to recommend approval to the Board of County Commissioners based on the conclusion that: The use will not endanger public health or safety: it meets required conditions, will not

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substantially injure the value of abutting property, and the character of the use will be in harmony with the area in which it is to be located.

The motion was seconded by Lewis Smith. It passed unanimously.

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Agenda Item IV, Other Items A: Status Report on Previous Board Recommendations:

Preliminary Plat Review of Albemarle Preserve tract 1, phase 1a, for 155 lots on 95.10 acres between Holiday Lane and Minzies Creek. Requested by John Linton for Albemarle Preserve, LCC; part of conditional use permit number (PUD) REZ-19-01 recorded in Register of Deeds book 494, page 775.

Planner Repanshek stated that was approved by county commissioners on October 5th.

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Agenda Item IV, Other Items B: Chair's signature on approved minutes.

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A motion was made by Mr. Skinner to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Blanchard. It passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 7:36 pm.

Minutes approved this _____ day of _____, 2026.

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Chairperson Recorder

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