

To: Public Utility Commission  
From: Lori Church, Rochester resident  
Date: January 5, 2026  
Re: Case #25-2931-PET (Proposed telecom tower at 1030 Rt 100S, Rochester)

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In today's society, most people want and need connectivity. A Rochester survey in 2012 confirmed this, and it resulted in improved coverage by AT&T as well as EC Fiber installing miles of fiber in 2018. However, the proposed telecommunications tower does not add value to the town, and it does **not** conform to the Rochester Town Plan (Plan) or the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission regional plan (TRORC).

#### **248a Telecommunications**

The Plan addresses the 248a telecommunications process and uses the strong language of "shall" throughout: *"For all telecommunications facilities, the following policies SHALL apply ..."* (emphasis mine, p15). In a legal sense, the word "shall" creates an element versus a factor. If one element is not present, the entire legal premise crumbles. In this case, the application does not meet the criteria outlined by the Plan.

Preferred Locations (Plan, p15): *"New telecommunications facilities shall be sited and designed in locations that reinforce the town's traditional patterns of growth, of Rochester's compact village center surrounded by a rural countryside, including farm and forest land."*

The proposed tower would rise 70 feet above the tree line, and something that big and made of metal does not *"support the town's rural countryside, including farm and forest land or its principal scenic quality of its ridgelines and mountainsides."* The AT&T antenna in the church steeple and the small cells on telephone poles provide needed coverage and are sympathetic to the rural countryside.

Prohibited Locations (Plan, p16): *"Because of their distinctive natural, history, or scenic value, telecommunication facility development shall be excluded from the following areas: ... [including] "[r]are, threatened or endangered species habitat or communities."*

The proposed area is a known deer and bear wintering area, and there are endangered bats within the land parcel. Not only is the burden on Vertex/Verizon to prove its due diligence on National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)-related topics, but also the Plan is clear that this proposed site should not be used due to the endangered bat community.

Significant Areas (Plan, p16 and pp63-64): *“All new telecommunications facilities shall be sited and designed to avoid or, if no other reasonable alternative exists, to otherwise minimize or mitigate adverse impacts to the following:*

- *Historic districts, landmarks, sites and structures listed, or eligible for listing, on state or national registers.*
- *Public parks and recreation areas, including state and municipal parks, forests and trail networks.*
- *State or federally designated scenic byways, and municipally designated scenic roads and viewsheds.”*

Vermont is a beautiful state, and Rochester’s landscape is pristine. Route 100 – which is where the proposed tower would be located – is designated by the state as a Scenic Byway (*Scenic Route 100 Byway: Expansion of the Vermont Byway Designation, Final February 28, 2013, Amended January 21, 2015*). In addition to the Route 100/White River Corridor referenced under “Significant Natural and Historic Areas,” there are at least three locations in the small downtown area where the metal monstrosity would be visible: The Park, Pierce Hall, and Rochester Public Library (Plan, pp 63-64). These locations are some of the many reasons why recreation is such a significant revenue stream (Plan, p51). As TRORC said, “One of the Region’s principal scenic qualities is its ridgelines and mountainsides. These areas are significant contributors to the rural character of the Region. ... Protection of these areas from insensitive developments is a matter of public good.” (TRORC pp199-200)

### Zoning Compliance

The zoning section might be the one area of the Plan that the proposal does not violate. However, if buildings cannot be over 50 feet tall, why should an erector-set style cell tower be allowed to be three times that height in our rural mountains?

Natural Resource Protection (Plan, p16, p53, and TRORC pp200-201): *“New telecommunications facilities must be sited to avoid the fragmentation of, and undue*

*adverse impacts to the town's working landscape, including large tracts of undeveloped forestland, open farm land, and primary agricultural soils mapped by the US Natural Resource Conservation Service."*

The steep grade which is above 25% in many places is prohibited by the Plan in other 248 projects (Plan, p44). The prohibition for other 248 projects is persuasive for this proposed tower due to the amount of tree cutting, the splitting of the canopy which will create more flood hazards, and the widening and thickening of the road leading to the proposed site. All of these impervious surfaces create a risk of flooding and erosion.

Protection of Wildlife (p16): *"Designers must gather information about natural and wildlife habitats that exist in the project area and take measures to avoid any undue adverse impact on these resources. Consideration shall be given to the effects of the project on: rare, threatened, and endangered species; the impacts of human activities at or near habitat areas; and any loss of vegetative cover or food sources for critical habitats for rare, threatened or endangered species."*

As stated above, the proposed area is a known deer and bear wintering area, and there are endangered bats within the land parcel. Not only is the burden on Vertex/Verizon to prove its due diligence on NEPA-related topics, but also the Plan is clear that this proposed site should not be used due to the endangered bat community.

Site Selection (p16): *"Site review should not be limited to the telecommunications facilities; other elements required of the facility need to be considered as well. These include access roads, site clearing, onsite power lines, substations, lighting, and off-site power lines. Development of these elements shall be done in such a way as to minimize any negative impacts. Unnecessary site clearing, and highly visible roadways can have greater visual impacts than the telecommunication facility itself. In planning for facilities, designers should take steps to mitigate their impact on natural, scenic and historic resources and improve the harmony with their surroundings."*

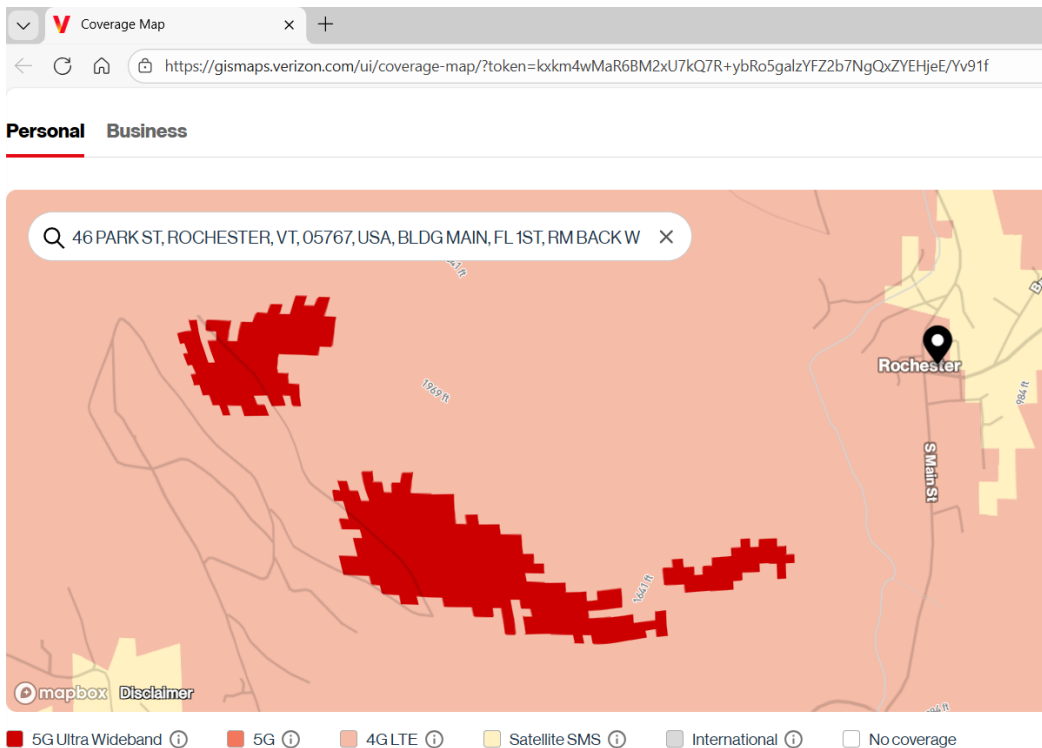
There are multiple aesthetic and environmental reasons why this proposed tower is a poor choice. Verizon can accomplish the same goals that AT&T did without Vertex as the builder coming into our community and disrupting the environment and destroying the aesthetics of our area.

## Alternatives

Competition is prevalent in the area in the telecommunications space. There are several landline providers (Plan, p35) as well as many internet providers, including landline, DSL, cable, satellite, and EC Fiber (Plan, p35 and TRORC p198). Additionally, the Vermont Digital Economy Project (VDEP) built free village Wi-Fi zones in Rochester (TRORC p198), and there is a current initiative with Microsoft w/RTO.

For cellular, TRORC said, "... Coverage in the TRO Region is reasonably good along main travel corridors ..." (TRORC p199). One of the reasons that coverage in the region is good is due to the AT&T antenna in the Federated Church steeple (Plan, p35). The Vermont statute as well as TRORC p201 demand that carriers co-locate where possible. Other carriers utilize the antenna, plus they also leverage the small cell technology in the area. As does Verizon.

The applicant has not provided any evidence that it has attempted to co-locate. It also has failed to indicate that Verizon coverage is already available in downtown Rochester and the Rochester neighborhood of Great Hawk. [See Verizon's GIS map](#), and see below for a snip from the Verizon site using Rochester's post office address.



Since Verizon already provides coverage in Rochester in approximately the same (or more) areas as the application proposes, the proposed tower is unnecessary.

### **Conclusion**

The Rochester Town Plan and TRORC's Regional Plan balance both citizens' desires and industry competition. The town does not need or want this proposed cell tower, and Verizon already has service in the same area. Furthermore, the proposal does not comply with the Rochester Town Plan or the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission plan. Therefore, the Certificate of Public Good should be **denied**.