

Monopole: Mock-up shows it will rise 10 feet above tree line



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian
Ron Zilli, a local forester, is opposing the construction of a new 150-foot-tall Verizon monopole in Shively Park due to claims that the tower would rise high above the tree line at the park.

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Zilli, the assistant district forester for the state Department of Forestry, believes “more people would comment on this, and be involved in this, if they realized what it was really going to look like.”

Measuring trees

To help make his point, Zilli met with Angela Cosby, the director of the city’s Parks and Recreation Department, at Shively Park and showed her how foresters measure trees.

A Verizon mock-up depicted the monopole, which would be powder-coated gray to blend with the sky, nestled near the tree line. City staff have said trees would provide a natural visual buffer and that the secluded location in the rear, southwest edge of the park would make the monopole visible from only a few places within the park.

After Zilli’s demonstration, which suggested the monopole would extend well above the tree line and could be visible from other parts of the city, Cosby asked for clarification from Verizon.

Verizon, according to Rosemary Johnson, the city’s

special projects planner, has now revised the mock-up to show the monopole rising 10 feet above the tree line. Zilli still thinks it will be much higher.

Extended negotiations

Astoria had tried — unsuccessfully — to move the communications tower off Coxcomb Hill for several years. The lattice tower, built in 1991, is unable to handle new capacity that could improve the city’s emergency communications and Verizon’s spotty wireless service on the South Slope and other neighborhoods.

Wealthy and influential benefactors of the Astoria Column, who want the communications tower away from the landmark for aesthetic and potential expansion reasons, worked with Converge Communications, a Portland telecommunications consultant, to lobby Verizon.

After some initial skepticism and concern that the city was bending to the agenda of the Friends of the Column, the City Council agreed to cover the expenses for Converge and authorize the city to work with the consultants and Verizon on an agreement.

In a bizarre sideshow,

Zachary Seidel, a young activist, disrupted a City Council meeting in June and tried to arrest Mayor Arline LaMear and Police Chief Brad Johnston, alleging that the city’s collaboration with the Friends of the Column on a deal with Verizon was corrupt.

Johnston, who also serves as the assistant city manager, has been closely involved in discussions to remove the communications tower from Coxcomb Hill. He said the city and Verizon looked at several alternatives before settling on Shively Park as a compromise.

Verizon actually would use three sites to replace the tower at Coxcomb Hill: Reservoir Road, Shively Park, and equipment atop the Astor Building downtown.

“I think we’ve made it as unobtrusive as possible with its siting,” Johnston said of the monopole at Shively Park. “It is sited at the outside edge of anything that somebody would be gazing at. And I think it will blend in very quickly.”

Johnston thinks the monopole will be less obtrusive than the tower near the Column. “Do we really want to put it in a park? ‘No,’” he

said. “But are we getting a net benefit from locating it there in that we have something that’s less visually disruptive with the two towers than we have right now with the one?”

“I think the answer to that is definitely ‘yes.’”

‘Poorly vetted’

Zilli recognizes the benefits of moving the communications tower off Coxcomb Hill, and for having a new emergency communications tower at Reservoir Road, but believes the monopole at Shively Park should be decoupled and evaluated objectively.

Verizon, he believes, used leverage with the city as a business opportunity to expand the company’s coverage network.

“And it has been poorly vetted,” he said. “And I think there’ll be repercussions, at least in perception.”

Zilli said that when the City Council agreed to reimburse the Friends of the Column for expenses, the city “basically became a partner, in my opinion, to this process. And made a foregone conclusion that this deal was going to go through as proposed.”

LNG: ‘It’s going to be a major political fight’

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Partnership — calls for “national treatment for trade in natural gas,” the energy department waives the analysis.

“The Department of Energy would have to automatically approve natural gas exports to TPP signatories,” said Nathan Matthews, a staff attorney at the Sierra Club, an environmental organization opposed to the trade deal.

So, if Congress doesn’t ratify the partnership, Oregon LNG has conditional authorization from the energy department to export to TPP countries — Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam — pending an environmental review and final regulatory approval.

But, if Congress does ratify the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Oregon LNG will have everything it needs from the energy department to export to them — no department reviews necessary.

“If there is a free trade agreement between us and a given country, in effect the national interest is presumed to be met,” said Fred Heutte, a volunteer for the Sierra Club’s federal and international climate campaign.

‘Major political fight’

Removing the bureaucratic obstacles, like environmental reviews, to exporting goods offers an incentive for countries to sign free trade agreements with the United States.

“It’s kind of a sweetener,” Heutte said. “If you’re an LNG-importing country, then it’s easier to get a supply from the U.S., because the ‘project people’ will get, in effect, an automatic rubber-stamp approval, because your country has a trade agreement with the U.S.”

Supporters of the Trans-Pacific Partnership — which President Barack Obama said in 2009 the U.S. intended to join, hoping it would become a pillar of his administration’s

economic policy — argue that the increase in exports will boost the U.S. economy. The trade agreement would create an expanding network of countries with easy access to products, like natural gas, from the United States.

But critics, including the Sierra Club, argue the partnership doesn’t adequately address environmental factors — like the impacts of global climate change — that should be considered in any meaningful definition of the “public interest.”

“An agreement that ties our hands and prevents us from considering environmental impacts going forward is limiting our ability to address real problems and make important decisions about the climate,” Matthews said.

He added that, even if the Trans-Pacific Partnership is ratified and the Department of Energy must speed up licensing approvals, LNG projects must still get approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Com-

mission to site, construct and operate an LNG facility, in addition to securing various state and local permits. The Department of Energy is a “partial but important piece of the puzzle,” he said.

Oregon LNG is awaiting the approval of land use permits from the city of Warrenton and the final environmental impact statement from FERC’s environmental staff.

Neither Oregon LNG, nor U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden — the Oregon Democrat who co-sponsored a bill to fast-track trade deals like the TPP — could be reached for comment.

“It’s going to be a major political fight,” Heutte said. “It’s a really big deal.”



J. Scott Applewhite/AP Photo
U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., center, joined at left by Rep. Lloyd Doggett, D-Texas, a bloodhound named Roxy, Rep. David Cicilline, D-R.I., right, and other members of Congress, speaks a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington, Oct. 29, about the details of the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Wolves: ‘Oregon ranchers honored their obligation to follow the plan’

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T-shirts, made up a majority of the audience. A sprinkling of men in cowboy hats — Eastern Oregon cattle ranchers who have borne the stress and cost of wolf attacks on livestock — clustered on one side of the hearing room.

The testimony echoed the arguments that have been made since Oregon’s wolf population reached the number of breeding pairs that trigger consideration of delisting

under the management plan.

Conservation groups and their allied argue that the state’s biological status report on wolves was flawed and should have been peer-reviewed by other scientists. Wildlife staff belatedly circulated the report to biologists they knew, but conservationists said that was insufficient.

“If this commission chooses to delist it will make a very sad and powerful statement about who and what it serves,” said

Jonathan Jelen, development director for the conservation group Oregon Wild.

Livestock producers, however, argued they’d followed the wolf plan in good faith and expected the commission to do the same.

“Oregon ranchers honored their obligation to follow the plan,” said Jerome Rosa, executive director of the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association. “This is one of the reasons wolves multiplied in our state.”

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