

Commissioners to vote on two resolutions regarding telecommunications

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
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Where to place the cell towers, what to charge

The McKinley County Commission meeting took up the topic of cell towers at its Oct. 19 meeting.

County Attorney Doug Decker gave a presentation about siting and permitting county facilities for wireless telecommunication.

Decker told the *Sun* that 2003 was the first time the county ever adopted a cell tower ordinance. A local government is required to comply with Federal Communications Commissions rules and the New Mexico law regarding cell tower regulations.

Decker said one of those rules says a cell tower must have the engineering strength to withstand the pressures put upon it, such as weather conditions. Neighborhoods also have to be given notice if a new tower is going to be built.

Decker stated that the 2003 ordinance had been working fine up until about 2015, and then in 2017, the state passed regulations for small towers. Decker said the small towers are a “different beast” than the large towers the county was previously using.

Since 2018, McKinley County’s service provider has been Wireless Tower Solutions. Wireless Tower Solutions handles the applications for small towers from companies like Verizon or U.S. Cellular.

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Decker said a company currently has to pay an \$8,000 escrow deposit and a \$2,000 application fee. He said that the application fee might be changing.

County commissioners will soon be voting on two resolutions; one concerns the fees and the other focuses on the requirements for a small tower system. Decker thought the vote would take place during the special meeting on Nov. 9, but since the canvassing of the local election will be taking place on that day, the vote could be moved to the regular meeting Nov. 16.

Decker said that the issue is more about public safety than anything.

“We want these towers not to fall down. We don’t want the microwaves to zap anybody,” he said. “We also don’t want a tower falling down and damaging property.”

He added that aesthetics are also a factor.

“We would love to have more communication capabilities; we’re not anti-communication,” But we just want it to not be an eyesore”

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