REGULAR PLANNING COMMISSION
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2025 - MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER - The Regular Planning Commission Meeting was called to order by Chair Jeffrey Harlan at 6:00 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG – Commissioner Klepack led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

Present: Chair Jeffrey Harlan, Vice Chair Jon Zich, Commissioner Angely Andrade, Commissioner Robert Dickson, Commissioner Karen Klepack, Commissioner David Martinez, Commissioner Johnny Rojas

Absent: None

Commissioner Andrade joined the meeting at 6:03 p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRESENTATIONS: None.

PUBLIC COMMENTS – MATTERS NOT LISTED ON THE AGENDA:

Cynthia McDonald expressed concern about the citywide rezoning outreach process. She noted receiving a late notice for a coffee shop meeting she could not attend and urged staff to consider well-publicized, town hall–style forums similar to "Newport Beach's Speak Up Newport" and advisory committees on housing. She further encouraged the City to look to examples like Santa Ana for more meaningful public involvement.

PLANNING COMMISSIONER COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS:

Commissioner Martinez announced several upcoming events, including the adjourned regular City Council meeting and the swearing in of Cheyenne Wright, current Parks Commission Vice Chair, as Director for Division Five of the Costa Mesa Sanitary District. He also noted a housing initiative pop-up event at Moon Goat Greenhouse on the following morning at 9:00 a.m., and a "Neighborhoods Where We All Belong" workshop focused on North Costa Mesa and the SOBECA area scheduled for September 10 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at Fieldwork on Paularino Avenue. Lastly, he

highlighted the start of the ArtVenture event on September 13 from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Norma Herzog Community Center.

Commissioner Dickson commented that while he appreciated the pop-up outreach events for the "Neighborhoods Where We All Belong" initiative, he emphasized the need for a larger, town hall–style meeting to bring residents together for more meaningful dialogue on significant issues such as citywide rezoning and the Fairview Developmental Center. He noted that Costa Mesa has a strong history of citizen commissions and committees on similar matters and suggested that staff coordinate with the City Manager or Council to consider forming such a committee. He reiterated that both commissioners, council members, and the public have raised concerns about the current engagement process and encouraged efforts to strengthen community involvement.

Commissioner Andrade highlighted her participation with Orange County United Way in launching its five-year strategic plan, noting she led an art walk in Costa Mesa that showcased local sculptures and installations, which gave her both pride and a new appreciation for the City's cultural assets. She recognized Arts Commission Chair Elisa Ochoa for also contributing to the event and encouraged residents to attend upcoming community activities, including ArtVenture as a family-friendly opportunity to inspire creativity. She further noted that California Biodiversity Day will be celebrated at Fairview Park with guided walks to highlight the park's history, archeology, and protected species, emphasizing the value of engaging with both the City's arts and natural resources.

CONSENT CALENDAR:

1. AUGUST 25, 2025 UNOFFICIAL MEETING MINUTES

MOVED/SECOND: DICKSON/ MARTINEZ
MOTION: to approve Consent Calendar.
The motion carried by the following roll call vote:
Ayes: Chair Harlan, Vice Chair Zich, Commissioner Andrade, Commissioner Dickson, Commissioner Klepack, Commissioner Martinez, Commissioner Rojas
Nays: None
Absent: None
Recused: None
Motion carried: 7-0

ACTION:
Planning Commission approved consent calendar items.

----------END OF CONSENT CALENDAR----------

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

1. CALL TO REVIEW (PAPL-25-0004) ZONING ADMINISTRATOR APPROVAL OF A MINOR CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT (PMCP-24-0029) FOR A NEW WIRELESS COMMUNICATION FACILITY AT 2065 PLACENTIA AVENUE

Two ex-parte communications reported from Vice Chair Zich and Commissioner Dickson.

Presentation by Associate Planner, Justin Arios.

John McDonald, from the applicant team, stated he read and agreed to the conditions if approval.

Public comments:

Speaker 1 thanked the Commission for their efforts and criticized AT&T's application as inadequate, inconsistent, and reliant on biased consultants. They argued that denial would not be an effective prohibition under federal law but a rejection of a poorly prepared proposal. The commenter urged the City to require greater setbacks and push for alternative industrial or commercial sites rather than placing the burden on nearby residents.

Speaker 2 expressed concern that the applicant had not clearly presented a gap analysis with measurable data to justify the new tower, noting visible vacancies and questioning whether additional coverage is truly needed. They raised health concerns beyond electromagnetic waves, emphasizing the City's goal of fostering a healthy community through outdoor activity rather than more internet use. The commenter also criticized the aesthetics of existing facilities, suggested AT&T should first address those issues, and even questioned whether a community boycott of the carrier could eliminate the need for the tower.

Ashley Babasada spoke in strong opposition to the proposed wireless tower behind their home, citing credible scientific studies that raise concerns about long-term health risks from radio frequency radiation, particularly in dense residential areas with children. They argued the project violates the precautionary principle, would likely reduce nearby property values by 10–20%, and is inconsistent with zoning goals when commercial or industrial sites could be considered instead. The commenter emphasized that residents bear the risks without proof of long-term safety, noted personal health concerns already experienced living near existing towers, and urged the commission to reject or reconsider the proposal to protect community health, property, and quality of life.

Celine Miller, a resident living about 15 feet from the existing 55-foot mono-pine, voiced strong opposition to adding another tower behind her home. She described the constant noise from the current facility, which prevents her from opening windows or enjoying her yard, and noted that the project notice was mailed on July 4 with only 10 days to respond, forcing her to gather 100 petition signatures from neighbors. She criticized the neighborhood being burdened with multiple towers within a short span of homes, asked when it would stop, and invited commissioners to visit her property to experience the daily disturbance firsthand.

Speaker five strongly opposed the proposed wireless tower, describing negative experiences with the existing facility behind their home, including workers behaving inappropriately toward family members, playing loud music that disturbed the neighborhood, and creating an unsafe environment. They argued that homeowners invested in a private residential area, not an industrial zone, and that the proposal misrepresents the site by calling the structures "stealth mono-pines" when in reality they are poorly maintained industrial towers. The commenter emphasized that the application is inaccurate and misleading, that the current tower is already an eyesore visible from their yard, and that the new proposal prioritizes convenience over finding an appropriate, less disruptive location.

Speaker 6 opposed the proposed tower, stating that while their service with AT&T is imperfect, it does not justify adding another intrusive facility so close to homes. They described repeated disturbances from the existing tower, including workers overlooking private yards, loud music, and poor maintenance that leaves the structure looking unsightly. Emphasizing that the neighborhood is residential and families chose it for its privacy, they urged that any new facility be located in a true industrial area, not in residents' backyards, and stressed that one tower is enough.

Speaker 7 opposed the proposed cell tower due to its noise impacts, visual intrusion, and incompatibility with nearby residential uses. She noted that while connectivity is important, the constant hum, disruptive maintenance, and clustering of three towers within 300 feet would harm residents' quality of life, contradict the City's push for new housing, and lower property values. She emphasized that over 100 residents signed a petition against the project, underscoring broad community concern, and urged the commission to work with providers to find a more suitable non-residential location.

Speaker 8 opposed the proposed tower, criticizing the lack of a true maintenance plan for the existing mono-pine, which they described as poorly maintained and visually unappealing. They noted that the project conflicts with the City's push for new residential growth, adding that both noise and visual pollution undermine neighborhood quality of life. The commenter also questioned the dismissal of alternative sites, suggesting cost—not feasibility—was the real reason, and

highlighted that 92 neighbors have already signed a petition against the project, underscoring strong community opposition.

Jason Della opposed the proposed tower, describing the existing mono-pine as an eyesore that overwhelms neighborhood character and foliage. He shared photos of both the current facility and an abandoned cell tower on state-leased property tied to his business, noting how such structures are often neglected over time, left standing after mergers, and poorly maintained despite lease payments continuing. He cautioned that this pattern could repeat in Costa Mesa, urged the commission to review lease terms carefully, and warned that long-term abandonment risks could burden the community with additional blight.

Cynthia McDonald cautioned that approving another mono-pine sets a precedent for more towers as rezoning brings denser, taller buildings, raising concerns about cumulative impacts and abandoned, deteriorating structures that would discourage new residents. She questioned how many towers could ultimately be placed on one property, noting the inconsistency with Costa Mesa's "Tree City, USA" designation and dismissing faux trees as unattractive and misleading. At minimum, she urged requiring the planting of real trees as a condition of approval.

Richard Huffman opposed the project, questioning whether every carrier would be allowed to install its own tower and warning that unchecked proliferation is unreasonable. He urged that companies be required to share facilities and that the City take a stronger role in regulating tower placement to protect residents. He concluded that corporate competition should not outweigh community well-being, calling on providers to find better solutions.

Andrew Barnes, opposed the project, describing the existing tower as a source of visual blight and questioning whether AT&T had properly evaluated alternative sites. He suggested the company should consider repurposing an abandoned tower through a sublease agreement rather than adding new infrastructure. He praised the thoughtful public comments and urged the commission to require the applicant to do more work to protect public safety and preserve the character of the neighborhood.

Commissioner Dickson made a motion to continued to a date uncertain. Seconded by Vice Chair Zich.

Motion amended to continue the meeting to a date certain of December 8, 2025.

Motion Discussion:

The Commission discussed continuing the item to the December 8, 2025, Planning Commission meeting, allowing the applicant time to explore relocating the tower

on the site and to provide additional coverage data at different heights. In discussion, Commissioners clarified the standard of review and emphasized the importance of addressing residents' concerns, including noise, aesthetics, and maintenance of existing facilities, with some urging code enforcement follow-up on current site conditions. They encouraged the applicant to engage directly with neighbors before returning, consider siting the tower closer to Placentia Avenue within the industrial area, and potentially modifying or extending the existing tower rather than adding a new one. Commissioners noted that while improved coverage is needed, any solution must respect residents' quality of life and neighborhood character.

MOVED/SECOND: DICKSON/ZICH
MOTION: to continue the item to the December 8, 2025 Planning Commission meeting.
The motion carried by the following roll call vote:
Ayes: Chair Harlan, Vice Chair Zich, Commissioner Andrade, Commissioner Dickson, Commissioner Klepack, Commissioner Rojas
Nays: Commissioner Martinez
Absent: None
Recused: None
Motion carried: 7-0

ACTION:
The Planning Commission Continued the item to the December 8, 2025 Planning Commission meeting.

OLD BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. STUDY SESSION REGARDING POTENTIAL ZONING CODE AMENDMENTS

Presentation by Contract Planning Manager Amber Gregg.

Staff presented an update to the City's Safety Element, explaining its role in addressing natural and human-made hazards, compliance with state law, and integration of new data such as CAL FIRE fire hazard maps, FEMA flood maps, and the City's Local Hazard Mitigation Plan. Commissioners asked about map accuracy, implications for property owners, and consistency with the Climate Action Plan, while generally praising the clarity and usefulness of the report. Concerns were noted about balancing staff time with other priorities like rezoning, but staff clarified the update is nearly complete and largely consultant-led.

Public Comments:

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Speaker 1 asked why the safety plan did not address preparedness or emergency response for situations like the COVID-19 pandemic, noting that public health should be part of safety planning. They also raised concerns about community safety related to incidents of unknown individuals allegedly attempting to kidnap residents, and questioned how such threats are addressed within the safety element.

MOVED/SECOND: ZICH/DICKSON
MOTION: To move staff recommendation.
The motion carried by the following roll call vote:
Ayes: Chair Harlan, Vice Chair Zich, Commissioner Andrade, Commissioner Dickson, Commissioner Klepack, Commissioner Martinez, Commissioner Rojas
Nays: None
Absent: None
Recused: None
Motion carried: 7-0

ACTION:
The Planning Commission received and filed.

REPORT - PUBLIC WORKS – Mr. Yang announced three upcoming bicycle safety and education "rodeo" events: a teen-focused e-bike event at TeWinkle Middle School on Saturday, September 27 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.; a community event at the Senior Center on Saturday, October 25 from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.; and a final event at City Hall on Saturday, November 22 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Each event will feature bike skills training, safety education, and interactive activities for all ages.

REPORT - DEVELOPMENT SERVICES – Ms. Caron reported that several key City Council items are moving forward, including the Hive Live project scheduled for first reading on October 7, 2025, the 3310–50 Bear Street project approved on September 2, and the recently reviewed Zoning Code update set for first reading on September 16. Updates were also provided on the "Neighborhoods Where We All Belong" outreach, with the next major workshop on September 10 at 150 Paularino Avenue focused on North Costa Mesa and the SOBECA area. Additional pop-up events are taking place at local coffee shops and community spaces throughout September, with details posted on CostaMesaNeighborhoods.com, and the City will also host a booth at the Hispanic Heritage Celebration on September 27 at Lions Park.

REPORT - ASSISTANT CITY ATTORNEY - None.

ADJOURNMENT AT 8:14 p.m.

Submitted by:

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CARRIE TAI, SECRETARY
COSTA MESA PLANNING COMMISSION

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