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City prepares for small cell expansion

City of Madison is getting ready for 5G implementation. The City is developing guidelines that will allow cellular companies to locate Small Cell installations in a way that maximizes technological benefits, while attempting to preserve street-side aesthetics. The City invites the public to an informational meeting and public hearing before the Board of Public Works. Anyone who attends will learn about the process and what the City is doing to regulate the placement of the new small cell facilities:

- 6 p.m., July 17, 2019, at 1600 Emil Street, Madison, Wis.

Wireless companies plan to install antennas and equipment on poles on public streets. The meeting will go over the interim design guidelines and other requirements the City is considering to regulate the installation of the new facilities.

The growing demand

Wireless companies are installing antennas because there is a growing need for wireless and cellular data. Traditionally, wireless providers used large cellular towers to serve customers, but with newer technology and additional data needs, the towers can't keep up with the increased demand for high speed wireless data. Future 5G technology is also expected to increase download speeds and eventually allow for new capabilities not possible with slower download speeds.

To support the growing need, wireless network providers are starting to install equipment known as "small cells," which are low-powered antennas that provide an area with higher data volume than the large towers, but in a much smaller area. Since the small cells serve smaller areas, the facilities need to be installed much closer together, serving only a couple of blocks in all directions.

The small cell facilities typically are attached to poles within the right-of-way including new standalone poles, utility poles and street light poles. When the small cell is placed on a utility pole or street light pole, the existing pole must be replaced. The small cell equipment is allowed in the public right-of-way per federal and state law, just like utilities. Federal regulations have limited the City's ability to regulate but some regulation is still possible.

Per federal regulations, the small cell antenna may be no larger than three cubic feet in volume (about the size of a large suitcase), and all equipment associated with the small cell technology, including the antenna, may be no larger than 27 cubic feet.

The City passed an ordinance governing small cell installations with an effective date of Aug. 1, 2019. The ordinance requires that the City Engineer put in place small cell design standards to insure that small cell facilities are installed so as to reduce the impact on the public while recognizing the limitations imposed on cities by Federal Law.

The interim [small cell design guidelines](#) and [additional information](#) about small cell infrastructure is attached and linked to this document.

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