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## St. Croix CZM Rejects First Responder Network Tower Despite Staff Recommendation for Approval

**Blue Sky Towers sought approval for a 150-foot tower to expand the FirstNet first responder network, but commissioners rejected the Estate Long Point and Cotton Garden site after questioning alternative locations and transparency.**

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The St. Croix Coastal Zone Management Committee has rejected Blue Sky Towers III LLC's application to build a 150-foot communications tower on the East End, with commissioners saying they were not satisfied that the proposed site had been adequately justified or that alternative locations had been fully documented.

The tower was intended to help expand FirstNet, the first responder communications network, and had been proposed for a privately owned parcel in Estate Long Point and Cotton Garden. The project drew strong opposition from nearby residents, prompting commissioners during a March 20 meeting to defer a decision while seeking more information on alternative locations and possible responses to public concerns.

On Thursday, project representative Kevin Rames told commissioners that an easement connecting the project to East End Road, which had been part of the original proposal, had been removed “as a result of feedback from the community.”

However, even after that adjustment, a site visit by commissioners, and additional information from the developers, the committee remained unconvinced.

“I’m just having a bad feeling in my stomach over this whole issue,” said Commissioner Aubrey Ruan. “We’ve questioned issues about the site that I don’t think was adequately cleared in my conscience.”

Several commissioners focused on what they described as a lack of clear, written information explaining why other potential sites were rejected.

“The information that I’ve seen and looked at doesn’t really support the reasons why other sites were invalidated,” said Commissioner May Cornwall. “I would like to know why particular sites, which were technologically good sites, were eliminated. It just doesn’t seem transparent to me.”

Ms. Cornwall also questioned the reliance on deed restrictions as a reason for eliminating several alternative sites from consideration. Project representatives said some deeds barred commercial use, but Ms. Cornwall suggested that such restrictions could potentially be lifted when a project serves a public benefit.

“That has never been addressed,” she noted.

“I want a document. Don’t just want the conversation,” Ms. Cornwall said, cutting across Mr. Rames as he began to respond. “I want a document, preferably a matrix of all sites considered and why they were eliminated.”

“We’ve done that already,” Mr. Rames responded, explaining that deeds for many suggested alternative sites expressly prohibit commercial uses.

“No commercial use is right on the face of the deed,” he said.

That issue appeared central to the disagreement between the developer and commissioners. At the [March CZM meeting](#), Mr. Rames had explained that the territory’s FirstNet system is funded through simultaneous commercial use of the tower.

Mr. Rames said one privately owned site considered by the developers was eliminated because of a legal dispute over the property. Another was rejected “because it leaves dead spots in the East End area.” Commissioners were also told that the site did not meet FirstNet requirements.

The proposed location, Mr. Rames said, “ends up being the last site standing in this area.”

Commissioners were not persuaded by the developer’s assurances that all viable alternatives had been exhausted. They also declined to follow their own staff’s recommendation that a federal

consistency determination be granted for the tower.

Before commissioners recessed for deliberation, CZM Assistant Director Gregory Richards said staff had found that issuing major permits for the project would be consistent with the Coastal Zone Management Program, would not result in significant adverse environmental impacts, and would clearly serve the public good.

After roughly 40 minutes of deliberation, all four commissioners voted to reject the staff recommendation and deny the permit.

St. Croix CZM Chair Kai Nielsen said commissioners had received more comprehensive information in support of a previous monopole project. In this case, he said, “assessments weren’t sufficient to put it in its current location and would like to see it somewhere else.”

Despite the denial, Mr. Nielsen encouraged project representatives to return with a different site.

“These services are needed on the East End,” he acknowledged. “There’s several other properties with property owners willing and able to provide the land that we believe could fit the requirements once they are provided to us.”