



Joint- Use

CELLULAR FACILITIES

Co-location project gets top honors for innovation

BY BARBARA BILLITZER

With consumer demand escalating over the past decade, wireless cellular carriers are facing a new challenge - finding a way to build the infrastructure needed to keep pace. While some of the obstacles can seem daunting, the need is only growing stronger.

There are so many different commercial carriers all requiring coverage. Balancing the needs of commercial wireless carriers with the concerns of each city and planning commission is no easy task. If only multiple carriers would be willing to inhabit the same infrastructure space, the obstacles facing today's carriers might be history. But carriers rarely, if ever, choose to co-locate with other carriers. With the ever-increasing demand for wireless, creative problem-solving has become essential.

Attaining the Impossible

During the past five years, multiple cell carriers attempted to construct or expand cell sites in historic Guajome Regional Park, a 557-acre county park located in Oceanside, California. But the city of Oceanside had opposed adding multiple cell site towers within a county park. Despite a number of design concepts presented, the City of Oceanside Planning Department opposed each one, claiming they were not in character with the historic site. To compound the issue, the county made it very clear that they were not willing to fund any part of the project.

Greg Locke, now a Real Estate Property Agent for the County of San Diego, had heard about other cities and counties who

had successfully developed multiple-use cellular facilities. With experience in private sector cellular business practices, he felt confident that he could bring the same concept to San Diego County. As Greg recalls, “I recognized that co-location of cellular facilities at this park site would resolve the issue of independent permitting, as well as allow for better overall planning.”

At the time, there were six cell phone companies requiring coverage in the area. They included Sprint, Clearwire, Verizon, Cricket, T-Mobile and AT&T. A critical part of the plan was getting each carrier to agree to in advance to co-locate within one central facility. So Greg contacted the commercial carriers, engineering firms, city planners, planning commissioners and construction contractors to see if they would be willing to collaborate on the project.

An Elaborate Plan

The challenge was to find a way to get all the carriers to buy in to the shared facility concept. For the most part, the fiercely competitive carriers will do just about anything to avoid having to co-locate with other carriers in a joint-use facility. This makes the negotiating process with them not only challenging, but in many cases, downright impossible. When you add a county historic park into the mix, the issues are only compounded.

In 2006, city planning commissioners urged the cellular companies to come up with a joint proposal that would meet their collective coverage needs, rather than focus on just their own requirements. At that point, the county agreed to take the lead on the project in exchange for agreements from the telecommunications companies to pay all costs and include amenities the county wanted, such as an amphitheater.

When the Oceanside Planning Commission approved the project in 2008, the design phase could finally begin. The concept involved creating a master cell site plan within the park, which placed six carriers within one joint-use 1,530 square foot telecommunications facility. In order to minimize the visual impact, the cell site would be located in a park maintenance yard and be buried partially underground within a slope. For aesthetics, the 24 antennas needed were positioned within three faux trees that were 60-foot tall. The entire park received an electrical upgrade, and a water conservation irrigation system was also installed. Extensive landscaping was integrated throughout the entire premises.

As a public benefit, and at no cost to the county or city, a 50-person outdoor public amphitheater was incorporated into the master design plan, and disability access to the park was significantly enhanced.



To gain planning commission approval, the design concept had to maintain the unique character of the historic site.



To minimize the visual impact, the 24 antennas were camouflaged within several 60-foot tall faux trees.

Reducing the Risks

At the start of the project, each carrier agreed to fund the county staff time needed to complete the reviews, studies and construction management required for this complex project. In return, the county agreed to serve as an advocate for the project during the permitting application of the project.

As Greg explains, “The carriers were willing to develop this innovative project if their entitlement risks could be reduced, and they asked me for assistance. I was able to negotiate commitments from them once the county agreed to serve as the project proponent and be an advocate for the project during the entitlement approval process. These commitments significantly reduced the carriers’ level of risk associated with attaining project approval.”

By demonstrating the long-term benefits of the development project, Greg was able to obtain agreement. However, the carriers were also required to approve a design that would be in keeping with the character of the park, as well as provide tenant improvements, execute multiple long-term revenue stream lease agreements and fund all county staff time involved with the project. Despite this long list of requirements, commitments and funding were obtained from each of the carriers.

A Collaborative Approach

To facilitate the process and keep everyone in the loop, Greg coordinated numerous site visits with different Oceanside staff members throughout the development stage, including city planners, planning commissioners and county parks project managers. “The intent was to educate the city employees and show the County Park Department that the project could work,” says Greg.

For the city planners, the application for a multiple-use commercial cellular facility was a new concept. Nevertheless, they supported the project because it would significantly reduce the review process. Rather than review an application from each provider, they welcomed the chance to approve one design that incorporated multiple users within a shared facility. As long as all the carriers would remain in the joint-use facility, the city agreed to support the project.

Working with the engineering firms, Greg monitored the development of the joint cost-share agreement to ensure each carrier contributed equally to the funding. He also developed an innovative revenue standardized leasing rate that the carriers adopted. This approach greatly reduced the entitlement review, as well as the leasing approval and execution timeline.



Construction of the outdoor public amphitheater fulfilled a goal set in the park’s 1973 master plan.

During the construction phase, Greg was able to coordinate with Oceanside's Building Division and combine site and permit compliance inspections with the city and county inspectors. This significantly reduced the need to conduct multiple inspections by two different public agencies and expedited the construction phase of the project.

An unexpected benefit occurred in the area of stormwater compliance. The contractors were constantly monitored by both the city and county to ensure that best practices were incorporated during construction. This oversight ensured that there were no stormwater discharges resulting from the project, even during three major rainstorms that occurred during the grading phase of construction.

Merging Function and Aesthetics

Cell phone towers are not normally celebrated for their beauty, but then, few come with a new amphitheater and indigenous plants that bring such historical significance to the Native Americans who once lived in the area. The idea was to turn what could have been an eyesore into an interpretative area that can be used as part of environmental education programs at the 575-acre park, which is in Oceanside on Highway 76 at North Santa Fe Avenue.

Besides camouflaging the antennas in faux trees, other necessary equipment is housed in a building that is partially buried in a slope, so it's not quite so obvious. The development needs were balanced with maintaining the unique character of the park. "You can't make it invisible, so we did a series of things to hide the facility," says Greg.

Construction of the amphitheater fulfills a goal set in the 1973 park master plan, which recommended that the park include a multi-use amphitheater. Every year, more than 1,000 children make field trips to the park as part of their school environmental education programs.

Project Receives Innovation Award

In January 2011, the County General Services Association (CGSA) granted its Innovation Award to Greg for his role in developing the first multiple-use commercial cellular facility in San Diego County. The award is based on contributions made in the area of creativity, originality, dollar savings, process efficiency, increased revenue and learning that resulted from the project.



Greg Locke, Real Estate Property Agency for the County of San Diego, shows off the 1,530 square foot telecommunications facility that houses six different carriers.

Greg earned this award by developing an innovative design concept that adhered to CGSA's mission of providing cost-effective, efficient, high quality and timely support services to County departments, groups and agencies.

The award is well deserved. After all, this project was not only innovative, but was completed without the expenditure of public funds. Even the county's staff time associated with the project was funded by the private sector. The added feature of a new public amphitheater makes the regional park a great leisure destination, all at no cost to the county.

Even more notable, the financial advantages of this project are considerable, as it will provide San Diego County with a lease revenue stream valued at \$1.39 million over ten years. According to Greg, "When you combine a vision with good old fashioned teamwork, success often follows."