



Small Cell Wireless Facilities

The City of Gig Harbor is managing requests from wireless providers and wireless infrastructure companies to install small cell wireless facilities in the public right-of-way (ROW) . This document answers some frequently asked questions about small cell deployment in Gig Harbor, including its potential role in bringing fifth generation (“5G”) wireless cellular network technology to our city.

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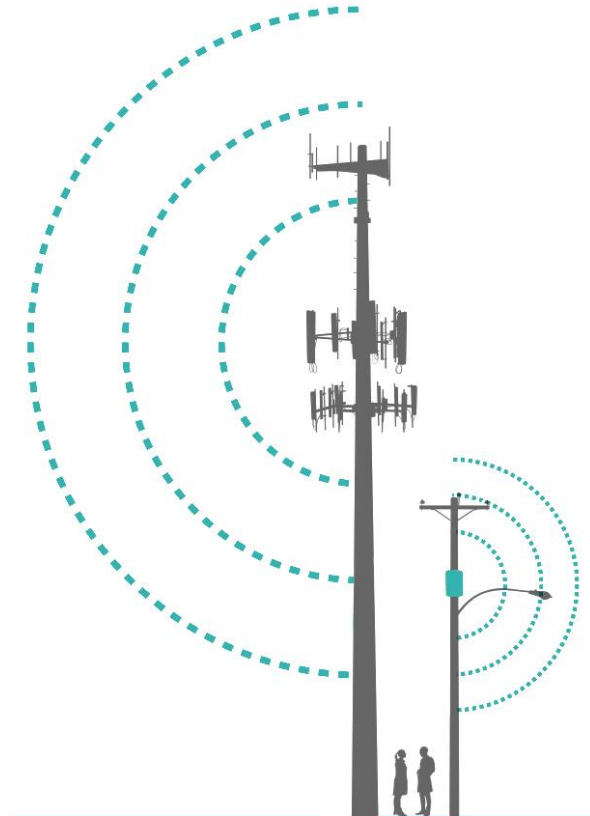
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What are small wireless facilities?

Small wireless facilities, also known as small cell facilities, are low-powered telecommunications antennas that provide voice and data coverage to relatively small, densely populated geographic areas, supplementing the larger cellular network. They are installed and maintained by wireless service/infrastructure providers. Small wireless facilities are much smaller than a traditional cell tower, typically about three (3) cubic feet in volume and mounted to existing or replacement utility poles and streetlight poles.

Why are small wireless facilities needed?

These lower power facilities add capacity in high-traffic areas, dense urban areas, and suburban communities, where people are using smartphones and other devices, and are not a substitute for macrocell sites. Research shows existing macrocell sites are becoming increasingly more congested and installing more macrocell towers covering large areas will not keep up with projected demand for high-speed wireless data. To meet demand, small wireless facilities “offload” data traffic from the larger cell towers. Each of these smaller antennas serves a much smaller area or “cell” (typically 1-2 blocks) but with much higher data volumes.



Where can small wireless facilities be installed?

Most providers favor use of public ROW, such as existing streetlight or utility poles, where they have additional rights under state and federal law, cells may also be placed on private property. The City cannot direct the placement of small wireless deployments. Providers determine their network engineering needs and where to place equipment to meet current and projected capacity demands.

Are small wireless facilities safe?

The FCC requires all FCC-regulated transmitters, including small wireless facilities, to comply with its radio frequency exposure standards. The FCC sets RF emissions (or electromagnetic fields) limits in close consultation with the FDA and other health agencies. Compliance with these guidelines ensures exposure levels remain well below those generally believed to cause adverse health effects. The FCC’s authority and responsibility to set RF emissions levels for FCC-regulated transmitters is found in the [National Environmental Policy Act of 1969](#). FCC rules governing RF emissions exposure are contained in 47 C.F.R. §§ 1.1307, 1.1310. For more

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information, please visit the FCC's webpage on Radio Frequency Safety. Questions or concerns regarding human exposure to RF emissions from FCC-regulated transmitters can be directed to the Federal Communications Commission, Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau, 445 12th Street SW, Washington, DC 20554; Phone 1-888-225-5322.

How are small wireless facilities regulated?

Wireless facility placement is governed by federal, state, and local law. More specifically, the Federal Communications Commission ("FCC") passed [the Telecommunication Act of 1996](#) which stated that local governments may not regulate the placement, construction, or modification of wireless service facilities due to the fact that such facilities must comply with the Commission's regulations concerning such emissions as regulated by the FCC.

What is the City of Gig Harbor's role in small wireless facility deployments?

The City performs two roles regarding small wireless deployment in Gig Harbor: one as a permitting authority and the other as an asset owner. The City's small wireless facilities regulations were adopted in 2019 and are currently codified in [GHMC 12.22](#) (Small Wireless Facility Deployment) and [GHMC 17.61](#) (Communications Facilities).

The City's small cell regulations address public safety and aesthetic values by:

- i. Requiring providers to obtain a franchise agreement approved by City Council;
- ii. Requiring providers to obtain a small wireless facility permit for each site installation, and submission of detailed engineering project plans for review by city staff to ensure compliance with City regulations; and
- iii. Establishing design requirements relating to aesthetics and public safety. The City owns and maintains thousands of city streetlight poles, so allowing wireless providers to lease space on city streetlight poles for the attachment of small cell facilities will reduce the number of new poles being installed within the right of way.

Can the City regulate the placement of small wireless facilities in relation to emissions?

No. The FCC has exclusive jurisdiction over the establishment of RF emissions standards for FCC-regulated transmitters, including small wireless facilities. The City can and does, however, require all permit applicants to certify that each proposed small cell installation complies with FCC emissions standards. The certification process requires a signed statement from a licensed Professional Engineer. Concerns over the adequacy of the FCC's existing RF emissions standards should be addressed to the FCC as the City has no authority over the issue.

After the equipment is installed and operational can the City test the RF emissions coming from the equipment?

Yes, per Section 15.8(b) the City can periodically inspect and test the Franchisee's equipment. This includes RF emissions. The City would not be reimbursed for this periodic inspecting and testing.