

DATE ISSUED: May 1, 2002 REPORT NO. 02-100

ATTENTION: Honorable Mayor and City Council  
Docket of May 7, 2002

SUBJECT: **AMERICAN TOWER CORPORATION: 5252 BALBOA AVENUE,  
Conditional Use Permit No. 40-0322-01.** Council District Six , Process  
Five

REFERENCE: Planning Commission Report No. P-02-018

OWNER/  
APPLICANT: EILEEN WEINER, BALBOA-GENESEE LLC  
AMERICAN TOWER CORPORATION

SUMMARY

Issues - 1) American Tower Corporation is requesting a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to legalize and expand an existing rooftop antenna facility on an ten-story commercial office building, and a Site Development Permit (SDP) to allow for an exception to the Clairemont Mesa Height Limit Overlay Zone. The project is located at 5252 Balboa Avenue in the Clairemont Mesa Community.

Manager's Recommendation -

1. APPROVE the Conditional Use Permit to operate the communication antenna facility; and
2. APPROVE the Site Development Permit granting an exception to the Clairemont Mesa 30 foot Height Limitation Overlay Zone.

Planning Commission Recommendation - On January 24, 2002, the Planning Commission voted 5 to 0 with Commissioner Stryker and Commissioner Schultz absent recommending approval of CUP/SDP No. 40-0322-01.

Community Planning Group Recommendation - The Clairemont Mesa Community Planning Committee met on November 20, 2001 and voted 11 to 1 to recommend approval of the proposed project. The Planning Committee approval was conditioned upon limiting the project to a maximum of 76 antennas and ensuring that any facade mounted antennas would be coordinated to match the modular fenestration of the building exterior. These conditions have been placed in CUP/SDP No. 40-0322-01.

Other Recommendations - None.

Environmental Impact - The proposed project has been reviewed pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and determined to be exempt, according to CEQA Guidelines Section 15303(3).

Fiscal Impact - None.

Code Enforcement Impact - None.

Housing Impact Statement - None.

## BACKGROUND

American Tower Corporation is requesting a Conditional Use Permit to operate a large collocated communication facility to serve a variety of wireless service providers, and a Site Development Permit to exceed the Clairemont Mesa Height Limit Overlay Zone. The project site is located at 5252 Balboa Avenue, at the intersection of Balboa Avenue and Genesee Avenue, in the Clairemont Mesa Community Plan Area. The Clairemont Mesa Community Plan designates the site for commercial office use and recommends that the area be included in the Community Core area of the plan. The property is currently zoned CO-1-2 (Commercial Office) and developed with a ten story medical office building. The site is surrounded by a variety of land uses including, single-family residential to the west, multi-family residential to the south, mixed-use commercial and medical to the north, and a large commercial retail center to the east.

The ten-story office building is approximately 123 feet tall and provides a unique platform for wireless services in the Clairemont Mesa community. Over the past several years Development Services has permitted a number of administrative approvals for the installation and operation of antenna facilities on the building. However, in January 2000, it was determined that the number of antennas currently located on the roof of the building had expanded beyond that which had been approved in the earlier permits. Of specific concern was the proliferation of omni (whip) antennas usually associated with paging services that extended above the roof line and therefore, violated the Clairemont Mesa Height Limitation Overlay Zone as well as the City's Communication Antennas Regulations.

A Neighborhood Code Compliance case for the illegal (non-permitted) antennas was initiated by the City of San Diego on February 3, 2000, in an effort to catalog the permitted and non-permitted antennas and clean up and organize the rooftop installation via a Conditional Use Permit. The Site Development Permit is required for remaining antennas that extend beyond the existing building height and therefore, require an exception from the thirty foot height limit in the Clairemont Mesa community.

The proposed project has received the support of the Clairemont Mesa Community Planning Committee, and was recommended for approval on the consent agenda by the City of San Diego Planning Commission on January 24, 2002.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project would consist of a maximum of 76 communication antennas and the associated electronic equipment cabinets on the roof of an existing, 123-foot high, commercial office building. The types of antennas include directional (panel) antennas, omni (whip) antennas and dish (satellite) antennas. The equipment cabinets would be located behind screening elements on the roof or within the interior of the existing mechanical shelters.

## PROJECT ANALYSIS

American Tower Corporation proposes a number of measures designed to clean up and organize the rooftop facility. These actions include the removal of inoperable antennas, the demolition of an existing 30 foot tall lattice tower, the relocation and reorganization of the remaining antennas, new screening materials, and a master plan for any future expansion. Collectively, these actions would result in a major improvement to the visual character of the existing building and the surrounding development.

To date, 33 of the non-permitted antennas and the 30-foot lattice tower have been removed. The remaining 47 antennas include 21 omni antennas, 23 panel antennas, and three dish antennas. The remaining antennas would be relocated to comply with the intent of the City's Communication Antenna Regulations. This will be accomplished by organizing the omni antennas so that they are grouped together and spaced an equal distance apart, rather than randomly distributed across the roof. Furthermore, the remaining panel antennas would be facade mounted onto existing mechanical equipment shelters and the elevator penthouse. New screening materials would be provided as a means to tie the various rooftop appendages together.

Development Services staff has reviewed the proposed project and determined that the facility complies with the Communication Antenna Regulations of the Municipal Code. The collocation of 76 communication antennas provides the Clairemont Mesa community a single telecom facility that can be utilized by a variety of wireless service companies that may otherwise penetrate into the adjacent residential zones to complete their individual networks. Additionally, having a master plan for the site and a single rooftop manager (American Tower) would ensure that the proliferation of non-permitted antennas does not occur on this site in the future.

Development Services also supports the exception to the 30-foot height limitation and believes the required findings for a Site Development Permit can be made. Specifically, the height of the existing 123 foot high building is substantially taller than any structure in the area and the building will not be significantly altered by allowing the omni antennas to extend above the roof line. Additionally, the relatively narrow profile of the omni antennas would not impact views from surrounding properties. All existing and proposed panel antennas will be facade mounted to the existing building and would not extend above the height of the existing roof line. Similarly, all existing and proposed dish antennas would be installed below the existing parapet. Therefore, neither the panel antennas nor the dish antennas would require an exception from the height limitation.

The proposed screening material is a design feature of the project that is intended to tie all the various rooftop appurtenances together and enhance the visual impact of the building from the surrounding neighborhood. The proposed screening would provide some connectivity to the

existing rooftop elements including the existing mechanical equipment and the heating and air conditioning equipment. The proposed screening and all of the telecommunication equipment would be painted and textured to match the exterior finish of the existing building. All of the associated equipment cabinets for existing and future providers would be located either within the existing mechanical shelters or below the existing parapet.

## CONCLUSION

The existing condition of the rooftop facility constitutes an adverse visual impact to the Clairemont Mesa community. The proposed project cleans up the rooftop by removing approximately half of the existing non-permitted antennas and a permitted 30 foot tall lattice tower. The proposed project reduces the visual impact of the rooftop by organizing the remaining antennas in a logical and orderly fashion and by adding screens to connect the various mechanical elements on the roof. Finally, the proposed project manages and controls the future expansion of the rooftop with the implementation of a master plan

The proposed project complies with the City of San Diego Communication Antenna Regulations and the applicable CO-1-2 Zone Development Regulations. The proposed project is consistent with the Clairemont Mesa Community Plan, with the exception of the height limit, which may be granted with a Process Five hearing with the City Council as Decision Maker. The project has been exempt from further environmental review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act, and supported by the Clairemont Mesa Community Planning Committee. The Planning Commission has reviewed the project and unanimously recommends approval. The proposed project would address all existing code violation for illegal antenna installations and provide a master plan for future collocation on the site.

The Development Services Department recommends that the City Council approve the Conditional Use Permit for the construction and operation of the communication facility and, recommends approval for the Site Development Permit for the exception to the 30-foot Clairemont Mesa Height Limit Overlay Zone.

Respectfully submitted,

---

Tina P. Christiansen, AIA  
Development Services Director

Approved: P. Lamont Ewell  
Assistant City Manager

CHRISTIANSEN:JPH

Note: The attachments are not available in electronic format. A copy is available for review in the Office of the City Clerk.

- Attachments:
1. Location Map
  2. Site Plan and Elevations
  3. Photographic Simulations
  4. Draft Permit and Conditions
  5. Draft Resolution and Findings of Approval
  6. Site Justification
  7. Ownership Disclosure
  8. Copy of Appeal