

City of Palo Alto

Office of the Mayor and City Council

January 15, 2026

The Honorable Brendan Carr
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
45 L St NE
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Carr:

The City of Palo Alto, California (“City”) submits these comments in response to the Commission’s Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) in WT Docket No. 25-276, *Build America: Eliminating Barriers to Wireless Deployments*.

The City strongly supports robust, next-generation wireless networks and the infrastructure needed to power innovation, including AI-enabled services, research, public safety communications, and universal connectivity. Our community expects high-quality wireless coverage, and we share the Commission’s goal of timely, efficient, deployment. At the same time, Congress and the courts have preserved a meaningful role for local governments to manage the public right-of-way, protect safety, and integrate infrastructure thoughtfully into residential neighborhoods, and historic and commercial districts.

The NPRM risks unsettling this balance by treating reasonable local tools as presumptively unlawful barriers. The Commission should reaffirm that reasonable, published, non-discriminatory standards, regulating elements such as facility concealment, size, placement, and spacing to avoid conflicts, remain permissible where they do not prohibit service.

Categorical preemption of local standards for setbacks, design review, or area-specific aesthetic considerations would be counterproductive and contrary to statute. Furthermore, clarifications under Section 6409 should not gut previously-approved concealment elements or conditions. Streamlining eligible modifications is appropriate, but the Commission should confirm that modifications cannot defeat approved stealth requirements or materially alter visual and physical impacts that were integral to earlier approvals.

Palo Alto combines a technology-focused business community with residential neighborhoods reflecting a historic college town, and both elements are important to its residents. The City has been actively involved in and appropriately responsive to industry applications for installation of next generation infrastructure. Since the FCC’s initial small cell orders, the City has successfully approved hundreds of wireless projects, from eligible facilities to macro cells, on private property and in the public rights of way. For the subset of projects in the right of way that are not eligible facilities, the City has relied on objective design standards (c. 2020-2025), and currently provides a public hearing process through the City’s Architectural Review Board that began mid-2025.

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- According to the City's permitting records for the last five years, the City issued over 750 permits for telecommunications infrastructure (including projects not currently subject to FCC rules) to twelve different telecommunications providers/contractors, including 468 permits for AT&T and 246 for Comcast.
- The application review and process timeline has averaged 91 days overall, and in 2025 the City issued 162 permits with an average review and process timeline of 41 days, down from 69 days in 2024 (40% decrease in time) despite an only moderate decrease (15%) in permit applications. These timelines include applications where permitting was delayed by either the City or the applicant, or extended by mutual agreement. This reflects the City's commitment to deploying the latest telecommunications infrastructure, and demonstrates why the NPRM is ultimately unnecessary.
- The City works in partnership with the private sector to provide the appropriate space and basic infrastructure for wireless facilities and is actively demonstrating that local control does not need to be preempted in order to effectively deploy next-generation technology. For utility poles specifically, the City has authorized wireless installations on 123 poles, including 83 wood poles.
- Under its former objective wireless standards for facilities in the public rights of way, City staff would analyze applications for the preferred and viable alternative sites, with a view toward approving facilities that would be most acceptable to the surrounding community. As one example, for a Verizon streetlight facility approved in 2021, staff approved the applicant's request to locate in an area despite minimal visual screening because it was adjacent to a commercial area rather than a single-family home. Although this project review complied with the FCC's shot clock and tolling agreement regulations and resulted in the approval of a new wireless facility, the community value of this flexibility and dialogue would be lost under the proposed NPRM.
- The City's architectural review process, despite requiring a public hearing for enforcing local control measures, resulted in approval of the one project considered to date. Notably, the public dialogue resulted in aesthetic enhancements important to residents and not originally contemplated by the applicant. Parties should be free to agree on timely-requested and site-appropriate modifications, without the rigidity this NPRM would impose.

Finally, the proposal to create a "rocket docket" under Section 253(d) would disadvantage compliant communities by compressing timelines, inviting one-size-fits-all preemption, and encouraging parties to bypass local collaboration. If the Commission pursues any expedited mechanism, it should be narrowly tailored to demonstrated, repeated violations of shot clocks and must preserve full notice, a meaningful opportunity to respond, and due regard for reasonable local standards.

For these reasons, the City of Palo Alto respectfully urges the Commission to: (1) reaffirm the continued suitability of reasonable local standards that do not prohibit service; (2) eschew categorical preemption of setbacks or design review elements; (3) protect legitimate concealment conditions in any 6409 revisions; and (4) decline, or narrowly limit, any rocket docket.

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Thoughtful local review increases public acceptance and ultimately accelerates sustainable deployment. We appreciate your consideration of these comments and look forward to working with the Commission to deliver reliable networks while preserving the community values that make deployment durable and successful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Vicki A. Veenker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Vicki" being more prominent.

Vicki Veenker
Mayor
City of Palo Alto