



DATE: August 6, 2026

TO: Orange County Zoning Administrator

FROM: OC Development Services/Planning

SUBJECT: Use Permit PA26-0015

PROPOSAL: A Use Permit to bring the existing over-height monopalm wireless communications facility and the existing over-height equipment enclosure walls into compliance with requirements pursuant to Section 7-9-109(l)(3) of the County of Orange Zoning Code.

GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION: 1B Suburban Residential

ZONING DISTRICT: Las Flores Planned Community – Neighborhood Center

LOCATION: 26105 Antonio Parkway, Rancho Santa Margarita, CA 92688 within the Fifth Supervisorial District.

APPLICANT: Crown Castle

STAFF CONTACT: Ilene Lundfelt, Associate Planner
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RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

OC Development Services/Planning recommends the Zoning Administrator:

1. Receive staff report and public testimony.
2. Adopt Zoning Administrator Resolution No. 2026-08 (Attachment 1) to:
 - a. Find that the project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Class 1 (Existing Facility) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15301.
 - b. Approve Use Permit PA26-0015 to bring the existing over-height monopalm wireless communications facility and the existing over-height equipment enclosure walls, into compliance with requirements pursuant to Section 7-9-109(l)(3) of the County of Orange Zoning Code, subject to the Findings and Conditions of Approval contained within the Resolution.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Site Development Permit PA01-0050 was approved on June 27, 2001, to allow for a wireless communications facility consisting of a 42-foot-tall monopalm and accessory equipment located within an equipment enclosure concealed by an 8 feet high CMU (concrete masonry unit) block wall. The monopalm wireless communications facility, addressed as 26105 Antonio Parkway, was lawfully approved and constructed prior to the adoption of the County's Wireless Communications Facilities Ordinance on October 27, 2015.

Changed Plan CP120005 (approved on October 1, 2021) and Changed Plan CP180056 (approved on November 19, 1018) allowed additional upgrades to the wireless communications facility, including replacement and installation of new antennas, remote radio heads (RRHs), and associated cabling within the existing facility and enclosed ground equipment area. Both approvals consisted of equipment modernization and technological upgrades and did not result in an expansion of the facility footprint or increase in the height of the monopalm structure.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The subject site is located at 26111 Antonio Parkway (the “Site”) and contains two buildings that serve as the Santa Margarita Water District administrative offices as well as a previously approved rooftop telecommunications facility. The site also contains two existing monopalm wireless facilities. One of these, separately addressed as 26105 Antonio Parkway (the “Facility”) that is the subject of this Use Permit application. The project site is within Planning Area 8 of the Las Flores Planned Community (PC Las Flores) and has a land use designation of “Neighborhood Commercial.”

SURROUNDING LAND USES

The surrounding area consists primarily of commercial uses, open space, and parks and recreational uses.

Direction	Zoning Designation	Existing Land Use
Project Site	PC Las Flores	Santa Margarita Water District Facility
North	PC Las Flores	Commercial Center
South	Open Space (OS)	Open Space

West	Open Space (OS)	Open Space
East	PC Las Flores	Church

A vicinity map (Attachment 2) and project map (Attachment 3) are included, illustrating the project site in context with surrounding areas.

PROPOSED PROJECT

The facility was lawfully approved and constructed prior to the adoption of the County's Wireless Communications Facility Ordinance on October 27, 2015. Pursuant to Orange County Codified Ordinance Section 7-9-109(l)(1), Legal Nonconforming Use, wireless communications facilities that were lawfully constructed, erected, or approved prior to adoption of the ordinance and do not conform to its requirements are allowed to continue operating as legal nonconforming uses for a period of ten (10) years from the effective date of the County's Wireless Ordinance. Section 7-9-109(l)(3) further requires that, at the conclusion of the ten-year period, or prior to any substantial change to the facility, whichever occurs first, the permittee shall apply for a Use Permit to bring the facility into compliance with current standards.

No physical modifications, expansions, equipment upgrades, height increases, or changes to the existing facility's appearance are proposed as part of this application. The existing monopalm tower, antennas, equipment cabinets, utility connections, lease area, and all associated facility components will remain unchanged.

The applicant is requesting a Use Permit to bring into compliance the existing over-height 42-foot-tall wireless communications facility and the existing over-height equipment enclosure walls with the - current requirements pursuant to Section 7-9-109(l)(3) of the Orange County Zoning Code.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY

The project site is designated Suburban Residential (1B) in the General Plan, which permits a range of residential uses and supporting infrastructure. The proposed wireless communications facility is considered a utility use that provides essential communication services to the surrounding community and is consistent with the goals and policies of the General Plan.

The proposed project is consistent with Goal 8 of the General Plan Land Use Element, which encourages innovative planning and design approaches to address land use and site development constraints while maintaining compatibility with surrounding development. The existing wireless communication facility utilizes a monopalm design that incorporates stealth and camouflage techniques intended to minimize the visual appearance of the facility and reduce aesthetic impacts on the

surrounding area. The approval over-height stealth monopalm design supports the intent of Goal 8 by utilizing innovative site and architectural design concepts to reduce visual impacts associated with wireless communications facilities.

Accordingly, the project fulfills the intent of the Creative Design Concepts Policy by applying thoughtful and efficient design strategies that address site constraints, reduce impacts, and support the provision of essential infrastructure.

SPECIFIC PLAN AND ZONING CODE CONSISTENCY

The project site is zoned Las Flores Planned Community in the Neighborhood Center Planning Area. Community facilities including public uses and public utility building, structures and facilities are allowed uses subject to an Area Plan or Site Plan. Approval of the proposed Use Permit is consistent with the requirements of the Neighborhood Center Planning Area, as the Use Permit is a discretionary planning application that serves as the applicable entitlement for the proposed use.

The County of Orange retains broad land use authority to regulate the placement, construction, and modification of macro wireless communication facilities under the federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 (47 U.S.C. §332 (c)(7)(A)). This authority includes the ability to require discretionary permits, apply zoning and aesthetic standards, and evaluate technical information submitted by applicants. The County may process macro wireless communications facility applications provided the decisions are supported by substantial evidence and consistent with federal limitations.

This authority to regulate the placement, construction, and modification of wireless communication facilities is exercised through the County of Orange Zoning Code, including Section 7-9-109, Wireless Communications Facilities on Private Property. When an applicant demonstrates compliance with the applicable standards and requirements of the Wireless Ordinance and the Zoning Code, the application may be approved subject to findings and conditions necessary to ensure consistency with those standards.

Pursuant to the Wireless Ordinance, any permit application that includes a request for a deviation from any site development standard required by the Wireless Ordinance shall demonstrate to the satisfaction of the approving authority that: (1) adherence to applicable zoning regulations will make the project technically infeasible and (2) the proposed wireless communications facility is the least intrusive means by which to locate and design the facility to the extent feasible.

The proposed project complies with the development standards required by the Wireless Ordinance except for the applicant’s requested deviation from the following wireless facility design standards:

Wireless Ordinance Development Standards	Required	Existing
Ground-mounted equipment enclosure fence height	6 feet	8 feet

Tower Height	No tower shall exceed the maximum permissible height for structures in the underlying zoning district 35 feet	42 feet
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Ground-mounted equipment enclosure fence height

Per the Wireless Ordinance Section 7-9-109(h)(8), equipment enclosure fencing shall not exceed a maximum height of 6 feet unless the applicant demonstrates a valid safety or design consideration that justifies a taller enclosure. The applicant occupies an existing and previously approved ground equipment area enclosed by an 8-foot high CMU wall. While the Wireless Facility Design Standards (Section 7-9-109(h)(8)) limits equipment enclosure fencing to 6 feet in height, the existing 8-foot wall is necessary to fully screen and conceal the equipment cabinets, which exceed 6 feet in height. Therefore, reducing the enclosure wall to the maximum permitted height would leave the equipment exposed and strict adherence to the 6 feet height limit would be technically infeasible.

The existing 8-foot enclosure wall represents the least intrusive means of screening the existing equipment minimizing visual impacts. Preserving the existing site design will continue to camouflage the equipment consistent with the intent of the Wireless Facility Design Standards (Section 7-9-109(h)(1)). Therefore, the requested deviation for the existing over-height equipment enclosure wall satisfies the required findings that: (1) adherence to the applicable zoning standard would be technically infeasible, and (2) the proposed design is the least intrusive means of accommodating the existing wireless communications facility to the extent feasible.

Tower height

Per the Wireless Ordinance Section 7-9-109(h)(14), no tower shall exceed the maximum permissible height for structures in the underlying zoning district, which is 35 feet under the Las Flores Planned Community – Neighbor Center. The proposed project requires approval of a Use Permit to bring the existing monopalm wireless communication facility that exceeds the maximum permitted height of 35 feet within the underlying zoning district into compliance.

To adhere to the current 35-foot height limit would make the existing facility technically infeasible because reducing the height of the monopalm would require substantial reconstruction or replacement of the existing facility and will adversely affect its ability to provide reliable wireless communications coverage within the intended service area. The existing 42-foot height is necessary to support the antennas at an elevation that provides the designed level of wireless service and network performance.

The existing monopalm facility provides essential wireless communications infrastructure and incorporates stealth design elements intended to minimize visual impacts by camouflaging the facility as a palm tree. No physical modifications, expansion of the facility footprint, increases in height, or changes to the existing equipment are proposed as part of this application. The request is only to bring the existing over-height monopalm facility into compliance with the County's Wireless Communications

Facilities Ordinance. Therefore, the requested deviation for the existing over-height wireless facility satisfies the required findings that: (1) adherence to the applicable zoning standard would be technically infeasible, and (2) the proposed design is the least intrusive means of accommodating the existing wireless communications facility to the extent feasible.

FINDINGS

Proposed Use Permit PA26-0015 is consistent with:

1. General Plan – The proposed project is consistent with (1B) Suburban Residential of the General Plan Land Use, which permits a range of residential uses and supporting infrastructure. The proposed wireless communications facility is considered a utility use that provides essential communication services to the surrounding community. Additionally, the proposed project is consistent with Goal 8 of the General Plan Land Use Element, which encourages innovative planning and design approaches to address land use and site development constraints while maintaining compatibility with surrounding development. The existing wireless communication facility utilizes a monopalm design that incorporates stealth and camouflage techniques intended to minimize the visual appearance of the facility and reduce aesthetic impacts on the surrounding area. The approval of the over-height stealth monopalm design supports the intent of Goal 8 by utilizing innovative site and architectural design concepts to reduce visual impacts associated with wireless communications facilities.
2. Zoning Code – The use, activity or improvement(s) proposed, subject to the specified conditions, is consistent with the provisions of the Zoning Code, inclusive of the County of Orange Wireless Communication Facilities 7-9-109, and the Las Flores Planned Community. The existing wireless communications facility was lawfully approved and constructed prior to the adoption of the Wireless Communications Facilities Ordinance and is eligible for consideration of a Use Permit pursuant to Section 7-9-109(l)(3). Approval of the Use Permit to bring the existing over-height monopalm wireless communications facility and the existing over-height equipment enclosure walls into compliance meets the intent and requirements of the Zoning Code. It has been demonstrated that adherence to the applicable zoning regulations for equipment enclosure wall and tower heights shall make the project technically infeasible and the proposed wireless communications facility is the least intrusive means by which to locate and design the facility to the extent feasible.
3. California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) – The proposed project is categorically exempt (Class 1) from the provisions of CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15301, because it provides for the operation, maintenance, repair, leasing, permitting and minor alteration of existing private facilities and structures, with no expansion of existing use.
4. Compatibility – The location, size, design and operating characteristics of the proposed use will not create unusual conditions or situations that may be incompatible with other permitted uses in the vicinity because the project does not include new development does not alter existing land uses, and will not impact access, or circulation. The existing wireless communications facility is located within the Las Flores Planned Community, where public utility facilities are permitted subject to the applicable planning approvals. Because no physical modifications, expansion of the

facility footprint, or increases in height are proposed, approval of the Use Permit will not alter the existing relationship between the facility and adjacent land uses.

5. General Welfare – The application will not result in conditions or circumstances contrary to the public health and safety and the general welfare because the proposed wireless facility must comply with Federal Communications Commission (FCC) standards for radiofrequency (RF) emission.
6. Public Facilities – The approval of the permit application is in compliance with Codified Ordinance Section 7-9-711 regarding public facilities (fire station, library, sheriff, etc.) because the proposed project would be required to pay into any applicable development impact fees prior to the issuance of building permits.

Therefore, the findings can be made in support of this request for a Use Permit to bring into compliance the existing over-height wireless telecommunication facility and the existing over-height equipment enclosure walls pursuant to Section 7-9-109 of the County of Orange Zoning Code and the Las Flores Planned Community, which allows for over-height wireless telecommunication facilities, subject to the approval of a Use Permit.

REFERRAL FOR COMMENT

A copy of the planning application and the proposed site plan were distributed for review and comment to the OC Sheriffs (Attachment 5) and the appropriate County divisions - Building and Safety, and Environmental Planning. Staff has reviewed all comments received, and where appropriate, has addressed the comments through recommended Conditions of Approval.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notices were mailed to all owners of record within 300 feet of the subject property, posted at the project site, published in a local newspaper, and posted at the posting kiosk at the County Administration building located in Santa Ana, CA at least ten days prior to this public hearing, as required by established public hearing posting procedures.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA

The proposed project is categorically exempt (Class 1) from the provisions of CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15301, because it provides for the operation, maintenance, repair, leasing, permitting and minor alteration of existing private facilities and structures.

CONCLUSION

Staff has reviewed the applicant's request for a Use Permit and finds the proposed project to be consistent with the County of Orange General Plan, the County of Orange Zoning Code and the Las Flores Planned Community. Staff recommends approval of Use Permit PA26-0015, subject to the required Findings and Conditions of Approval within Resolution No. 2026-08.

APPEAL PROCEDURE

Any interested person may appeal the decision of the Zoning Administrator on this permit to the Planning Commission within 15 calendar days of the decision upon submittal of required documents filed online at myoceservices.ocgov.com or in person at the County Service Center, located at 601 N. Ross St., Santa Ana. If you challenge the action taken on this proposal in court, you may be limited to raising only those issues you or someone else raised at the public hearing described in this report, or in written correspondence delivered to OC Development Services.

Submitted by:

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Ilene Lundfelt, Associate Planner
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Concurred by:

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Cindy Salazar, Division Manager
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ATTACHMENTS:

1. Resolution No. 2026-08
2. Vicinity Map
3. Project Map
4. Plans
5. OC Sheriff Email, June 26, 2026