

Cell tower installation in Rancho neighborhood on thin ice

By Nick Baptista / The Valley Springs News / March 20, 2024

Consideration of whether to install a telecommunications tower in Rancho Calaveras once again has been continued.

The Calaveras County Planning Commission spent 4 ½ hours Thursday on the subject and nearly voted to approve a neighbor's appeal to deny the project.

However, after representatives from Vertical Bridge, the largest private owner and operator of communications infrastructure in the United States, assured the commission they would take a serious look at alternative sites, the commission voted 4-0 to continue the matter to a date uncertain at this time.

Vertical Bridge wants to erect the 90-foot tower in a residential neighborhood at 5992 Clements Place.

The threat of cancer, wildfire and plummeting property value concerns were raised when the appeal was first heard at a Feb. 8 planning panel meeting.

In the meantime, the planning commission received information from two professional sources that property values for homes in the area could decrease by 10 percent.

One analysis indicated property values in the neighborhood would drop by \$1.5 million.

Vertical Bridge presented the commission with six alternative sites and Planning Commissioner Timothy Laddish encouraged the firm to seriously consider the Ford Construction site, which is zoned general industrial. He called it the least intrusive site.

Planning Commissioner Don Parker had strong words for Vertical Bridge, saying the firm had not been totally honest with the planning commission and calling for a thorough analysis of all the alternative sites.

"I'm not convinced you did the research you needed to based on how little information you provided us," Parker said. "It's like you thought you were going to come in here and slam dunk this thing. We're a rural community and we live here for a reason. We don't allow stuff like this to ruin our peace and serenity without a fight."