City of Malibu

Wireless Facilities - Resident Fact Sheet and FAQ

Wireless facility projects can raise understandable questions, especially when equipment is proposed near homes or scenic areas. This fact sheet explains what types of projects residents may see, what the City can review, what federal law requires, and how to stay informed and participate.

Quick Facts About Wireless Applications

The City reviews for compliance with requirements for safety, location, concealment, use of the public right-of-way, and coastal requirements where applicable.

Not every project is a new facility. Many projects involve changes to previously approved wireless sites.

A mailed notice means an application has been deemed complete and is under City review. It does not mean the project has been approved.

Federal law and Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations limit local authority in some areas. That includes imposing short timelines for processing applications, limiting regulation based on RF emissions of FCC-compliant facilities and mandating approval of certain qualifying changes to existing facilities.

Why Wireless Facilities Are Proposed

Wireless providers periodically upgrade older equipment and, in some locations, propose new facilities to keep pace with soaring consumer demand for calls, texts, and data service. It is becoming common for people to choose only to have wireless service for their communications. Reliable wireless service can be important during emergencies such as wildfires and evacuations. Malibu's coastline, canyon geography, and terrain can make reliable coverage more challenging in some areas. As a result, providers often pursue upgrades to existing sites or propose to place new facilities on utility poles to improve service in smaller pockets rather than constructing large new towers. Wireless providers—not the City—determine where they seek to deploy facilities to meet their service needs. The City's role is to review proposals for compliance with applicable requirements.

Types of Wireless Projects

There are two common application types, and the regulatory standards for each are different.

Type of Request	Overview	City Authority
Eligible Facilities Request (EFR)	Modify an existing wireless site, such as replacing antennas or adding equipment, that does not substantially change the size of the facility.	Federal law requires approval if the request does not substantially change the facility. EFR criteria are set by the FCC. (47 U.S.C. §1455(a); 47 C.F.R. §1.6100). The City cannot require relocation of qualifying EFRs or apply local design standards.
New Wireless Facility / Non-EFR	A new wireless location, new pole, or a modification that exceeds federal EFR limits.	Subject to Malibu's local review standards where allowed under federal law.

City Review and Federal Limits

The City can review:	Federal law limits the City in important ways:
▪ Structural, electrical, fire, coastal, and other generally applicable safety requirements. ▪ Concealment, placement, screening, and design requirements consistent with Malibu Municipal Code Chapters 12.02 and 17.46, Local Coastal Program, and City Council Resolution Nos. 20-65 and 21-17. ▪ Public right-of-way management and whether a proposal interferes with safe public use.	▪ If a facility complies with FCC standards for safe human exposure to RF emissions, local governments may not deny the application based solely on concerns about RF environmental or health effects. ▪ If an application is a qualifying EFR, the City must approve it within the federal framework. ▪ Wireless applications are subject to federally defined review timelines (47 C.F.R. §§1.6003 and 1.6100).

Radiofrequency (RF) Safety

All wireless facilities must comply with federal radiofrequency (RF) emissions exposure safety standards established by the FCC. These apply nationwide and are designed to protect public health with substantial safety margins. Applicants must submit technical documentation demonstrating compliance. Federal law does not allow a city to deny a wireless facility based on the environmental effects of RF emissions if the facility complies with FCC rules (47 U.S.C. §332(c)(7)(B)(iv)). Residents who would like additional information about the FCC's RF safety standards may review public resources provided by the FCC.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Why are wireless facilities sometimes proposed near homes?**
   Wireless providers determine where to deploy facilities to meet demand for service in the surrounding area. Where federal law allows, the City's regulations apply. The City's Wireless Design Guidelines (City Council Resolution Nos. 20-65 and 21-17) prioritize use of existing structures and concealment where feasible, and establish a preference for non-residential locations while minimizing visibility and separation from sensitive uses such as schools, parks, and surrounding residential areas where feasible.

2. **What is an Eligible Facilities Request (EFR)?**
   An EFR involves a change to an existing approved and constructed wireless site, such as adding, removing, or replacing equipment. To qualify as an EFR, the proposed change must not substantially change the size of the existing facility according to federal criteria in 47 C.F.R. §1.6100. The City may only use the federal criteria to evaluate EFR applications and the criteria are included in Malibu's regulations. If a proposal qualifies as an EFR, federal law requires approval.

3. **Does every project have a public hearing?**
   No. Under Malibu's wireless regulations, some applications, including certain small wireless facilities, EFRs, and some collocations on existing structures, are reviewed administratively, while other applications go to the Planning Commission for a public hearing. The City undertakes an administrative review for those projects that have short (60-90 day) timelines for decision imposed by FCC regulations. This helps ensure the process will be completed on time and limits the risk that applications will be deemed approved under applicable state or federal law (47 C.F.R. §1.6100; Cal. Gov. Code § 65964.1). Administrative review does not mean automatic approval; the City still confirms that the application complies with the correct review path and meets the applicable standards. Administrative decisions are still subject to public noticing and a written notice of decision.

4. **How does Malibu reduce visual and neighborhood impacts?**
   Malibu's wireless regulations are designed to protect community welfare and aesthetics. The City requires concealment or stealth, seeks to avoid unnecessary new support structures, avoids above-ground facilities where applicable, and uses separate but complementary City standards for facilities in the public right-of-way and on parcels. Applicants must demonstrate compliance with the provisions of California Building Standards Code (Title 24), including California Building, Electric, and Fire Codes.

5. **What about RF emissions exposure?**
   Many residents have concerns about RF emissions exposure. Malibu requires compliance with applicable FCC RF safety standards. These are national standards and federal law does not allow any state or local government to deny a wireless facility based on the environmental effects of RF emissions if the applicant demonstrates the facility will comply with FCC standards. That means the City can review other issues it is allowed to consider, such as location, concealment, safety, access, and code compliance, but not deny a compliant project on RF-health grounds alone.

6. **Do wireless facilities work during emergencies?**
   Reliable communications can matter during wildfires, evacuations, road closures, and outages, but no single site can guarantee service in every emergency. In 2025, the Malibu City Council designated the entire city as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. Previously, the CPUC adopted regulations requiring wireless providers to have resiliency strategies to prepare for disasters and power outages for their facilities in Tier 2 and Tier 3 High Fire Threat Districts, which include Malibu. The measures include 72-hour backup power requirements, redundancy, network hardening, and preparedness planning. Malibu's emergency planning and recent after-action reports show how important resilient communications are when power and telecommunications systems are stressed.

7. **Do wireless facilities require a Coastal Development Permit?**
   Coastal Development Permit (CDP) requirements and any applicable exemptions are determined on a case-by-case basis and are reflected in the City's individual permit actions. When a CDP is required, coastal permitting and appeal procedures apply. Certain wireless facility applications may be exempt from CDP requirements and subject to federal law that may limit the City's discretionary review. In those cases, the City's review is limited to determining whether the proposal meets applicable federal standards.

8. **How can residents stay informed and comment?**
   Residents can review the pending wireless applications report on malibucity.org/pendingwireless, ask to be added as an interested party, submit comments to the case planner, and appeal a Wireless Permit within the appeal period. Notice is provided in accordance with applicable requirements, including mailed notice to nearby property owners and interested parties when a project is deemed complete and under City review. Mailed notices include information on how to submit public comments to the case planner. To sign-up to receive an email when the Pending WCF Application Report is updated and posted on the City's website, email Patricia Salazar, Deputy Community Development Director, at psalazar@malibucity.org.

Resources

City of Malibu

- Pending WCF Applications
- Wireless Regulations
  - MMC Chapter 12.02 (Public ROW)
  - MMC Chapter 17.46 (Private Property)
  - City's Wireless Permit and Wireless ROW Permit Submittal Checklist
  - Wireless Design Guidelines - City Council Resolution Nos. 20-65 (Public ROW) and 21-17 (Private Property)
  - Certified Local Coastal Program (LCP)

Federal

- FCC Rules - 47 C.F.R. Subpart U §1.6001-§1.6100
- Cal. Gov. Code § 65964.1
- FCC RF Safety