

Safeguard Snowflake

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“Big Telecom Is Bullying Navajo County” Say Residents as Community Pushes Back Against Cell Tower and Costly Legal Threats

Amid a lawsuit and permit appeal filed by a cell tower company, residents are preparing to testify before the Navajo County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, January 27, at the Supervisors’ Meeting Room located at 100 East Code Talkers Drive (Highway 77), Holbrook, Arizona 86025.

Community members are preparing to testify at an upcoming public hearing before the Navajo County, Arizona, Board of Supervisors, who are reconsidering its previous unanimous denial of a cell tower. The cell tower infrastructure company SBA Communications (“SBA”) filed both an appeal and a lawsuit against the County after supervisors voted unanimously in November 2024 to deny the permit following extensive public opposition.

The rehearing, scheduled for January 27, has renewed community concerns about corporate pressure, costly litigation, and efforts to override local decision-making.

In November 2024, when Navajo County supervisors voted unanimously to deny the cell tower permit, the community had testified in strong opposition and the Board cited negative impacts on property values, visual blight, and the civil rights of residents who are disabled due to their sensitivities to chemicals and electromagnetic fields.

The proposed cell tower would be located near a community of residents with environmental disabilities. SBA’s appeal and lawsuit, along with the pending rehearing, have heightened concerns about public health, legally protected rights to reasonable accommodation, and the increasing use of costly litigation to pressure local governments into reversing land-use decisions made in response to community concerns.

Residents say the SBA lawsuit against the count exemplifies a broader trend in which large corporations are intimidating local governments all over the U.S.

“Big Telecom is being a bully by threatening Navajo County in court”, says Susan Molloy, a 30-year resident of the community. “Our supervisors listened to the people and acted responsibly. Now that local decision to deny is being challenged by cell tower companies that do not live in this community.

Tom Freeman, a local resident, emphasized the financial stakes for taxpayers, says “This appeal exposes the county to an expensive lawsuit brought by a private company,” Tom said. “Local governments shouldn’t be forced to choose between protecting their communities and risking costly legal battles they can’t afford.”

Kristi Mattson, M.D., a physician with a special interest in Environmental Medicine and has years of experience treating patients with Multiple Chemical Sensitivities and Electromagnetic Hypersensitivity, says, "There is no need for a cell tower in this disputed location. Home values will fall, and persons requiring modified disability housing will lose the enjoyment and use of their property. Residents with environmental disabilities will become more disabled, unable to continue living independently and will suffer physical and financial harm. The county has the right to protect the welfare of its citizens."

Residents, health advocates, and local leaders are expected to testify before the Navajo County Supervisors when they reconsider SBA’s permit application on Tuesday, January 27 in the Supervisors’ meeting room located at 100 East Code Talkers Drive, Highway 77, Holbrook, Arizona 86025, urging officials to uphold the original denial and respect local decision-making.