

The Palo Alto Architectural Board (ARB) has recently reviewed several applications for 'Small Cell' Wireless Communication Facilities (WCF) under the ARB standards. There has been much debate as to whether any of the proposed WCF projects could be described as “enhancing the living conditions in adjacent residential areas,” or “of high aesthetic quality, using high quality, integrated materials and appropriate construction techniques, and incorporating textures, colors, and other details that are compatible with and **enhance the surrounding area.**” The City is now proposing to adopt new review standards.

After reviewing the WCF applications, the ARB has concluded that:

1. Antennas concealed by an integrated shroud and mounted at the top of either an existing streetlight or utility pole are acceptable design solutions.
2. Radio and power equipment concealed by a simple, well-designed shroud and mounted at the top of either an existing street or utility pole are acceptable design solutions.
3. Radio and power equipment, either exposed or concealed by a shroud, and mounted on the side of an existing streetlight or utility pole are not adequate design solutions. Equipment mounted on horizontal cables and wires are even less attractive.
4. Radio and power equipment should normally be installed below grade or sufficiently above the ground to be out of the line-of-sight of pedestrians.
5. Radio and power equipment could be located in new, well-designed, appropriately placed, “street furniture” such as benches and planters. The street furniture should be functional and desirable in the locations in which it is placed.

As the number of WCF installations increases, small negative visual impacts will be multiplied, resulting in a significant overall reduction in the aesthetic quality of the streetscape. Telecommunications companies and network installers have suggested that the City organize a workshop process to identify, or if necessary create, more acceptable WCF designs. The ARB believes such a process, combined with careful attention to placement of each WCF, could lead to better results, and that ARB expertise would be helpful in this process.