

WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL

Held on Monday, January 5, 2026

DISCUSSION: Cell Phone Service and Improving Cellular Service Within the City

Mayor Jordan started the meeting at 7:30 p.m. Council Chambers via Zoom.

In attendance were: Councilmembers Frankie Santos Fritz, Amy E. Knesel, Danielle P. McKinney, Jenni A. Pompi, Kristen L.K. Weaver, and Mayor Emmett V. Jordan.

Councilmember Silke I. Pope was absent due to travel.

City Staff: Josué Salmerón, City Manager; James Wisniewski, Acting Public Information Officer; and Gizelle Alvarez, Constituent Services Coordinator.

Others present included Tom Jones, Bill Orleans, and others.

DISCUSSION: CELLULAR PHONE SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

Overview of Coverage Gaps

The Council addressed significant discrepancies between carrier-provided coverage maps (which claim robust 4G/5G service) and residents' lived experience, particularly in Old Greenbelt and the Greenbelt Center. City Manager Salmerón presented data showing that while towers cluster in high-traffic corridors, the "center" of the city remains a dead zone due to topography and the dense tree canopy of Greenbelt National Park.

Mayor Jordan expressed deep disappointment that Verizon declined to send a representative despite a formal invitation. In contrast, the Council noted that T-Mobile has been more proactive in past engagements. Mr. Tom Jones, an industry expert, provided testimony on how the City can more effectively escalate service complaints to corporate entities to trigger a "business case" for infrastructure investment.

Infrastructure and "Smart Cities" Vision

The Council explored several avenues for physical infrastructure improvements:

- City Assets: Potential leasing of city-owned land, water towers, or light poles for small cell installations.
- Small Cell vs. Traditional Towers: Discussion on the limitations of state legislation regarding municipal control over small cell placement.
- Zoning: Councilmember Knesel inquired about current restrictions; staff noted that while the City has historically opposed certain towers, the current service crisis requires a reevaluation.
- Public Schools: Council discussed reaching out to PGCPs regarding potential tower placements on school grounds, acknowledging past community opposition but citing updated technology as a reason to reconsider

Greenbelt Cell Coverage Improvement Plan

The council discussed cell phone coverage issues in Greenbelt, comparing it to Hyattsville and noting that Greenbelt's clusters miss the center due to open areas such as Greenbelt National Park. They explored solutions to improve coverage, including using boosters, Wi-Fi, and public spaces with Wi-Fi, as well as considering new technologies like satellite text messaging. Councilmember Knesel inquired about zoning restrictions for potential cell tower locations, and it was noted that state legislation limits municipal input on small cell tower placements. The council also discussed past instances in which the city opposed tower installations and acknowledged community frustration with coverage issues, expressing a willingness to rally behind efforts to improve service.

Greenbelt Cell Service Improvement Plan

The council discussed cell phone service issues in Greenbelt and planned to compile a list of affected residents to present to Verizon. They explored potential co-location sites for antennas, including the water tower and elementary schools, noting the challenges posed by the city's topography and tree canopy. The council agreed to create a survey or webpage for residents to report service problems and to consider door-to-door canvassing and tabling at popular locations to gather more information.

The council discussed poor cell service in Greenbelt, particularly in the center and at schools, and explored potential solutions. They considered collecting data to build a stronger business case for service providers and exploring partnerships with companies like T-Mobile. The council also touched on the history of opposition to cell towers in schools and the need to reevaluate the situation in light of current technology and economic factors.

City Cell Tower Placement Strategy

The council discussed improving cellular service in the city, focusing on exploring options for placing cell towers on city-owned properties and working with a consultant to identify optimal locations. They agreed to reach out to Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) about potential tower placements on their properties and to conduct a citywide survey to better understand service gaps. The council emphasized the importance of a multi-carrier approach to avoid monopolies and improve service for all residents.

Cell Service Provider Accountability Meeting

The council discussed cell service issues in the city and expressed disappointment that Verizon did not send a representative to the meeting, despite the invitation. They emphasized the need for better responsiveness from cell service providers and suggested asking them again before making any decisions. Tom Jones, who has experience in the cellular industry, provided suggestions for effectively reporting cell service problems to providers. The council also mentioned their previous positive experience with T-Mobile, which has attended past meetings to present on its network.

Improving Greenbelt Cellular Coverage

The council discussed poor cellular coverage in Greenbelt, particularly in Old Greenbelt, and explored potential solutions. They considered conducting a new survey to assess coverage issues. Previous maps may not accurately reflect current problems because phone capabilities vary. The council also discussed leveraging their relationship with Verizon, as a significant customer, to

improve service. They plan to continue efforts to contact a Verizon representative to address the issues, particularly around the Greenbelt Center.

Community Cellular Service Improvement Plan

The council discussed strategies to improve cellular service in the community, focusing on resident outreach, infrastructure development, and advocacy. They agreed to create a tutorial for residents on contacting carriers about service issues, while being cautious about collecting personal data. The council also explored installing cell towers on public buildings, with Kristen agreeing to consult experts on feasibility and cost. Additionally, they discussed improving Wi-Fi in public spaces and potentially leveraging a past Comcast grant opportunity for this purpose.

Information Items Discussed:

The council discussed ongoing litigation with the county regarding fire and EMS services, hoping for a settlement before the January 12th appeals hearing. They noted improvements in the county's fire department leadership and recruitment efforts. Councilmember Fritz shared updates on Metro, including the restoration of Yellow Line service and a new shirt design featuring Greenbelt, though some shirts were misprinted. The council also learned about a town hall meeting regarding Dora Kennedy French Immersion School's move to a new campus.

The meeting ended at 9:08 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Bonita Anderson
City Clerk