

TOWN OF COLLIERVILLE

Frequently Asked Questions about Small Cell Towers

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Does the Town regulate Small Cell Towers?

Yes, to the extent allowed by State Law.

What are Small Cell Towers? Why are we seeing more installed?

They are compact wireless communication facilities that can improve network connectivity, coverage, and capacity. Small Cell Towers are often attached to streetlights, utility poles, or buildings in high-density areas. They are made up of small radio antennas called nodes, which send data through fiber optic cable to a hub site, usually a cell tower. Small Cell Towers are becoming more common in our area due to 5G technology. Cell providers are installing them where customers experience inadequate or inconsistent coverage.

Does Collierville have to allow Small Cell Towers?

Yes. With the "Comprehensive Wireless Broadband Investment, Deployment, and Safety Act of 2018", the Tennessee State Legislature preempted local governments from passing regulations and ordinances prohibiting the installation of 5G technology. The 2018 State Law limited local governments from regulating certain aesthetic requirements, such as the height of Small Cells or their support structures. The new law precludes a local government from establishing preferred locations, requiring proof that a site is needed to fill a coverage gap, and proof that a provider complies with Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations. Collierville adopted local regulations in 2019 that closely mirrored the new State Law.

Where can Small Cell Towers be located? How do they look?

They are typically not on private property like larger cell towers but are instead within public right-of-way along public streets. Since 2018, the Town has seen Small Cells deployed in three (3) ways by providers, such as Verizon or AT&T:

- rebuilding of existing MLGW-owned light poles within the Town's public right-of-way;
- attaching to wooden poles where overhead lines are already existing; or,

- creating new poles (where one was not before) for the sole purpose of supporting the small cell telecommunication equipment.

Sometimes small cells are placed atop MLGW concrete light poles specially designed to accommodate the weight of a small cell. Such poles typically have a larger base size and are taller than surrounding light poles. In some cases, new poles are required to be metal and painted Collierville Green or black (based on their context).

How does Collierville review requests for new Small Cells?

Collierville's 2019 ordinance established that permits for Small Cells would be reviewed administratively by Town staff. Because of the 2018 State Law, the Town staff has very little discretion when considering them. Applications for Small Cells must include proof to the Town that MLGW has issued an address for the location and has approved the design of any replacement poles, if MLGW owns the existing pole to be affected.

Appeals of staff decisions by service providers are forwarded to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen (BMA) for public review, with public notices sent to the surrounding neighbors and provided in a local newspaper. Appeals of BMA decisions would go to court.

How can I contact my State Legislator about Small Cells?

The Town has very limited ability to affect the design and location of small cells except as expressly allowed in the 2018 State Law. Collierville residents concerned about the State Laws adopted in 2018 that limit local governments related to Small Cells are encouraged to contact their legislator directly. [Click here for an online tool](#) provided by the Tennessee Legislature to help residents identify their legislators.

How can I view the Town's Small Cell regulations in the Town Code?

Consult [§117.120 of the Town Code](#) for the Small Cell regulations. Contact the Planning Division at 901-457-2360 or planning@collierville.tn.gov with any questions.