

# Community Cooperation Facilitates Cellular Infrastructure Expansion



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**D**ensifying today's cellular network requires solving challenges that include technology selection, spectrum management, and access to the new site deployment locations. The members of the communities benefiting from these technology decisions have an integral voice in these deployment decisions. Unfortunately, the needs of the community can become obscured by the rules, regulations, and governing agencies that dictate siting and deployment matters. Wireless operators' objective to build and deploy the best network to serve customer needs also can cloud what matters most to the communities served, and risk strong local partnerships. The value of creating and maintaining strong community partnerships is a critical part of a wireless operator's success.

In 2022, UScellular began a two-year program to deploy 24 Centralized Radio Access Network (CRAN) sites (small cells) within the city of Lawton, OK. UScellular was the first wireless carrier in Lawton to seek access to their public right of way (ROW) for small cells. This initiative was a substantial investment for the company, aimed at benefitting the community by significantly improving coverage and capacity in areas with higher demand. The project team followed the rules and regulations to obtain permits and

city approval for 24 CRAN sites in the ROW. In 2024, as the company's general contractors (GCs) began deploying these sites, they met resistance from members of the community. Residents near two planned CRAN locations disputed the legality of the sites and petitioned the City Council to issue a stop order, force the removal of the two sites, and revoke all other issued permits for the project. These residents felt city leaders and UScellular had failed to consider their needs, input, and concerns regarding the placement, form factor, and height of the sites. The City Council subsequently voted in favor of issuing the stop work notice for the project and the City Manager issued a removal notice on the two sites and sent a warning that the 22 previously issued permits would be revoked.

Recognizing the need for swift and direct involvement, I pulled all third parties from the discussions and travelled to Lawton to meet directly with the City Manager. After jointly working to understand the underlying issues and causes for the breakdown in communications, we identified the benefits of a close partnership between the community and our company. Community members understood the benefits of improved service but wanted their input to be heard and incorporated into the plan. I recognized the importance of maintaining close, positive ties with the community and our customers, as well as the City Council. The City Manager sought our partnership in helping to navigate the emerging small cell issues, and we sought to retain approval to complete the strategic investment in the community. I visited the neighborhoods with concerns to review siting and design alternatives, and ultimately threw my support behind altering the pole designs to match



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existing community infrastructure and moving a few locations away from residential properties. I also reinforced our commitment to invest in rural communities, partner with the local government and remain sensitive to community feedback. We established quarterly partnership meetings to create a feedback loop for navigating difficulties and addressing resident feedback.

The City Manager agreed to keep the 22 of the planned sites intact and supported the proposal of two new locations for the revoked sites. Nearly one year later we have put 22 CRAN sites on air in Lawton, and the final two sites are expected to commence deployment this summer. This favorable outcome illustrates the power of partnerships, tied back to being present, open to feedback, and directly interacting with key stakeholders like the City Council and City Manager. We can only meet our shared goals by building and maintaining strong partnerships with the communities we serve. [cca](#)

*UScellular's wireless operations are pending acquisition by T-Mobile at the time this article was written.*