



WIRELESS PLANNING: REMOVAL AND/OR TRANSFER OF WTS FACILITIES

This bulletin provides general guidance for:
 Section 1) The removal (decommissioning) of a Wireless Telecommunications Service (WTS) facility; and
 Section 2) The transfer of entitlements for WTS facilities to another carrier.

SECTION 1 | REMOVAL OF WTS FACILITIES

Overview

Requirement: Carriers are required to remove WTS facilities within six (6) months of inactive use¹. A building permit is required. If the facility is not removed by the carrier, the property owner shall assume the responsibility.

Primary Areas of Concern for Removal:

- > Removing antennas, empty pipe mounts, and cable trays on primary facades.
- > Properly patching and repairing wall surfaces, especially on buildings that are historic in nature.
- > Removing RF warning stripes on roofs, warning signage, and hazardous materials.

WTS facility removal (decommissioning) -- The guidance in this Bulletin is primarily intended for facade (wall) or roof-mounted WTS facilities. Additional review may be required for freestanding WTS facilities (e.g. traditional monopoles, freestanding structures, etc.). The removal of Personal Wireless Facilities within the Public Right-of-Way (e.g. wooden utility pole mounted facilities along streets) is subject to review by the [Department of Public Works, Bureau of Street Use & Mapping](#).

OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES | WTS facility removals at the following locations are typically not reviewed by the Planning Department or DBI (unless otherwise requested): BART, Bay Bridge, [Caltrans](#), Golden Gate Bridge, Hospitals (certain buildings under [OSHPD](#)), properties located within active OCII ([Office of Community Investment and Infrastructure](#) - Successor Agency to the former Redevelopment Agency) Project Areas (such as Bayview Hunters Point, Candlestick, Mission Bay, Transbay), The [Port of San Francisco](#), SFO (Airport), SFSU, The [Presidio](#),

¹ Planning Department Wireless Telecommunications Services Facilities Siting Guidelines (1996), available on <http://www.sf-planning.org/>

UCSF, [Treasure Island](#), VA Campus, and Yerba Buena Island (typically Caltrans or US Coast Guard).

Process for Removing

BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATION | In order to officially remove the WTS facility, a building permit must be filed with the Department of Building Inspection (DBI). The Planning Department is the first referral agency during the routing process for the building permit application. The building permit application must clearly indicate the carrier in the project description field and on the cover sheet of required plans; further requirements for the project description on the building permit application, and on the cover sheet of required plans, are included in this bulletin.

> **Two (2) sets of plans:** These plans are subject to DBI's plan submittal requirements (typically 11 inches x 17 inches minimum). Further requirements for project description and plan details depending on WTS site are included in this bulletin.

> **Photos with Plans:** Since many sites no longer conform to the original construction drawings, provide recent photos, of location of WTS on building and of attachment methods. The photographs are to be included in the plan sets. The focus of the photographs is on the WTS elements that are visible from public rights of way, including but not limited to from surrounding streets, parks or other public spaces. If applicable, include up-close photos that show how antennas are attached to facades; such as whether the antenna mounting points are limited to the inside face of the parapet.

PERMIT FINAL COMPLETION | After the WTS facility is removed, ensure that a final inspection is arranged with DBI and that the building permit for the WTS facility removal is completed.

Also, withdraw any other pending building permits pertaining to the existing WTS facility by requesting the withdrawal from the Central Permit Bureau, DBI, 1660 Mission St. A [Form](http://sfdbi.org/) is available online from <http://sfdbi.org/>.

FIVE YEAR PLAN | Wireless Carriers are required to provide five year plans (list of sites) to the Planning Department, which are due on April 1 and October 1 of each year. Ensure that the WTS facility removal is also removed from the five year plans. The WTS facility removal permit will be reviewed by the Planner against the Carrier's five-year plan.

PROPERTY OWNER | Ensure the property owner is aware of the scope of the proposal, including those elements that will and will not be retained on-site. For example, if the facility features fibre-reinforced plastic (FRP) screening that is visible from off-site and is expected to be retained on site, ensure the property owner is aware that such an element may eventually degrade and need to be replaced or painted with an RF-transparent paint if a future WTS is contemplated. Replacement would ultimately be the responsibility of the property owner.

Scope of Work for Removal

ANTENNAS | Ensure that transmitting antennas, GPS antennas, microwave dishes, and empty placeholder brackets are removed (See *image for example*).



On both the DBI building permit application project description and on the cover sheet of the plans, the following information must be clearly provided:

- Identify the number of antennas or dishes to be removed, by number and type;
- Clearly indicate that the proposal is to remove existing antennas, instead of installing new antennas.

*Screening elements composed of fibre-reinforced plastic (FRP) for antennas (and other equipment) tends to degrade faster than other building elements. Property owners and wireless carriers are encouraged to remove

such elements, and ensure original building elements are not damaged in the removal process.

CABLE TRAYS AND CONDUITS

| Cable trays and conduits that are visible from off-site or that impair light or view for tenants must be removed. Some internal conduit and cable trays may be retained on-site if a future use is contemplated (See *image for example*).



EQUIPMENT SHELTERS

| On a case-by-case basis, Planning may allow equipment shelters to remain in place. Planning is typically not supportive of retaining equipment shelters that are abandoned in appearance, impair usable resident open space, or are visible from off-site locations; especially on buildings considered Known or Potential Historic Resources, or those buildings located in historic districts.

GENERATOR PLUG (CAM LOCK)

& ELECTRIC METER Determine if an exterior-mounted generator plug receptacle, or facility-specific electric meter, is present (typically at storefront level) (See *image for example*).



On both the DBI building permit application project description and on the cover sheet of the plans, this additional information must be clearly provided:

- Show the location of the exterior-mounted receptacle or meter;
- Clearly indicate the removal of receptacle or meter, and indicate the restoration of the wall surface with existing wall material noted, and repair material noted.

GENERATORS

| If generators (e.g. natural gas, diesel, or fuel cell) are present, and will not be re-used by the property owner (which is generally permitted), then clearly indicate on the plans. Ensure a fuel spill clean-up kit is present when fuel lines or tanks are drained.

On both the DBI building permit application project description and on the cover sheet of the plans, this additional information must be clearly provided:

- Scope of removal (generator, tank, fuel lines, mounting pads)

*Contractors must notify the [Bay Area Air Quality](#)

Management District of diesel or natural gas generator removal. The contractor must e-mail Michael Nash at: mnash@baaqmd.ca.gov. Provide the site address and any generator permit/identification information.

RADIO FREQUENCY SIGNAGE AND STRIPING/ BARRICADES | Ensure roof striping, barricades (e.g. fences), and warning signs are removed, except for those items necessary for an active co-located (another wireless carrier) WTS facility.

On both the DBI building permit application project description and on the cover sheet of the plans, this additional information must be clearly provided:

- Clearly indicate the removal of barricades, signage or striping, as applicable.

*Contractors must notify the SF Department of Public Health of the WTS facility removal. The contractor must email Patrick Fosdahl at: Patrick.Fosdahl@sfdph.org. Provide information about removal.

Appropriate Review Prior to Building Permit Submittal

BUILDINGS OVER 45 YEARS OF AGE | Additional review of application to remove WTS facilities that have been installed near character-defining features on buildings that are Unknown or Known Historic Resources may be required. This could include material-specific patch details and surface treatment. Carriers should discuss the removal of WTS facilities from Historic Resources with appropriate Staff prior to the preparation of plans.

Avoid improper patch repairs that could prevent water from properly weeping away from the building. Improper patches may include the use of cementitious mortar to patch a porous brick surface, resulting surface deterioration of the historic brick surface. Providing close-up photos of such locations is highly recommended (See *image for example*).



Preliminary information can be found on the **SF Property Information Map**, PIM, (<http://propertymap.sfplanning.org/>) or visit the Planning Information Center, 1660 Mission Street, 1st floor.

CODE VIOLATIONS | The Planning Department and Department of Building Inspection (DBI) both maintain separate Code Enforcement programs. Planning Department code enforcement information is available on the **SF Property Information Map**, PIM, (<http://propertymap.sfplanning.org/>)

DBI's **Online Permits & Complaint Tracking** site (<http://dbiweb.sfgov.org/dbipts/>) can be used to verify active complaint(s) for the subject property. Permits for the removal of WTS facilities may require case-by-case review by the DBI inspector, if there is a separate unresolved building violation.

BATTERY AND EQUIPMENT DISPOSAL | Contractors are responsible for following local, State and Federal laws regarding the handling, disposal and recycling (preferred) of elements considered toxic waste (e.g. batteries used for backup power). Materials must be handled as toxic waste if discarded.

BIRDS | Ensure site removals do not disturb migratory birds or nests. More than 350 species follow the Pacific Flyway. Of the two primary routes, the Oceanic Route passes through the Bay Area. Spring migration occurs between February through May, and fall migration begins in August and lasts through November. A qualified biologist should be consulted if migratory or nesting birds are present.

BLOCK BOOK NOTIFICATION (BBN) HOLDS | Community members may choose to be notified of any building permit application for a specific property by signing up for a **Block Book Notification**, BBN, (<http://sf-planning.org/>). Unless the BBN is cleared in advance, a community member would have 10 days (from the time they are notified by the Department of the permit) to review a building permit application and plans. This can *place a hold on any permit approval by Planning*, in order for the BBN requestor to determine if they wish to request further dialogue with the Project Sponsor or Discretionary Review before the Planning Commission.

Recommended course of action to expedite permit approval for properties with active BBN:

1. Check the **SF Property Information Map**, (<http://propertymap.sfplanning.org/>), to see if the Project Site has an active "BBN" listing in the "BBN" tab.
2. If there is a BBN present, then check with Planning Information Center, 1660 Mission St, 1st floor, to determine the scope of the BBN(s), such as whether the BBN applies to "all permits" or "only new construction." Ask the Planner to check if the BBN requestor would like to review the removal permit.

SUBMITTAL CHECKLIST

REMOVAL OF WTS FACILITIES

Minimum Application Materials

- Building Permit Application, from DBI
 - Two Sets of Plans
 - Photographs
 - Detailed project description and scope of work on cover sheet of plans
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Recommended Project Description for Cover Sheet of Plan Sets

CARRIER NAME:

- Remove (INSERT # _____) antennas
 - Remove cable trays & conduit. Repair and repaint wall surfaces. Wall surface material to be repaired with _____ material.
 - Repair and repaint antenna mounting bracket locations. Wall surface material to be repaired with _____ material.
 - Remove GPS, screening elements, and microwave dishes.
 - Remove generator plug (Cam-lock) and restore and repaint wall surfaces. Wall surface material to be repaired with _____ material.
 - Remove equipment cabinets, batteries, generators, and fuel lines/tanks.
 - Remove RF warning roof striping, warning signage, and barricades. Retain such elements for other active co-located wireless carriers, if present.
 - Remove electrical meter and restore and repaint wall surfaces. Wall surface material to be repaired with _____ material.
 - Other scope of work:
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WIRELESS PLANNING: REMOVAL AND/OR TRANSFER OF WTS FACILITIES

SECTION 2 | TRANSFER TO ANOTHER WIRELESS CARRIER | MACRO AND MICRO WTS FACILITIES

Macro WTS Facilities

Macro WTS facilities are typically required to obtain an entitlement known as a Conditional Use Authorization (CUA), unless located in zoning districts with “C”, “M” or “PDR” prefix (except PDR-1-B requires CUA).

A WTS facility that is located in zoning districts with “C”, “M” or “PDR” prefix may still require a CUA if it is either: 1) 25 feet above the mounting surface (e.g. ground or roof); 2) 25 feet above the applicable height limit; or 3) features larger unscreened elements¹.

If a WTS facility is decommissioned, then the CUA can generally be transferred to another wireless carrier (or Wireless Internet Service Provider), within six (6) months of non-use, though subject to considerations including, but not limited to:

- > Demonstrating the original WTS facility was properly installed and permitted (including obtaining a final inspection for prior building permits). If a CUA was obtained but the facility was never built, it would not qualify for transfer.
- > Demonstrating the WTS facility complies with the US Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Compliance may include: minimally-visible and well-maintained screening elements and cable trays, repairing vertical cable trays, and moving GPS antennas to minimally visible locations (e.g. attachments to mid-roof cable trays areas). An Administrative Certificate of Appropriateness (ACOA) or Minor Permit to Alter (MPTA) may also be required. See Wireless Planning Advisory Bulletin #2.
- > Neighborhood notification may be required in limited instances, based on the specific zoning district ([Planning Code Sections 311 and 312](#)), and scope of physical alterations (e.g. the addition of screening elements

which mimic new building alterations or expansions). Neighborhood notification is not required for a facility transfer where the original facility was properly permitted and no exterior alterations are required.

> Recording an updated Notice of Special Restrictions (NSR), subject to Planning Department review, with the [Office of the Assessor-Recorder](#). This requirement only applies to WTS facilities subject to a Conditional Use Authorization (CUA). The NSR would utilize the previous approval motion and conditions, but also clarify the transfer of the entitlement from one carrier to another. The previous NSR would still remain recorded for the subject property.

> A Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) or Permit to Alter (PTA) may also be required for properties located in Article 10 or Article 11 historic districts or properties designated Article 10 landmark buildings in the Planning Code.

> Review the prior conditions of approval for the Conditional Use Authorization. Case-by-case Zoning Administrator review may be needed based on the scope.

> Community members may choose to be notified of any building permit application for a specific property by signing up for a [Block Book Notification](#), BBN, (<http://sf-planning.org>). Unless the BBN is cleared in advance, a community member would have 10 days (from the time they are notified by the Department of the permit) to review a building permit application and plans. This can *place a hold on any permit approval by Planning*, in order for the BBN requestor to determine if they wish to request further dialogue with the Project Sponsor or Discretionary Review before the Planning Commission. Recommended course of action to expedite permit approval for properties with active BBN:

1. Check the [SF Property Information Map](#), PIM, ([¹ Pursuant to Article 2 of the Planning Code](http://

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propertymap.sfplanning.org/), to see if the Project Site has an active “BBN” listing in the “BBN” tab.

2. If there is a BBN present, then check with Planning Information Center, 1660 Mission St, 1st floor, to determine the scope of the BBN(s), such as whether the BBN applies to “all permits” or “only new construction.” Ask the Planner to check if the BBN requestor would like to review the removal permit.

> Ensure the property owner is aware of the scope of the proposal, including those elements that will and will not be retained on-site. For example, if the facility features fibre-reinforced plastic (FRP) screening that is visible from off-site and is expected to be retained on site, ensure the property owner is aware that such an element may eventually degrade and need to be replaced or painted with an RF-transparent paint if a future WTS is contemplated. Replacement would ultimately be the responsibility of the property owner.

Micro WTS Facilities

Micro WTS facilities can typically be transferred within six (6) months of non-use, to another wireless carrier, or Wireless Internet Service Provider (WISP), subject to approval of a building permit application by the Planning Department and final completion by DBI. Micro WTS facilities typically consist of two (2) whip antennas, each approximately size of a baseball bat; or one (1) panel antenna within a faux vent pipe or mounted to a rooftop penthouse. The example in the image features two (2) micro antennas, in a location that would no longer be approved (primary facade of a building is considered an historic resource).



The following considerations may apply:

> The building permit will undergo design review and Historic Preservation review, if applicable. Micro WTS facilities typically do not require a Conditional Use Authorization; however, neighborhood notification ([Planning Code Sections 311 and 312](#)) may be required in specific zoning districts, and limited instances, based on the scope of physical alterations (e.g., the addition of screening elements which mimic new building alterations or expansions).

Neighborhood notification is not required for a facility transfer when these requirements are met: 1) the original facility was properly permitted, 2) the original facility was previously in active use within the last six (6) months, and, 3) no exterior alterations are required.

> A Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) or Permit to Alter (PTA) may also be required. See [Wireless Planning Advisory Bulletin #2](#).

> Community members may choose to be notified of any building permit application for a specific property by signing up for a [Block Book Notification](#), BBN, (<http://sf-planning.org>). Unless the BBN is cleared in advance, a community member would have 10 days (from the time they are notified by the Department of the permit) to review a building permit application and plans. This can *place a hold on any permit approval by Planning*, in order for the BBN requestor to determine if they wish to request further dialogue with the Project Sponsor or Discretionary Review before the Planning Commission. [Recommended course of action to expedite permit approval for properties with active BBN:](#)

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