

INDIAN WELLS CITY COUNCIL

May 21, 2026



To: City Council
From: City Manager Department
Prepared by: Nick Werner, IT and Risk Manager
Subject: **Wireless Master Plan**

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

Council **RECEIVES** and **FILES** the Wireless Master Plan; and

CREATES a Wireless Plan Ad hoc Committee consisting of two Councilmembers to assist staff in developing amendments to the City's Zoning Code to improve cellular coverage and public safety in the community; and

FINDS the action does not constitute a "project" as defined in Section 15378 of the State California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3, and would otherwise be exempt from the provisions of CEQA pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2), 15060(c)(3), 15061(b)(3).

BACKGROUND:

During the 2025 Annual Strategic Planning Session, City Council directed staff to assess cellular coverage across the City and identify strategies to improve service in unserved and underserved areas through a Wireless Master Plan (WMP). This analysis was requested after the City of Rancho Mirage completed a similar review. Following Council direction, staff issued a Request for Proposals, and City Council awarded a professional services agreement to CelPlan Technologies, Inc. to complete a citywide WMP and to develop various options to improve cellular coverage in the community.

The scope of the WMP included a multi-day drive test and field verification of existing wireless assets, predictive coverage modeling for the major carriers (e.g., AT&T, T-Mobile, and Verizon), evaluation of the City's current cell tower siting and permitting framework, and identification of recommendations—both policy-based and site-based—to improve broad-area cellular coverage while maintaining Indian Wells' visual and community character.

The WMP documents existing cellular coverage conditions in Indian Wells and outlines recommended strategies to address identified gaps through a combination of well-

concealed low-band macro sites and targeted zoning/permitting updates. The WMP is intended to guide coordinated discussions with wireless carriers and property owners, support more reliable service for residents and visitors, and strengthen the foundation for public safety communications.

It is important to note that the WMP recommendations do not propose any procedural change for public comments and participation on future wireless facility applications. Public Hearings would still be required by the City's Planning Commission and City Council for projects requiring Conditional Use Permits. The Wireless Master Plan is an in-depth evaluation of the City's existing cellular coverage and zoning regulations governing the siting of telecommunication facilities, including expert recommendations to improve coverage in target areas with poor service. Discretionary approvals by City Council, such as a Conditional Use Permit, remain a requirement for any wireless telecommunication facility development prior to issuance of a building permit.

DISCUSSION:

CelPlan's Wireless Master Plan provides the City with a technical and regulatory framework for understanding existing cellular conditions, identifying service gaps, and recommending future improvements to wireless infrastructure (Attachment 1). The work is based on field drive testing, verification of existing assets, and predictive modeling calibrated to measured conditions. The Plan identifies that Indian Wells' wireless service issues stem from various factors, including uneven site distribution, terrain and land-use constraints, and limitations on the City's existing siting pathways.

Key findings show coverage is unevenly distributed across Indian Wells. Service is generally strongest near areas with concentrated existing infrastructure (including the Tennis Garden and resort areas) and weaker in portions of the north, southwest, and mountain-adjacent locations, including large areas within golf course communities.

The report asserts that improving broad-area coverage is most effectively achieved through low-band macro-cell deployments, paired with targeted updates to the City's antenna regulations to allow well-concealed facilities in appropriate support locations (e.g., clubhouses, maintenance areas, parking areas, perimeter/support zones, and select public properties). Improved macro coverage is also identified as the foundational prerequisite for reliable golf cart emergency notification solutions and general public safety communications on golf course properties.

Zoning Code Analysis

CelPlan Technologies' work plan included a comprehensive review of the City's zoning code to offer recommended code updates that can better facilitate the placement of wireless facilities in the community to address public safety and community requests for increased wireless coverage, while protecting the City's land use authority and community

participation on placement of wireless facilities in the community. The following provides a summary of those recommendations.

- Public Facility Zone and Telecommunications Overlay Coordination

The Plan acknowledges that properties zoned Public Facility are already conditionally permitted under Section 21.90.060 and recommends amendments to support coordination, clearer development standards, consistency with design requirements, and clarify entitlement applications for the development of wireless facilities on these properties. Further, the consultant recommends clearer development and design standards within the Telecommunications Overlay Zone to support code interpretation, avoid overlapping requirements, and promote consistency during review of new wireless facilities. By consolidating and removing redundancy throughout the City's Zoning Code, the consultant expects improved clarity, more consistent enforcement of standards, and simplified maintenance.

- Golf Course Overlay Zoning Areas

The Plan identifies the limitations of the existing Telecommunications Overlay as being clubhouse-centric and proposes additional siting areas in the Residential Very Low Density Zone with Golf Course Overlay within gated communities with clubhouse facilities (RVLD-GCO). The Plan recommends clarifying that wireless facilities may be considered in appropriate support areas within RVLD-GCO properties, such as clubhouses, maintenance and operations areas, parking areas, perimeter open space areas, and similar ancillary locations, while avoiding active golf-play areas, such as fairways, tees, and greens. Additional height may be considered if the facility is fully concealed or camouflaged and integrated into the surrounding development or viewshed. The intent is to improve the documented coverage gaps across the City's golf courses while prohibiting facilities on the active golf play areas.

- Watercourse Zone

The consultant recommends establishing a limited pathway for telecommunications facilities to be considered within the Watercourse Zone, subject to Conditional Use Permit review and strict engineering, flood-control, environmental, and safety standards. According to the Plan, the proposed amendment does not weaken existing floodplain or environmental protections; rather, approval is contingent upon full compliance with applicable FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps, State, County, and City regulations, and all applicable environmental requirements. Allowing wireless infrastructure within the Watercourse Zone may improve the documented wireless coverage gap in remote locations including the foothill and golf course areas.

Summary of Analysis

In sum, the WMP identifies significant coverage gaps in northern, southwestern, mountain-adjacent, residential, and golf-related areas, raising concerns about public safety and service reliability. To help address these gaps, CelPlan recommends low-band macro-cell deployments, combined with targeted changes to the City's regulatory framework to allow wireless infrastructure where it is most needed while preserving Indian Wells' strong aesthetic standards. CelPlan's modeled scenarios show that strategically placed, well-concealed low-band macro facilities could materially improve cellular coverage for everyday connectivity and the City's ability to support reliable emergency communications. Further, the recommended changes to the City's regulations maintain the requirement for discretionary City Council approval of any proposed wireless infrastructure within any zoning district in the City.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact to the City identified at this time.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA):

This action has been assessed in accordance with the authority and criteria contained in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the State and local CEQA Guidelines, and the environmental regulations of the City. The City acting as Lead Agency, has determined that receiving and filing the Wireless Master Plan does not constitute a "project" as defined in Section 15378 of the State California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3, and would otherwise be exempt from the provisions of CEQA pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2), 15060(c)(3), 15061(b)(3), because there is no possibility that the action would result in a significant environmental impact. Future telecommunication facilities proposed within the City shall be analyzed under CEQA, as applicable.

ATTACHMENT:

1. Wireless Master Plan