

**A "HAND RADIO ANTENNA"
AND BUREAUCRACY**

BY DENNIS J. MC CARTHY, AAØA

Thirty four years ago, the City of St. Louis had specific ordinances for the erection of ham antennas and towers.

Not anymore.

I found this out when I tried to erect an antenna again in the city last year, this time at a new address. There were no HOA or other restrictions.

First I applied for a ham antenna permit. A mistake, I later learned.

The application was made May 21, 2015 and cost \$29. It said it was for a "Hand Radio Permit." It was for a Cushcraft R-7 antenna.

Then...

On June 15 I received a letter from the Department of Public Safety advising me I must appear for a hearing for a conditional use permit for a "hand radio antenna."

The letter stated:

"This hearing must find the proposed use conforms to the following standards.

- 1. The use will not be detrimental to the public health, safety, morals or general welfare. (Who ever heard of an immoral antenna?)**
- 2. The use will not cause serious injury to the neighboring property values.**
- 3. The use will contribute to, enhance and promote the general welfare and convenience of the specific location."**

The letter added the hearing would be held July 9.

Then a second letter dated June 17 arrived saying “permit granted”.

Which letter was correct? Did I have a permit or didn't I?

So I went downtown and was told by an employee of the Zoning Department that I still had to attend the conditional use hearing and the permit would then have to be approved by the board of aldermen and, oh yes, the hearing would cost \$50 more. I asked to speak with the person in charge.

Mary Hart Benton, the zoning administrator, entered the room and said:

“Don't bother, I've heard all the arguments.”

“Have you heard of PRB1?” I asked.

“I've talked with the city counselor and he said it doesn't apply to the City of St. Louis,” she replied.

An employee suggested I get a letter from my alderman and bring witnesses to the hearing.

My Alderman wrote a favorable letter. Six other hams showed up. I got a letter from the lawyer who lives on one side of us. The neighbor on the other side, now a St. Louis Police Department major, showed up in uniform.

I got the permit.

Then I decided to put in a more conservative antenna, a Hustler vertical, 23 feet tall, weighing 12 pounds.

The inspector showed up and said I would have to dig a 4X4X4-foot hole for the antenna concrete base.

Thousands of pounds of concrete for a 12-pound antenna?

I told him “No.”

He told me:

“Either you do it or I’ll take pictures, post notices on your house and have the police arrest you!”

So I called City Hall and a woman said the inspector was right, the antenna was “40 meters tall....that’s over 130 feet!”

“That’s one of the frequency bands,” I said.

“One minute,” she said.

Then a man came on and said:

“There are no ham antenna laws. Just drive a pipe into the ground below the frost line and attach the antenna.”

A few days later the original permit application arrived, approved by the man.

The antenna went up last October.

I haven’t heard from anyone since.

But I am \$79 poorer for a permit I didn’t need.