

## Antenna Aesthetics

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In the February 2001 *QST*, an interesting article described techniques to visualize antenna installations prior to erecting them. Reading this caused me to consider issues of appearance and aesthetics. Much has been written to technically justify installing antennas as high as possible, choosing the highest gain available and maximizing performance, especially with the monster HF antennas used by DXers. But how do we address the appearance of antennas to someone not familiar with Amateur Radio?

There can be no question that CC&Rs often severely restrict antennas (if the antennas are permitted at all). Yet we have all seen antenna installations that are messy, present a poor image and only serve to raise the temperature of angry neighborhood association members. I, for one, would not look forward to living next door to someone with a junky-looking collection of antennas.

Of course, what offends one person may be beauty to another.

Most people do not understand the connection between efficient antennas and successful, enjoyable communication (and many couldn't care less). Our nonham neighbors can't easily put into words what they *don't* like about antennas, but they certainly can tell us when they are angry and unhappy with what we have erected!

There is fundamentally nothing wrong with trying to create a home environment that both our neighbors and we can enjoy and be proud of. Most people want to have some degree of control over the future of the homes they worked so hard to acquire. All the more reason to educate our homeowners' associations and community planners. But education alone may not be enough.

So I am raising the issue of keeping our antenna plans within reasonable bounds. There are several reasons why neighborhood associations, developers, and city planners may think our beloved antennas don't belong in residential communities:

- ✓ They fear that property values will nosedive and homes will become difficult to sell as the subdivision disintegrates. This, of course, is the major objection.

- ✓ To many, antennas are ugly.
- ✓ Antennas emit radio-frequency energy, which some believe is a potential health hazard.

- ✓ They may be afraid of antennas crashing into their homes in the middle of a big storm.

- ✓ They may be concerned about interference to their TVs, radios, telephones, home alarm systems, etc.

- ✓ In the opinion of most nonhams, large antenna farms don't enhance the visual tranquility many expect from their home settings.

Get the picture? Why would anyone ever want to live next door to an active amateur?

However, there may be room for compromise. Here are a few suggestions to constructively address or at least mitigate some of our neighbors' concerns:

- ✓ Be realistic in terms of height. Don't plan a 100-foot tower in a treeless residential neighborhood full of small lots.

- ✓ Accept greater challenges by not insisting on having the optimum set of antennas. If QRPers can enjoy radio communication with less power, we can certainly get by with modest antennas.

- ✓ Use good judgment when calculating the number of antennas you feel you need. Use multiband antennas where feasible.

- ✓ Make sure your antenna appears sound and solid.

- ✓ Consider wire antennas. They're much less visible than aluminum tubing.

- ✓ Keep antennas away from the sides of narrow lots whenever possible

- ✓ Plan antenna installations around building and lot features, especially the upper part of houses, trees or the back yard.

- ✓ Convince your neighbors that, although you like using radios, you are also interested in neighborhood tranquility and will willingly make compromises. Always have a "plan B" in your back pocket.

- ✓ Don't surprise people with antenna or tower installations. Instead, consider ways to help neighbors visualize what you are planning to install before beginning work.

- ✓ Consider doing a trial antenna installation. Temporarily put up an antenna for a long weekend and do a contest. Share the results with your neighbors.

The average ham doesn't like to give

offense to their neighbors. Most hams are responsible, community-spirited, and hardworking citizens. When thinking of antennas, consider a modest type such as a dipole or other wire antenna. If you feel that you need a tower, see if you can be happy with a 40 to 50 footer.

When developers and city planners consider antenna restrictions, they may have in mind the far end of the spectrum; that is, the amateur who wants to have the most gain, the highest tower and the most elements. Developers and planners feel the public expects them to control and regulate antenna installations, keep property values up and maintain beautiful neighborhoods.

Become involved early—rather than whine after the fact. Consider how you can minimize objections about how antennas look by rethinking your next antenna project.

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