


MEMORANDUM

To: Princeton Planning Board

From: David Schure, Chairperson 
Princeton Historic Preservation Commission

Date: May 12, 2026

Re: **Application of Crown Castle Fiber LLC for Preservation Plan Approval & Administrative Waiver of Site Plan Review
153 Birch Avenue (Corner of Birch Avenue & Race Street Right-of-Way)
Witherspoon-Jackson Historic District
Application No. P2424-517AW; 74HP-2024**

Crown Castle Fiber LLC (“Applicant”) has filed an application with the Princeton Planning Board (“Board”) for preservation plan approval and an administrative waiver from site plan approval to enable its installation of a new small cell node in the municipal right-of-way identified as 153 Birch Avenue at the corner of Birch Avenue and Race Street (“Property”), immediately adjacent to 25 Race Street.

The Property is located within the Witherspoon-Jackson Historic District (also “District”). Pursuant to section 10B-379(1), the Board referred the foregoing application to the Princeton Historic Preservation Commission (“HPC”) because preservation plan approval is required. Preservation plan approval is required because the Property is designated on Princeton’s historic overlay district as Type 2, which is subject to preservation plan review for any changes visible from the public right-of-way. Pursuant to section 10B-379(2), on April 28, 2026 at its regular meeting HPC held a hearing on the application and its preservation plan. HPC hereby submits this report to the Board with its recommendations following its review.

The Witherspoon-Jackson Historic District is primarily a residential district unique to Princeton with a period of significance that reflects the development of one of the earliest African

American communities in New Jersey from 1830 to 1969. The District's cultural significance is represented through the built environment that developed over time in simple vernacular styles due to economic disparity, displacement and discrimination.

The project that is the subject of this application consists of the installation of small cell node equipment on a new wood utility pole at the corner of Birch Avenue and Race Street. The Applicant's goal in installing these small cell nodes throughout Princeton is to address coverage and capacity issues in the vicinity. This particular new pole, topped by a small cell antenna, will be 33-feet tall above grade, with a shroud cabinet, disconnect, and meter box mounted to the pole. All associated small cell node equipment including the cabinet, wiring and hardware will be painted in matte black finish to match previously installed cell node equipment throughout Princeton.

The proposed small cell node will be installed in the municipal right-of-way which is immediately adjacent to property known as 25 Race Street. While the new pole will not directly impact that property or its existing structure, it will be installed within the viewshed of the municipal right-of-way and existing intersection.

The proposed new pole will not alter any existing buildings and its installation is reversible. The installation includes a commonly-used wooden pole which is similar to existing utility poles in the District. The matte black color is proposed to minimize visual contrast. Its height of 33 feet aligns with existing poles on Birch Avenue, which are between 35 and 44 feet in height. The proposed location of the new pole is on the north side of Birch Avenue. There are numerous utility poles with equipment along the south side of Birch Avenue and in the District itself, although there are fewer such existing poles on the north side.

Staff found that the proposed project generally retains the historic character of the intersection within the Witherspoon-Jackson Historic District.

HPC expressed reservations and concern about the proposed location of this new pole, noting there are no existing utility poles on this side of the intersection. HPC acknowledges the need to enable small cell installations in appropriate areas under the law, but also wants to ensure that the location selected is appropriate.

Consequently, HPC inquired into the Applicant's investigation of a more suitable location for the new equipment, particularly on an existing utility pole in the vicinity. HPC also inquired into the possibility of using an existing pole within the parking lot in Community Park South.

The Applicant indicated that there is an existing, continuous line of utility poles along the south side of Birch Avenue. The Applicant explained that it is not able to attach its new equipment to any of these existing utility poles because they contain "disqualifying" equipment (i.e., equipment that conflicts with the new equipment) or they are otherwise unable to add more equipment to these poles. The Applicant has investigated its use of other existing utility poles in the vicinity and found no other feasible options for the new installation. The Applicant also indicated that installation on a pole in the Community Park South parking lot is not feasible because it is on municipal property and not within the public right-of-way.

The Applicant agreed, upon HPC's request, to shift the pole to the east and slightly away from the corner as originally shown on its plans.

Following its review and discussion with the Applicant, HPC voted unanimously to recommend that the Board approve the application, subject to the condition that, at the Board hearing, the Applicant be required to submit documentary or testimonial evidence to establish that

there is not a more feasible location for installation of this new small cell node in the general vicinity.

HPC appreciates very much the opportunity to comment, approve (with conditions) and recommend this application to the Board.

cc: Sara Quinlan, Historic Preservation Officer (via email)
Justin Lesko, AICP, Planning Director (via email)
James Purcell, P.E., Acting Land Use Engineer/Assistant Engineer (via email)
Taylor Gribbin, Princeton Zoning Officer (via email)
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