

Car company questions decision to host cell tower after outcry

By Brock Weir

Local business owner Michael Carcone is questioning his decision to host a potential new cell phone tower following concerns from family, employees and neighbours.

Mr. Carcone, who owns Carcone's Auto Recycling, on Bloomington Road, told Council last week that he now feels caught in the middle of a dispute that saw neighbours organizing against the tower, intended to provide service in nearby Richmond Hill neighbourhoods as well as cell reception for those travelling the Bloomington corridor.

'I have been contracted by Rogers to assist into cooperating with them in the approval process, however I also have close family, neighbours and many employees that I care about who are all involved with the issue, so now I feel caught in the middle,' he said. 'Rogers has contracted to comply with all laws, bylaws and regulations, including those pertaining to the environment, health, welfare, [and] occupational safety. I want Council and all interested parties to know I expect and urge Council to hold Rogers to that promise.'

'When Rogers approached me and asked if I would house a cell tower, it didn't seem like there would be any underlying issue with it. However, with new information being brought forward from surrounding neighbours, I can't help but question my decision. We were contractually assured by Rogers that there were no unreasonable safety issues with such a tower on our property. The last thing we want is for our neighbours to feel unsafe.'

Mr. Carcone was just one of many residents to speak up at last week's Council meeting with many neighbours citing health concerns of having a cell tower in their backyards, including Nadia Romano, owner of Bloomington Self Storage, who said her company was approached last year to host the tower.

'We declined the offer as we did not want to put our children, ourselves, and neighbours at risk by being in such close proximity [to the tower],' she said, citing more stringent regulations on microwaves mandated by Health Canada counterparts in such nations as Brazil and Israel. 'The bottom line is the safety guidelines we have in Canada are clearly outdated and do not protect public health,' she said. 'We need to join the rest of the world in setting truly protective guidelines for our own health. The priority should be set to protect the health of our citizens and not the interests of companies operating in the wireless industries. I don't want to put [my three-year-old] at risk for childhood leukemia so someone down the street may have better cell phone reception.'

Area resident Bonnie Kraft also appeared before Council arguing the process followed by Rogers was not in compliance with Industry Canada Standards because those living near the proposed site did not have adequate time to respond to notices about the proposal, a standard set at 30 days. Letters were received in the area on March 23, she said, when a new location was selected by the Tower. It was dated March 18 and stated the deadline for comments was April 4.

'The new tower is a new project that affects other residents,' said Ms. Kraft. 'It requires a new application. It is a clear violation of their requirements and, therefore, the applicant has been non-compliant.'

Speaking on behalf of the neighbourhood as a delegate was Dr. Azam Khan, who agreed that Rogers was not compliant with protocols.

'There is absolutely no need in the Town of Aurora where we have only 40 homes,' he said. 'It would be ridiculous for anyone to claim that we need this tower in our neighbourhood. In voting for non-concurrence, we can proceed and work together to update the Aurora protocols since it was developed before the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' [policies] were published in its final form to reflect all the things we have learned in this process.'

Rogers, on the other hand, said they explored all options to find the best location for the Tower. Its location needs to be within a certain area to address present needs, according to Tatyana Moro, who spoke on Rogers' behalf. Small cell technology, a solution

floated by opponents, would not be adequate, she said, as they only cover 100m distances.

Richmond Hill sites were also explored, including a nearby golf course. This, she said, would have been a suitable alternative, but the site owners were not willing. With other options being taken off the table for similar reasons, Carcone's was the best available option, she said.

Ms. Moro also rejected the claims there was inadequate consultation. This process began in July 2014 with four public notices published in local newspapers, a notice on the property itself, and 17 notices mailed out providing 48 days to comment. The second mail-out providing a further 17 days for comments was above and beyond what was required, she concluded.