

Vocal residents change Council's mind on proposed cell tower

By Brock Weir

Council changed course on a committee decision to concur with a proposed new cell phone tower on Bloomington Road, following vocal opposition this week from concerned residents.

The proposed 35 metre tower, set to be located at 1030 Bloomington Road within an existing auto yard, is was set to move forward at Council on Tuesday night, but Council will now respond to Industry Canada with a position of non-concurrence and a summary of arguments against it.

According to a report by Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, while Rogers was exploring a new tower in the area, Bell was looking for expansion as well and decided to co-locate on one piece of infrastructure rather than two.

While this co-location was praised by Council at the committee level last Tuesday, the road forward was less smooth. Industry Canada is the ultimate approval authority for telecommunications towers within municipalities and, in this case, Council's role is simply to advise the Federal body of its concurrence or non-concurrence with the proposal. But, whether or not to concur was the ultimate bone of contention.

“Even if Council were to put forward a position of non-concurrence, it does not necessarily prevent that cell phone tower from going forward because, at the end of the day, the actual arbiter and decider is Industry Canada,” said Councillor Michael Thompson at the time. “One of the things the [Federation of Canadian Municipalities] was trying to accomplish [with new protocols on placement] was whenever these towers came forward to municipal councils there was always a struggle to be able to find or identify a good place because, really, nobody wants it in their own back yard. But, we need them. It was demonstrated that daily usage is increasing so demand is prompting the need for these. It always comes down to location, we would always like to see it in a different spot, but you have to give credit to our staff who understand completely the challenge we have as Council and I have faith Mr. Ramunno did everything he could to ensure that at least the site was mitigated to some degree.”

Mayor Geoff Dawe agreed, saying this is always “an extremely difficult subject to deal with” and indeed one Council has struggled with in the past.

“Council very specifically directed Rogers to go back and talk to Bell about co-locating and that is exactly what they have done,” said Mayor Dawe.

“The result is a tower that is five metres higher, so obviously that is an impact and we appreciate that, but I think it is less of an impact than two towers. Nobody wants a tower in their backyard, I quite get that, but everybody wants to use their cell phones. The devices we are using now are 35 ? 40 times the band width of the old Nokia flip phone. We are using copious quantities of bandwidth which needs the infrastructure of the tower to support that.”

Although Councillor Sandra Humfries did not dispute the need for a tower, what she did object to was the location proposed. She questioned whether there was an opportunity work with Rogers and Bell to look at ways to find a slightly different location that would be less “obstructive” to nearby neighbourhoods. While Mr. Ramunno said time had been spent to find the most suitable location, more could be done to advocate, she said.

“Staff’s recommendation is asking us for our position,” she said. “You negotiated with the carriers, they came back with a co-located tower, the communication was outstanding and I want to give credit where credit is due, but I don’t think Rogers or Bell would enter into a partnership if it wasn’t lucrative. Why concur with something just because it is following process? I think we should have a right, representing our residents, in stating there is an opportunity to move this forward. It is going to go [ahead] anyway, but if we suggest we concur, there is no opportunity to [say otherwise].”

This, however, was not the right approach, in the view of Councillor Paul Pirri. Other properties were approached nearby to hold the

tower and they were not interested.

?Staff have told us it is in concurrence with our policies and FCM guidelines, so to say something I know is not accurate and not true, I don't know how we can do that,? he said. I don't like exactly where the placement is, but they have fallen in line with what they have had to do. I don't like it, but we don't ultimately have the jurisdiction on this. We could say no for the sake of saying no, but that is not the way I operate.?