

Cell tower talks should be ?escalated?, say Councillors

By Brock Weir

With still no definitive word back from Bell Canada, Aurora Councillors say it is now time to ?escalate? discussions between the Town and the telecommunications giant over a looming cell phone tower in King.

Matters between residents along Aurora's western edge objecting to a 60 metre telecommunications tower which popped up little over 100 metres into King from the Town Line came to a head with the Town and Bell in mid-April. They objected not only to the aesthetics of a tower dominating their skyline but also what they perceived to be a lack of notification and communication on the parts of Bell, Aurora, and King.

After considering spending upwards of \$100,000 seeking a legal injunction against the owners of the Tower, Councillors decided to forego what they were told by lawyers would most likely be a futile fight in favour of diplomacy and discussions with Bell, and launching a formal objection with Industry Canada, the federal body which regulates such towers.

While the formal complaint was lodged, talks between the Mayor and senior municipal staff, and Bell, have been less than fruitful.

?[Aurora CAO Neil Garbe] and I met with Bell representatives a couple of weeks ago,? Mayor Geoffrey Dawe told Councillors, and a handful of affected residents in the audience at last Tuesday's Council meeting. ?We discussed the issues of moving the tower, lowering the tower, repainting the tower, or dressing it up. Presumably that means Bell has not changed their minds on their position.

?We have been advised that repainting is not considered a viable option. We have been advised Bell will be mitigating the landscaping around the base, including fencing and landscaping. We have been advised of the power levels. The total output level from the Tower is about 600 watts and we're checking with Industry Canada in terms of the safety standards of where that fits. That 600 watts is not very powerful.?

The Tower, he added, was activated by Bell on April 29, he added, ?much to the disappointment? of the Town because Bell had issued assurances they would notify Aurora before they flipped the switch and Mayor Dawe said they did not.

Taking in the latest update on the situation, Councillors Chris Ballard, John Gallo, Sandra Humfries, and Michael Thompson questioned whether it was time for Aurora to ?escalate? the talks and take things to more senior staff at Bell, and perhaps all the way to the top with the president. Mayor Dawe said that his office has been working on making contact with the company's president but those attempts had, thus far, been unsuccessful.

Town Solicitor Warren Mar told Council that although the formal complaint was filed with Industry Canada, they did not copy Bell on the file to comply with Industry Canada's process.

?Should [Industry Canada] choose to go ahead with it, they will engage Bell Canada at that time, but I didn't want to interrupt Bell Canada because in a sense they should not have any direct impact as to whether or not we form a dispute resolution,? said Mr. Mar. ?It is our communication with Industry Canada directly to us on this process.?

While most Council members were in agreement that it is time to step things up, they were also looking for more information on what could be done. Those members of Council who made the trek to Vancouver over the weekend, said they were looking forward to not only attending seminars on this very matter, but also meeting up with colleagues, such as King Mayor Steve Pellegrini, to gauge their support.

?Now is the time we have to ramp it up and kick it up a few executive levels until we get to someone who does have the authority to move the tower or remediate this situation,? said Councillor Ballard. ?I think we're all still pretty shocked at the off-handed way Bell

is treating the citizens of Aurora and ourselves. I am hoping at some point someone at Bell will pay attention.?

Added Councillor Gallo: ?I am sure I speak on behalf of most of Council, if not everyone, that we're not going to take this lying down and go away, and we will do whatever we can do to make it right.?

Further information is expected to be presented to Council later this month by Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, to outline where Aurora went wrong in not formally objecting to the tower before it was built, and a plan of action.

?It remains that all this is happening after the fact, so I still hope we will get an answer as a Council as to how this happened and how this very important ball was dropped, and why we have allowed our residents to be so vulnerable in this situation,? said Councillor Wendy Gaertner.