

Council delays decision on proposed communication tower location

Council unanimously voted to grant Shared Tower Inc. more time to select a new location for their proposed radio tower last week.

The decision came after the company presented a report on their initial choice at a Committee of the Whole meeting on November 5. It was met with opposition from residents and Council members.

The proposed new tower, a 40-metre flush-mounted monopole built to service all telecommunications providers in the area, was set to be installed at 15400 Bayview Avenue—one of the most densely populated areas in Aurora.

At the November 5 meeting, Shared Tower Inc. Planning Coordinator Sandra Hallig explained that the site was selected after an extensive review of potential locations, stating that the company found this location to be the most ideal site to support the poor coverage issue that has been identified in the area. Despite this, however, the report was met with some pushback from residents.

Per Town regulations, Shared Tower Inc. sent informational packages to 384 properties within 120 meters of the proposed site after its selection. According to the company, eight residents reached out with questions or concerns, and approximately 15 attended a public information session they held.

One of the main concerns voiced by residents was whether a new tower was necessary in this area, seeing as there was existing infrastructure covering Bayview Avenue.

Hallig explained at the meeting that this was a matter of capacity, stating, "As the population grows, technology becomes enhanced, and the municipality expands, infrastructure that once was able to service an area is no longer able to and becomes overburdened. Essentially, the more people that try to connect to a server at once, the worse the connection quality becomes. Hallig emphasized that a new tower in this area would ease the strain on current systems and ensure better coverage for a growing community.

Some residents also raised health concerns, requesting that Shared Tower Inc. perform a Health Canada Safety Code 6 assessment to ensure the tower's radio emissions would not pose a risk to public health.

Shared Tower Inc. confirmed that such an assessment had been conducted by a third party and that the site was fully compliant with the maximum exposure limits set by the code.

Aesthetics was another significant concern, with Hallig stating, "A huge chunk of the community feedback we received was regarding visual impact. In response, she assured the Council that the flush-mounted monopole design was chosen to minimize that impact while remaining consistent with the design of existing towers in Aurora.

Despite these reassurances, however, Council members raised additional concerns during the meeting.

Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson, who lives near the proposed site, questioned the need for a new tower in that area, stating that he had not personally experienced poor connection or received any resident feedback regarding poor coverage in "many, many years." He asked about methods used to gather this information and whether the data would be made publicly available.

Hallig explained that the data used in the study was primarily gathered from service providers who track things like customer feedback, and dropped-call-and-unsent-message rates. She stated that Shared Tower Inc. did not have access to the raw data.

Councillor Harold Kim, who shared that he also had not personally experienced major connection issues, questioned whether the new tower would only improve coverage within a small radius or if it would have a broader impact on the overall network.

Hallig clarified that in addition to providing stronger connection in its direct radius, the tower would also help alleviate pressure on

other nearby towers, thereby improving coverage in a wider area.

Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, who had been involved in discussions with Shared Tower Inc. and had provided suggestions for alternative locations, voiced concerns about the selection process, stating that while the company's report identifies one of the major reasons it could not find an alternate location was unwilling landlords, he had reached out to one of the landlords and they hadn't had any communication from [Shared Tower Inc.'s] side.?

He questioned whether the company had contacted every landlord listed among their options.

Hallig replied that many factors went into the selection process, such as environmental restrictions and optimal server usage, but did confirm that they hadn't.

Finally, Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland asked whether the tower would be designed for 4G or 5G service. Hallig indicated that the technology was still under discussion, but both 4G and 5G services were possible.

In the end, the Council chose to delay the decision to allow for further discussions and exploration of potential alternative sites. Shared Tower Inc. was asked to continue its efforts to identify other suitable locations for the tower.

By Selena Loureiro