

Health concerns remain over cell tower

By Brock Weir

"Our health is not a waste of time," said one concerned resident at Town Hall meeting when Aurora Council made its decision not to move forward seeking an injunction from Bell Canada over a cell phone tower in neighbouring King.

In a letter to Aurora's Town Solicitor Warren Mar issued to the public on Tuesday, external lawyer Bruce Engell argued that in order to be successful in seeking an injunction, Aurora would have to prove to a judge that the Town would suffer "irreparable harm" that could not be compensated in damages if work continued on the Tower.

"The health and safety argument will not be successful, given the emission levels measured against Safety Code 6," advised Mr. Engell. "Given the ubiquity of cell towers in Ontario, in our opinion that argument would go nowhere.

"The visual intrusion argument is undercut by the fact the tower has already been built" in our view, it would not be possible to show there is any harm, related to visual impact, caused by making the tower operational compared to having it remain but be inoperative. Certainly, any such harm would not rise to the level of irreparable harm."

That being said, concerns still remained around the Council table about the health effects such a tower might bring to the neighbourhood. When asked by Councillor John Abel whether these concerns had been taken into consideration, Mr. Mar said Bell reported there was a one per cent emissions rate which Public Health deemed safe.

"There are some that just cannot be comfortable with what they are hearing," said Councillor Abel. "I know that is not our duty, but if we can somehow alleviate that and bring that forward that is something I would like to see." Councillor Evelyn Buck, however, sat on the opposite side of the fence.

"If I was convinced my children were at risk because of the place where I lived, I would shift pretty damned fast and not wait," she said, with one audience member asking, "We're supposed to move?"

"If people believe something is harmful, they have to exercise their judgement and avoid it," Councillor Buck continued. "The cell towers are being built to accommodate people with cell phones. They're just not putting them up there to decorate the countryside. They're there because people want the service and Bell Canada is a service provider."

Councillor Chris Ballard, on the other hand, said he felt for the residents concerned. It wasn't too long ago, he added, that people had their feet x-rayed to find the best fitting shoe and asbestos was used to insulate their homes. He questioned what the people of tomorrow might think when looking back at this situation.

"I think a lot of people are uneasy, even those of us who are big time users of cell phones are concerned about the increase of all types of radio waves and the cumulative effect it has not only on our bodies, but especially on growing children. I don't think it is something we should just dismiss because Health Canada says it is okay.

"Health Canada has said other things were okay that turned out not to be. Maybe 100 years from now people will look back absolutely horrified that we didn't [do something about this]. Maybe they will look back and chuckle and say those people had nothing to worry about, but for now I think it is a very valid concern the residents have on the health of their family [and the broader concern] of the value of their homes."