

New 50 metre tower will help GO Transit service growth: report

By Brock Weir

Another telecommunications tower will soon dot the Aurora landscape, this time near the intersection of Edward Street and Engelhard Drive.

The 46 metre communications tower is proposed by Metrolinx and GO Transit near the Engelhard railway crossing, and is due to receive Council approval this week following last Tuesday's General Committee meeting.

According to a report before Council by Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, Metrolinx applied for the tower last June, slated to be built in a fenced right of way of nearly 67 square meters. Once erected, it will be part of a new Centralized Traffic Control system (CTC) which will service the Barrie-Toronto GO Transit line.

It will replace the current manual control system and allow for planned service increases, says Mr. Ramunno. The tower has been located within the rail corridor property limits at a railway crossing and as far as possible from residential zones.

Within his report, Mr. Ramunno notes that since the spring of 2013, his department has been working with Metrolinx to find the best solution to the tower. After they identified the Engelhard Drive site, it was on to public consultation.

Through emails and a letter, three area residents expressed a concern that the GO Transit documentation did not take into account cumulative impacts from all of the telecommunication towers in the area, said Mr. Ramunno. [Concerns also included] possible impacts to nearby gathering spots such as a high school, dance studios, children's gyms [and the bowling alley]; opinion that the public notification sign was placed in a way that made it difficult to read; concern about whether all the notification area was notified; concern about the possible interference with the CYFS fire station communications; and one comment called the project a great asset to GO service and the community.

In response to the concerns, particularly about cumulative impacts, GO asked for a four week extension to respond. Further reports, said Mr. Ramunno, concluded radio frequency in the area would be 0.001% of the maximum allowed by Industry Canada. Additional concerns were also addressed satisfactorily, he said.

At last week's General Committee meeting, discussion focused on meeting these community concerns, as well as the aesthetic value of the proposal. In particular, Councillors questioned whether the frequency in the tower would impact operations of the Central York Fire Services in their Edward Street Station.

That came from residents that we heard from and the Fire Department did not respond back, said Mr. Ramunno. They had no concerns and it is something GO and their consultants needed to address, so there will be no interference with the fire hall equipment.

As far as looks, Council also wanted to know how it would compare to older and newer-style telecommunications towers which can be found in all corners of Aurora.

We have seen with other [towers], they have made an attempt to design different elements to try and make it less visually impactful, said Councillor Michael Thompson. With this one, there doesn't seem to be that same process. It seems to be very much an older-style tower.

After questioning whether that was part of the discussion, Mr. Ramunno said that was not covered in talks, but this would be a slender

free-standing tower with a lattice design, rather than the white tri-pole design which went up in neighbouring King Township last

year. At the end of the day, it is also slated to be painted red and white.

?Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and I have to acknowledge that I like those towers,? said Councillor Evelyn Buck with a laugh.
?I especially like them to be white and up there against the blue sky. I think they are beautiful and it is the child in me, I guess.?