

Southeast cell tower inches closer to reality

By Brock Weir

A new telecommunications tower will soon be on the landscape in Aurora's southeast quadrant

Council gave the formal thumbs-up to the tower, which has been relocated further away from a nearby residential neighbourhood than originally planned, to a joint effort between Bell Canada and Rogers.

Council signaled their concurrence to the plan at last week's General Committee meeting, which is set to be ratified by this week, but that is more of a formality as Industry Canada is the ultimate deciding body.

Slated for construction on the north side of Bloomington Road just west of Bayview Avenue, the co-located tower is now 235 metres east of the original proposal floated by Rogers as early as 2014 and is now 300 metres from the closest residential property on Offord Crescent.

"We asked them to co-locate and it was a joint effort between Bell and Rogers," said Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning. "Bell had an agreement with the landowners to the east, so the proposal is for Rogers to now co-locate on their tower." At approximately 40 metres in height, the new cell tower is planned to be a tripod rather than the straight tower on Bathurst Street just over the King line. Although Councillors gave their consent to the tower, it was not without some misgivings.

"Most of the residents that this tower will be serving in that neighbourhood are all against this tower going up," said Councillor Harold Kim. "It seems like the beneficiaries are really the residents in Northern Richmond Hill. It just seems [like common sense] that if you're servicing a certain population the tower should just go there. It is hard to support something when it is really not serving your residents.

"It's available land and it happens to be on our side of the street, but it is not really serving our residents."

The same problems were offered when the King tower was constructed, noted Councillor John Abel, who chaired last week's General Committee meeting.

Councillor Wendy Gaertner, on the other hand, approached the issue from a different angle, sounding out staff on possible environmental concerns on the site that could arise from construction. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the property in question received some "unknown fill" and questions cropped up on whether or not the soil could be contaminated, she contended.

"Since then, we have put in a fill bylaw and that bylaw is to moderate the kind of fill we're getting and that it is not going to compromise the environment," she said. "My two concerns are building a tower of this type is obviously going to take some earth out of the ground. If that earth remains on the property it is not an issue but if that earth is taken off the property whose responsibility is it to ensure that earth is tested and disposed of properly? If the earth is disturbed, the groundwater is potentially going to be disturbed and we have residents who have wells in that area. Who is going to ensure there is no effect on the residents' well water?"

While the responsibility would ultimately land with the applicant, Mr. Ramunno said a further report to Council would outline how much the site would need to be altered to accommodate the tower.

Further questions were raised on the future of the technology.

Councillor Tom Mrakas, for instance, questioned whether a recently approved pilot project and partnership with Bell Canada for small cell technology on area lamp posts in select areas could be extended into this area, he was told by staff this would have little impact as small cell technology is intended to boost data rather than cellular coverage.

Councillor Kim questioned whether the Region of York's Broadband Strategy, which is due to come forward this fall, could have any impact on Council's decision regarding this tower.

Council voted 5 to 2 in favour of consent.