

Proposed cell tower generates discussion

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Stephen D'Agostino, lawyer for Thomson Rogers, representing Rogers Communications Inc., makes a presentation to council and residents, to show them the proposed tower location, Aug. 27.
Photo by Megan Huff

Marmora and Lake – As part of the consultation process between Rogers and the Municipality of Marmora and Lake concerning a proposed 100 metre cell tower, a public meeting was held Aug. 27, to answer questions from council and members of the public.

Stephen D'Agostino, lawyer for Thomson Rogers law firm and Matthew Milligan, representative for Rogers Communications Inc. were on hand to discuss the proposal with about a dozen area residents.

D'Agostino made a presentation to council outlining the need for a new tower, and the steps Rogers has taken according to protocol.

According to D'Agostino, as part of following protocol, Rogers looked for municipal land, and also researched collocating with another

service provider on two existing towers on Highway 7.

However, he said, collocating on the other towers wouldn't provide continuous service throughout the village of Marmora, so Rogers sought out private landowners for property to lease.

And, he said, because Rogers only found out in late June that council had its own protocol that it had passed in February, Rogers looked for property without the aid of council.

As per the protocol Rogers follows for site selection, everyone within three times the tower height, or 300 metres, was sent an information package. Seven packages were mailed out. As well, throughout the month of August, Rogers invited residents to send questions and concerns. All of the information will be submitted to council in a justification report, but that report could take months to compile, D'Agostino said.

Rogers selected the site on James Street because of its high altitude and low visual impact to people passing through the village among other criteria, he said.

"The signal is much like light, it can be blocked," he said. "We had to make it high enough to look down on the town."

D'Agostino also told residents that this isn't the last time Rogers would be visiting the village.

"I don't want you to think this is a one time thing, we're going to be back in five, six, seven years time."

As the number of Rogers cell phone users travelling down Highway 7 rises, more towers will have to be built to accommodate those users, he said.

"The affective radius (of the tower) becomes less and less over the years because of the amount of use," he explained. Each tower can handle about 300 users at once.

As soon as user 301 tries to connect, the tower looks for another place to send its signal, therefore increasing the need for more towers.

The type of tower Rogers is proposing is a guyed tower - 100 metres high with guyed wires stretching to the ground, taking up almost 2.5 acres of land.

In closing, D'Agostino showed residents computer generated images of what the tower would look like from different viewpoints around the area.

"Did Rogers take into consideration if we'd want to see this out our window?" resident Judy Jones questioned.

D'Agostino said out of all the structures Rogers builds, from a visual impact standpoint, the guyed tower is much less invasive than a self supporting tower or a tripole tower.

Michael Brett, who has made two delegations to council in the past regarding the tower, had questions for Mathew Milligan.

Brett asked if Rogers knew the distance between the two cell towers located outside the village, and what other technologies those towers served.

"He should know exactly where those towers are and what's on them," Brett said.

However, D'Agostino told Brett the information was irrelevant to the public meeting.

Questions about real estate also came up, but D'Agostino said the effect on property values is minimal. In a study done by Bob Hughes and Associates in London, Ont., two of the "biggest, ugliest towers" in residential areas were studied, and results showed that real estate values didn't drop, he said.

"It's highly unlikely this tower will have an affect on the land, or it's pricing or marketability."

In an effort to make the tower even less invasive on rural land, D'Agostino said, Rogers has been known to put cedar fencing around the base of the tower to "make it look more natural."

But resident Trish Greena wasn't convinced.

"You can't compare the city to a rural area," she said. "I moved out of the city to get away from all that."

The residents' biggest concern, however, wasn't aesthetics, it was for their health and safety.

Brett contacted Trent University Professor, Madga Havas, who completed a study based around cell towers and health risks associated with them, and asked her to come speak at the meeting.

"I've attended a number of meetings like this, and I was very impressed with Rogers, it looks like they've done their homework," she said. "This is probably the best site, second to collocation."

However, Havas said, despite that, there are still health concerns that need to be addressed.

Havas told council that even though the tower complies with Safety Code Six, a requirement through Health Canada, she's not confident that the tower should be deemed safe.

"Safety Code Six only indicates six minutes of exposure, and the fact that Rogers is below that standard doesn't give me any comfort," she said.

The code measures power density, meaning exposure time to microwaves and it's affects on humans, like heating of the skin, for example.

According to Rogers, within six minutes exposure time within 100 metres, the tower only emits 0.01 per cent of the power density limit, whereas a cordless telephone is much higher at five per cent.

D'Agostino said hot spots in Toronto can emit up to six per cent of the power density limit.

Havas told council that, in many situations, if they turn down Rogers proposal and the decision is made by Industry Canada, the council's decision is overruled.

"Your best bet would be to urge Industry Canada to look at collocation," she said. Havas also told D'Agostino and Milligan that she was "absolutely surprised" they didn't come to council with the required information for residents.

D'Agostino told council that Havas' attendance to the meeting was "unfair" to Rogers, but residents disagreed.

"It's relevant to me, because that's my home," Greena said. "I'm not planning on leaving."

Councillor Bonnie Danes pointed out that this tower is "the start of more towers, because that one tower isn't going to take you to Bancroft," and told attendees that Rogers already has proposals for two more towers in Belleville and Tudor and Cashel.

In an effort to allow more public input, Milligan told council Rogers will extend the deadline for questions and concerns to Sept. 10.

All inquiries must either reach Rogers, or be in the hands of CAO Ron Chittick by that date to be answered in writing by Rogers.

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