



Cell tower decision deferred

Michael Howie, North Oaville Today

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Council has deferred the decision to accept Town staff's recommendations on Oakville's Interim Telecommunications Facilities Protocol, allowing for more public input and additional information on the subject.

At a Planning and Development Council meeting on Monday, March 19, staff presented their recommendations of change for the protocol, which was originally developed in October of 2011.

Council had directed staff to develop the interim protocol when the public grew more concerned with not only the aesthetics of the facilities, but also the potential health risks. The protocol is the Town's way of guiding the installation of telecommunications facilities, such as cellular base stations.

However, Industry Canada (the bureaucracy that issues licences to telecommunications companies and sets the rules governing facility installations) came down hard on the Town's interim protocol.

One of Industry Canada's major concerns about the protocol was the 200-metre setback from sensitive areas (such as residences, schools and day cares).

"With respect to the 200-metre setback, Industry Canada has determined it to be 'onerous,' without justification and unsupportable for their process," read the staff report presented Monday. "It limits the ability for new facilities that potentially already have some form of approval from Industry Canada to be located within areas that require the service."

Additional requirements set forth by the protocol (e.g. covering notification distances, design and setbacks on a lot), were also criticized, according to the report.

Discussion of health concerns was avoided because Industry Canada defers to Health Canada on the matter and the Town has no jurisdiction on the subject.

Though the debate and decision on staff's recommendations was ultimately deferred by unanimous decision of Council, four delegates were heard.

Three residents voiced their concerns primarily over health issues and brought forward research papers that evidence potential ill effects.

Council's interest was particularly piqued when Stephen D'Agostino, a lawyer who represents telecommunications corporations, spoke before Council. D'Agostino made a brief presentation on the requirements of industry to continue improving their network coverage. At one point, he was interrupted by a heckler from the audience.

Following his delegation, Council peppered D'Agostino with questions in relation to his knowledge of the industry, the appeal process with Industry Canada and the legal history of appeals. Many questions were not directly answered, resulting in apparent frustration from Council.

"It sounds like there's a lot of red tape reduction," noted Mayor Rob Burton. "We get blindsided. It doesn't dispose us favourably in your direction."

Rules of Council dictate that a delegation cannot present the same information twice at meetings. As a result, D'Agostino can not speak to the same points again at the future meeting.

A special meeting of Council will be held in the future, at which the Town's Telecommunication Protocol will be discussed, debated and decisions finalized.

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