

Residents mixed on proposed cell tower

By Mark PavilonsEditor

Residents seem to be at odds regarding a proposed cell tower near Pottageville. Rogers is proposing a 50-metre (164-foot) telecommunication tower at 4342 Lloydtown-Aurora Road. The area is identified by the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority and has a neighbouring water course (Pottageville Creek). Some residents, opposed to the plan, have circulated a petition. They contend the impact on health is unclear and controversial, with little to no information on the long term affects. This is compounded by the fact the community relies on well water. In addition, the community has significant concerns for the local wildlife including the bee population, the petition notes. Some homeowners believe that their home value will decrease and the tower would negatively impact their resale. We want to enjoy our rural community without worrying about our health and an eyesore in our backyards. We appreciate the need to improve communications however such towers do not belong within metres of residential homes and water wells. We oppose the telecommunication tower in the Pottageville community. One resident wrote: My family is within direct radius of the radiation coming off this tower. My family is also concerned of the decrease in market value, wrote one concerned resident.

But many other residents have been asking for improved cell service in the area for some time. Barbara Raaflaub wrote to the Township, noting some 47 Pottageville residents in favour of better service. Over the last few years, we have made several attempts to contact the major telecommunication providers, namely Bell Canada and Rogers Communications, with requests to improve cell service in our neighbourhood. To date, our requests have gone unanswered, she said. The topology of our residential hamlet limits access from the nearest local cell tower, which is located in Schomberg. With the Ontario Government's recently tabled budget and commitment to investing in broadband and cellular access, the residents asked for King council endorsement to the cell phone providers, in hopes of getting a swift and effective result to our problem. This investment by the province and your help could represent an example to promote early success as a win/win/win, she wrote. Raaflaub noted a local survey revealed that the majority of residents (65%), have some service, but the service is very poor and about 18% have no service at all. She said there are about three cell phones per household. She pointed out that many residents work from home and being able to use cell phones is essential. Township planner Felix Chau noted the application was formally submitted to the Township on May 30, 2022. The review of the application commenced shortly thereafter and since then, the review process has proceeded, in accordance with the Township's Cell Tower Protocol, which begins with scheduling a Public Information Session to inform the public of the application, and to offer a forum for public feedback. Staff try to avoid holding public open houses in the July and August due to varying availability. As it stands there is a public session slated for Sept. 14, pending formal circulation of the notices. He said this is the earliest opportunity for such a session. Chau did say he's working with the applicant on moving this application forward expeditiously. If there are no major issues with this proposed cell tower, staff are looking at the Sept. 26 or Nov. 7 council meeting to bring forth a report to council.