

Cell tower worries Pickering residents

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PICKERING -- Shyam and Desiree Mahedeo worry for their young children's safety once a cell tower is installed next to a nearby church.

A Rogers wireless cellphone tower, just under 15 metres tall, is set to go on a piece of property at Amberlea Presbyterian Church and has some residents concerned about the health risks.

"They get the dollars, we get radiation," Ms. Mahedeo said of the church, adding a number of young families, and elementary and high schools are in the vicinity.

Pastor Fred Stewart of the church confirmed the tower is on its way up and said after thorough research, he's comfortable the "low-power local" tower won't pose negative health risks.

"To me it's a better option than having the high-beaming ones from the outskirts," he said.

But Pickering City council unanimously approved a motion April 18 asking the federal government to reverse its approval of the tower and talk to the City to find a more appropriate location. Municipalities currently don't have any jurisdiction over cellphone or radio towers. Only plans for towers higher than 15 feet go to council for consultation.

"The bottom line is we don't have approval authority," said planning and development director Neil Carroll. "It's between Industry Canada and the telecommunication providers."

Ward 1 Regional Councillor Jennifer O'Connell, who introduced the motion along with Ward 1 City Councillor Kevin Ashe, noted regardless of whether the towers pose health problems, it's inappropriate in residential neighbourhoods.

"Unfortunately it gets to the point where these things start popping up and it's almost too late," she said.

Mr. Mahedeo, who has an electrical background, said he's read a lot of research online, in magazines and spoke with experts at the recent Total Health Show in Toronto, and has found towers can cause health problems such as cancers.

"We are effectively located in the kill zone of this tower," he said.

Mr. and Ms. Mahedeo have recently stopped attending the church due to their frustration with the project.

Neighbour and parent Elizabeth Bonello said she's found a lot of residents concerned with the plans. While she believes the church elders are decent people with good intentions, "I just believe they haven't done enough research."

But Pastor Stewart noted, "All of the plans for all cell towers have to be passed by Health Canada."

He noted the church will receive \$1,000 per month from Rogers for the land and said the majority of members he's spoken to are not concerned.

"We thought we'd do good with the revenue," he said.

He consulted neighbouring residents and has agreed to fix the fence backing onto their homes when the money first comes in.

Mayor Dave Ryan isn't convinced there are negative health affects associated with the tower, "but that being said, the concern is real and should be acknowledged."

The motion also asks the government to change its policies regarding tower approval and to consult municipalities on all towers regardless of height. It further states Industry Canada should not approve applications the municipality objects to.

"We need to send a message and we need every municipality to join in and to fight this," Coun. O'Connell said.