

Residents say no to Rogers tower

TELECOMMUNICATIONS



John Gleeson Photo

Residents attending last week's information meeting fill out comment sheets and petitions opposing the proposed Rogers cell phone tower on North Road in Gibsons.

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JOHN GLEESON/STAFF WRITER

Residents gave a firm thumbs down to the proposed Rogers telecommunications tower during last week's information meeting on the proposal.

Citing public health concerns, speakers were almost unanimous in urging Gibsons council to reject the company's offer to replace the existing 9-1-1 tower at the North Road fire hall, with many calling for council to enact a bylaw banning cell phone towers within 400 metres of heavily populated areas.

Officials from the Town and Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD) presented two cost options for tower replacement at the Nov. 20 meeting.

Under the first option, the estimated \$120,000 cost would be borne by SCR D residents at a rate of about \$6 per household.

The second option would see Rogers foot the bill for the new tower, while using it to upgrade the company's cell phone service. Rogers would also pay \$12,000 a year to lease the tower from the Town and SCR D.

Local government officials stressed that the current tower will have to be replaced regardless of who pays.

"It's old, it's near the end of its lifespan. It can't be climbed, for example," Gibsons director of planning Andre Boel said.

SCR D community services manager Paul Fenwick said the tower upgrade was critically needed for 9-1-1 services on the Sunshine Coast, and the 40-metre height would be required with or without Rogers' involvement.

Peter Leathley of Rogers said other options to co-locate the company's emitters were explored, but weren't viable as the service needs to be in the heart of Gibsons.

More than a dozen speakers registered their opposition to the Rogers proposal, with many quoting studies that pointed to health risks from exposure to cell phone towers.

While Health Canada and Vancouver Coastal Health have declared the technology safe, speakers argued that Canadian regulators have ignored new scientific data and worked too closely with industry lobbyists.

Leading a petition drive against the Rogers proposal, Gibsons resident Barry Haynes said the \$6-per-household cost would be more palatable than the loss of rental income and reduction in property values that would result from the installation.

"We concluded the Town would probably lose \$25,000 in property taxes if this goes through," Haynes said.

More than 300 people, he said, had signed the petition calling for a bylaw, while another 40 to 50 — about half of those in attendance — added their names during the meeting.

Although they did not address the effectiveness of a bylaw, officials said Industry Canada has the authority to approve tower sites, but in this case the Town and SCRCD can block the project because they own the property.

Feedback from the meeting will be summarized in reports to council and the SCRCD board, which are both expected to consider Rogers' co-location offer next month.