

## Local News

### Communications tower moving to industrial area

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The state government is working out a deal with the town of Middletown and Southgate Concrete to spare Cricklewood and Lakeside residents from being the neighbors of a 400-foot tall emergency communications tower.

Michele Ackles, spokeswoman for the state's department of technology and information, said the state's 800 mhz committee had planned on building the needed tower on the Broad Street maintenance yard belonging to the Department of Transportation despite the objections of neighbors, but changed their minds last week when Middletown offered to pay for the lease on a privately-owned site on Industrial Drive, far from any homes.

The 800 mhz committee is composed of representatives of state agencies that use radios for emergency communications. Their goal in building the Middletown tower is to improve radio communications among police, medics and firefighters in southern New Castle County who cannot get reception inside schools or large commercial buildings.

Ackles said the committee preferred the DelDOT yard site because it was free. But local residents opposed the plan, and Middletown Mayor Ken Branner and State Rep. Bethany Hall-Long worked to try to find an alternate site. In January, the committee voted to build on the DelDOT yard site because two proposed alternative locations on private land were too expensive because of rent charged by landowners.

"It's only about \$750,000 for the tower itself," Ackles said. "But the committee was very concerned about monthly leasing costs for 20 to 25 years."

But last Tuesday, DTI cancelled a hearing with New Castle County over their request of a zoning variance to build the tower within 300 feet of homes, despite county regulations calling for towers to be 500 feet away from residences.

Branner said the town, the state and Southgate Concrete are negotiating a contract whereby the tower would be built on the concrete company's Industrial Drive property and the town would pay the lease instead of the state.

"It just made sense to be able to get it in the industrial park rather than the residential zone," Branner said.

He said the amount of money for the lease has not been finalized.

In explaining why the 800 mhz committee had rejected previous deals, Ackles said the landowners had asked \$3,000 to \$4,000 per month to lease property.

She said a firefighter had offered DTI free land near Odessa, but it was too far away to be useful.

Ackles said other communication towers throughout the state are located on DelDOT property or the equipment is set up on privately-owned towers built for cell phones and other communications.