



Local News

Residents Don't Want Tall Tower Near Their Homes

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If you look at a map of emergency radio coverage in Delaware prepared by the state Department of Technology and Information, you see most of the state covered in a yellow blob representing good reception for police and fire department radios, even inside large buildings.

However, there is a significant hole in the blob, right over the Middletown-Odessa-Townsend area. DTI spokeswoman Michelle Ackles said that hole can make all the difference to medics, firefighters and police who can't always use their radios inside schools or grocery stores.

"An EMT can come in to a grocery store to treat a person, but if he needs to relay information to hospitals or doctors, he has to stop treating the person and go out the door to use the radio," Ackles said.

Fixing this hole is going to require the construction of a 400-foot tall steel tower. Otherwise, new large buildings, including schools, will have to undertake costly wiring projects to make their structures more radio-friendly.

But the proposed site, on the Department of Transportation yard on Summit Bridge Road just outside the town limits of Middletown is drawing criticism from local residents who do not want to live next to such a tall structure.

Diane Schrader is one of many Lakeside residents opposed to building the tower in the DelDOT yard. Schrader said she is not opposed to the tower, only its location near Lakeside, Cricklewood and St. Anne's Church.

She said flashing lights on the tower could trigger epileptic seizures from one elderly neighborhood woman, and that the presence of the tower would hurt the historic value of St. Anne's Church.

"It's a really inappropriate location," she said. "It's too close to people's houses."

She also said the large tower would kill migrating birds who make Noxontown Pond their rest stop.

Originally, the tower was to be less than 300 feet away from the nearest residence. However, Ackles said DTI is now considering a different site on the DelDOT yard farther away from property lines so it will not have to get a variance from the county. Under county zoning, the tower must be 500 feet from residences.

Ackles said DTI is open to other suggestions for locations. They are holding a workshop Thursday from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m., at Everett Meredith Middle School and are willing to investigate other possible, more appropriate locations for the tower if a landowner can offer a good spot within a mile and a half of the

DeIDOT yard. She said the department has already looked at several other locations, but found that most of them just shifted the problem to other neighborhoods. The DeIDOT yard has the advantage of already being owned by the state and being in a county Highway Industrial zone, which allows towers.

Bryant Baker, program manager for the state's initiative to provide 800 mhz radio service to all emergency responders, said the tower may also hold up to three transmitters for cell phone companies. He said this would be beneficial to the public because if the cell phone companies would not have to build more towers around town.

Ackels said she did not know how much the tower would cost to build or how much of that cost would be offset by cell phone deals. She also said DTI does not actively seek cell phone deals, but considers them if they are approached.

She said DTI did not initiate the project, but was building it because the emergency responders need it.

"We didn't just go out and dream this up," she said.

But as many benefits the site has, there are just as many drawbacks, as seen by people who would have to live near it.

"There are all kinds of different factors people are upset about," Schrader said.