

Board gives residents a voice on towers

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An agreement worked out last year had exempted cell phone towers being erected on township-owned properties from the normal notification and zoning approval requirements.

Residents will get a chance to comment about proposed cell phone towers on township-owned properties before they go up, it was decided at Tuesday night's Middletown supervisors meeting.

The issue arose when Mike Field, who along with his wife, Karen, operates a pick-your-own fruit business on the township-owned Styer property, told the board he was alarmed to learn of plans to erect a cell phone tower on part of the property. It's proposed for a spot near the newly opened fire and ambulance substation on Langhorne-Yardley Road.

Field said he received no notification from the township about the proposed tower. Last year, the supervisors approved an agreement with a company called Tower One that calls for the firm to seek out suitable cell phone tower locations on township-owned lands. A subsequent change to township zoning law exempts towers on these lands from the normal notification and zoning approval requirements.

"That no real effort was made to get people's comments about the tower is what irks me most," said Field.

Supervisors chairman Tom Gallagher agreed. He said he was surprised to find recently that a cell phone tower had been erected on some township-owned land near his house in the Highland Park section of Levittown in Middletown.

"I personally have a problem with that," said Gallagher. "The previous board apparently exempted these towers on township-owned lands from the zoning ordinances. It might be legally correct but it's not morally correct. People have a right to know that a cell phone tower is going up near their house before it goes up."

New supervisors Gallagher, Drew Kreiling and Patrick Mallon were not on the board when the agreement with Tower One was approved.

The agreement provides that the township will get \$50,000 a year in rent for each tower on township-owned properties. That revenue will help make things easier on taxpayers, said supervisor Robert McMonagle.

"This (agreement) was discussed exhaustively, on television, at two meetings," he said. "There are going to be cell phone towers all along the I-95 corridor from Maine to Florida, and I think Middletown should get in on that revenue."

While agreeing the township needs the money, Mallon said it's only fair for residents to get a chance to comment about proposed cell phone towers before they are erected.

Township Manager Ray Stepnoski said he would provide the supervisors with information on all cell phone towers planned for township-owned lands and arrange for the information to be put on the township's cable television channels or publicized in other ways.

Chris English can be reached at 215-949-4193 or cenglish@phillyBurbs.com.

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