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Planned telecommunications tower will bring Internet to rural residents

Halton Hills Fibre Optics is waiting for site-plan approval from the Town of Halton Hills Planning Department for a 220 ft. telecommunications tower proposed to go up on Fifth Line near Hwy. 7.

The tower is to provide wireless Internet connection, called Hummingbird Wireless, for the company's customers in Acton, south Erin, the rural areas north of Halton Hills, Rockwood and Ospringe.

"Our goal is to bring high-speed Internet to the fringe areas," said Dan Guatto, president of Halton Hills Fibre Optics, which currently has 196 customers.

He estimates the new tower, to be constructed on an approximately 1/3 acre property owned by Halton Hills Hydro, will be able to serve the more than 100 customers who have been waiting for the service, but were unable to have it because it wasn't available in their area.

Guatto explained Hummingbird is two-way fast, which he said means it is fast for both downloading and uploading.

"We don't want to get into the game of using larger bandwidth numbers than we actually provide, which is done. We're going to market it on the (surfing) experience," said Guatto.

Although lights are not required by Transport Canada on the tower, the company is considering them as

an option. The company is working closely with Rogers Communications, Halton Regional Police and Halton Hills Fire Department who are all interested in utilizing the tower as well.

Guatto said it is hoped that approval will come soon so the company can install the tower's concrete base before the end of the year.

They hope to have the tower up and functional within the first quarter of 2006.

Curtis Marshall of the Town of Halton Hills Planning Department said Halton Hills Fibre Optics, a subsidiary of Halton Hills Hydro, has not yet received final site plan approval for the tower, but he believes conditional approval will be issued very soon.

He said no agencies have raised concerns about the tower although the Town has received one objection from a member of the public, and Planning Department staff is attempting to contact that person to discuss their concerns.

At a public meeting held recently a man said he was concerned about a company supported by tax dollars getting into the communication business. He questioned if the company had the expertise.

Guatto said the company cannot legally use hydro rates or tax rates and said the company is successful already.

—By Lisa Tallyn, staff writer

Town adopts new protocol for towers

The Town of Halton Hills has adopted a telecommunication towers protocol, which will guide staff when making recommendations to the federal government about proposals.

The Town does not the final say about the location of these towers within its boundary—that's the jurisdiction of the federal government. This protocol is only designed to provide Town staff guidance before providing comments on the proposal.

Councillor Joan Robson questioned whether the wording "strongly discouraged" had enough force when referring to the location of towers within environmentally

sensitive areas.

Director of Planning Bruce MacLean told her "strongly discouraged" is equivalent to "prohibit—we don't want them there".

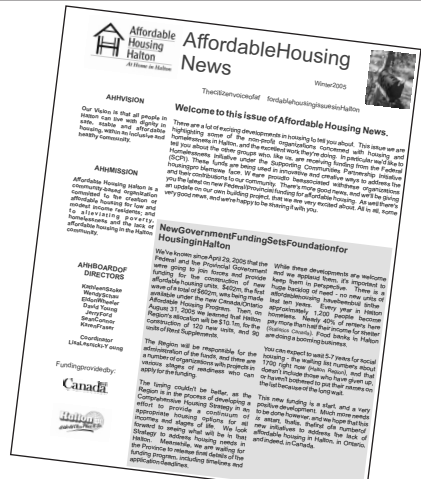
"But I cannot give you assurance that maybe the odd situation which arises wherein it is located in some area which some people think is environmentally sensitive."

But he added in his negotiations during past experiences with those trying to get the tower, "our words carried significant weight," he said.

Robson requested, and got, a revision to the protocol asked that a project be considered 'minor', provided that the height did not exceed the original design by 10-15 per cent.

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Topics covered in Newsletter: Response to new government funding announcement, AHH's building project, Community Partner Award presentation, Overview of the Federal government's Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) activities in Halton, AHH membership information.