Attn. Industry Canada: comments on Canada’s Antenna Tower Siting Procedures

I am writing to state a number of concerns and objections to the proposed Bell cell phone tower, Stoco Lake W4522 in the village of Tweed, Ontario.

I am a signatory to a petition with at least 150 names opposed to the tower and since hearing of this I have joined a group called Tweed Citizens for Safe Technology. On January 28, 2014, I attended a meeting of the Municipality of Tweed council and listened to comprehensive and pointed delegations asking that Council not concur with Bell’s proposal. Council’s response was that they were not able to concur given the opposition to the tower until there was a public meeting with residents of Tweed. They asked (with some frustration) that a member of Industry Canada be present given that they were in no position of any real power anyway, the final say being in the hands of the federal Industry Canada.

As it turned out, a public meeting was announced and held on March 27 but in fact it was an infomercial for Bell Canada. The format precluded statements of fact from experts in the field and from residents. Questions were allowed but answers were only to come from Bell representatives who skilfully avoided real answers to many of the questions and stayed on their message, using up the limited time of the meeting, with repetition that they needed this location and this one only, that people wanted this service, that they would not have the needed capacity for the town without a tower like this, that it was following federal safety codes, etc. etc. It became clear through the meeting that Bell had made many mistakes in the original siting of this proposal, using outdated maps, being unaware of new residential development very near the tower and not even having the correct name of the river next to the site. Nevertheless, according to Mr. Matthew Milligan, the bell rep, the consultation period for this tower was over, which begs the question, what were they doing in front of more than seventy citizens if all these concerned people had no more than an opportunity to ask questions?

Not only that, one Bell “consultant engineer”, Agneszki Zubek, denigrated cancer specialist Dr. Anthony Miller and contradicted his information with specious examples of everyday carcinogens, mentioning caffeine and pickles, which provided a good laugh for an very uneducated crowd. Close examination of the report by the International Agency for Research on Cancer does not show caffeine as a 2B cancer risk but a 3 and oriental pickled vegetables are mentioned as a 2B with a date of 1993. Clearly her intention in using that one was to minimize the message from Dr. Miller who stated that in his expert opinion the 2B category, that is “possible carcinogen” for wireless transmission frequencies should be changed to a 2A “probable carcinogen” because of research more recent than 2011. This unethical and insulting behaviour was, in my opinion, capped by finding at the end of the evening that Ms. Elizabeth Newell, the real estate agent who moderated the meeting, threatened to call the police to stop
one of our members from setting up a book and information table at the back of the room. Their answer was that it wasn’t a public meeting, it was a Bell question and answer session and that the room was paid for by Bell! So if Bell pays for the room, no other voice or information is allowed? What kind of public meeting shuts down the public’s right to information? How is this a public consultation?

And where is the integrity of Council in allowing a meeting that has only the proponents point of view? Perhaps it just seemed easier that way and cheaper too. Only one member of Council had the courage to ask questions on the behalf of the citizens of Tweed.

To add insult to injury, there was no representative from Industry Canada, and neither was there anyone from MP Daryl Kramp’s office, he who had grandly announced in local papers that he had asked for more consultation on cell phone towers as there are several going up in his riding. Given the announcement from the Federal Government on Feb. 5 that a more extensive public consultation would be required on all cell towers, it is discouraging that in this case, they did not show up. Perhaps they feel the meeting was inconsequential to the outcome, as Bell apparently does.

A new Roger’s tower on Crookston Road has been given the go-ahead, with construction expected soon. Apparently it will easily fill the needs of this village for wireless internet capacity. It is also our understanding that the guidelines from Industry Canada mandate the sharing of towers by the competing companies. Could Industry Canada intervene in this case and require Bell to work with Rogers and spare our residents the Bell tower which is highly controversial and very close to homes and recreational facilities for children?

I believe that there a number of issues that are of importance in our case in Tweed and concerning cell phone towers in general.

Many experts have serious doubts as to the efficacy of Safety Code 6 as a standard for the industry. Many countries and regions demand a higher standard of safety for their citizens. Wireless technology has not been around long enough to know its true risks to our health and especially to our children. But many studies are bringing forward indications of serious potential harm. Not only can the towers be harmful, but the widespread proliferation of Wi-fi in schools and public places is very concerning, given that many of us are finding out only now that there is potential harm in this radiation and that electromagnetic sensitivity is making many people ill and having unknown effects on the rest of us. Who will be liable if there is an epidemic of cancers from this technology? How about lowered fertility and birth defects? Apparently other non-wireless technologies are available that have a much higher level of health safety. Why are we not given this choice and why is not this choice promoted by Industry Canada instead of wireless? Why is Canada’s government not examining this industry? Why
are health effects not considered valid objections to wireless installations? As more is known, why are citizens told that they are unable to object on these grounds?

Why do citizens have no right to object to cell towers in residential neighbourhoods on the basis of loss to their property values? Most residents close to this tower feel that it will be an unsightly and ominous addition to their neighbourhood and already sales of property near the location have fallen through because of the tower proposal. No one wants a tower in their back yard, but it’s surprising how many people are comfortable with one in someone else’s back yard.

Why is there no right of choice, no truly democratic process by which residents can be effective in stopping installations like this?

Why are town Councils put in the onerous position of having a negligible say but being at the brunt of controversy? Often local councillors have alliances with some members of the town that may influence their decisions, which may very well be the case here. Residents near to towers and opposed may be over-ridden for reasons that are due to random local politics. And by no means do local town councils have expert knowledge in these matters or even a background that would help them to have an understanding of their own ignorance. As indeed is the case with many of us. This is not easy technology to understand, the industry has made it easy to use, but has not given us what we need to know about the risks.

Why should corporations in a mad rush to impose this technology for their profit have such a permissive regulatory structure supporting them at the expense of all of us citizens?

I believe that the rapid introduction and acceptance of this technology has made vast populations of humans and very sensitive species of animals and insects and our very important pollinators, the bees, into experimental guinea pigs, and that we will find out in years to come what the true effects of this will be. In the process, many people have embraced the benefits of the wireless revolution to the point that they believe they cannot live without it, and are unwilling to entertain real concerns. In this case are the opinions of citizens even the most valid indicator of how technology should proceed? Wireless technology may follow scientific advances like leaded gasoline, DDT, PCB’s, asbestos, thalidomide, neonictinoids, just to mention a few of the unholy marriages between science and industry that turned out to be seriously harmful to life. What will it take to have wisdom and a precautionary principle prevail over a merely and madly profit-driven ethic?

I would ask that your committee review and change your guidelines regarding cell phone towers and the wireless industry, taking into account the experiences of citizens all over Canada and new research that raises concerns. On February 5 2014 James Moore announced that that “Companies have an obligation to consult with local citizens before a tower is built.” That the
consultation process be open, well publicized and fair. A Bell info-merc, with the rules, the message and the room set up and paid for by Bell and Bell only is not a public consultation process. And in respect to Bell tower Stoco Lake W4522 do the responsible thing, listen to concerned citizens of Tweed and mandate Bell to use the Roger’s tower.

Respectfully,

Sue Vander Wey