

NM rejects cellphone tower near school

Opponents cited appearance, health risks

BY KENDEL MURRANT
For The Star-News

The New Meadows City Council on Tuesday unanimously denied a request from AT&T to install a 75-foot cell tower near Meadows Valley School. Fourteen New Meadows residents spoke against the measure during a public hearing. Letters were also submitted to the council, and more than 160 people signed a petition to block the tower's installation.

Jeffery Roff, who initiated the petition, pleaded with city council members to deny the permit, saying more than

a third of the city's voting public had signed the petition.

"I'm not here to talk about health issues; just facts," Roff said. "These citizens are unhappy. The citizens are asking you to look out for our interest."

"Based on the signatures on the petition and the statements at the P&Z meeting, the community is against the application," Shannon Berry said.

Various Reasons Cited

Opponents cited potential health risks, economic backlash, and visual detraction from the city's and valley's natural beauty as reasons to stymie the proposal.

"This is a scenic area and it would really be a shame to spoil our beauty with a giant cell tower with a flashing light," Steve Berry said.

Others said they were not opposed to the installation of a tower, but were concerned over the chosen location in the city's industrial park near the school.

"If you want to have this tower, go ahead, but put it out in a cow pasture," Ann DeChambeau said.

"I'm not against the service, but I want to protect the kids," Meadows Valley School Principal Edward Kalinowski said.

The possible long-term health affects of a cell tower were a concern to many at the meeting.

Several parents stated they would pull their children from the school and enroll them in McCall schools.

"I have already talked to McCall about taking my kids there, and they said other parents have called too," Brandy Richards said.

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Tower

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Kelly Nelson, owner of Nelson Machining & Manufacturing, Inc., said he and his four employees would not continue to work at their location in the industrial park if the cell tower were installed there.

"My employees stated in writing that they would not work that close to the cell tower," Nelson said.

"It'll cost me. I'll have to build somewhere else or move to McCall, but I don't want to do that," Nelson said.

'Emotional' Concerns

AT&T representative Don Shiveley stated that arguments against the tower had become "emotional," and reassured the council that the tower would be a boon for the town by bringing the latest phone technology to businesses and residents.

"The concerns with the students and youth of the town are an emotional concern," Shiveley said. "But the community outside New Meadows has embraced this as an acceptable utility out there, like gas, like electricity, like water." AT&T has multiple towers in Idaho and across the county near schools, churches, hospitals, and other consistently populated locations without any adverse affects, he said. Support for the tower's installation also came from the Adams County Sheriff's

Office and from former McCall radio station owner Dave Eaton, who said he has operated cell towers on No Business Lookout with success. "After I built (two towers) at No Business ... which provides cell service to New Meadows, there has never been a question of health hazard whatsoever," said Eaton, former owner of KMCL-FM.

New Meadows would have received \$500 a month in rent and would have added market value to the community and reduced the town's levy rate, City Clerk Mac Qualls said.

After a brief discussion, each of the town's four council members and New Meadows Mayor Julie Spelman stated that they would not support the permit.

"My job is represent you, and my vote is no," council member Angie Moore said.

"I just feel that our community doesn't want it where it is, and they elected us to do a job for them and represent them," council member Heather Wilde said.

"I don't find that it's that harmful in the studies, but I wouldn't hurt one of those kids for nothing," council member DeOle Priddy said. "Whether they have the correct information or not, this isn't what they want," council member Gina Mencer said.

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