

Cell Towers and Antennas

For the past two years, the County Executive and the County Council have been working to establish new rules for the placement of antennas and cell towers to support wireless networks. According to Council President Hans Riemer in his statement on October 31, 2018, the industry "...is running out of capacity on wireless networks in the County due to growing demand (i.e., us on our phones, and everyone having multiple devices) and they need to place antennas at the street level. The industry is also working on a new technology, 5g, that will be way faster than 4g (think 40g), but also it requires antennas at the street level, rather than up on tall towers."

It must be noted that current federal government policy, particularly as established by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), prohibits local governments from establishing rules and regulations that would prevent the cell tower and antenna industry from building what they deem to be the required infrastructure. Earlier in 2018, the Council approved new rules for the placement of towers and antennas in commercial areas.

In the fall of 2018 the Council considered a proposal by the County Executive to establish new regulations for the placement of towers and antennas in residential areas. These regulations met with considerable opposition from residents for three primary reasons:

1. The lack of opportunity for a hearing on a proposed antenna installation on an existing pole, e.g. on a street light pole.
2. The reduction of the distance that towers and antennas had to be set back from homes from 60 feet to 30 feet
3. The failure of the county in the past to ensure proper placement of new poles.

It must be further noted that under current federal rules and regulations, the health effects of exposure to cell tower emissions cannot be considered as a reason for denying a new tower.

At a Council meeting on October 30, 2018, it was clear that the proposed new regulations (known as ZTA18-11) would not be approved by a majority of the Council, and the proposal was consequently withdrawn from consideration.

Council President Riemer said that revised regulations would be taken up by the new council after it was elected on November 6 and formally installed.

This page will be regularly updated as events warrant.