



Cell Tower Proposal

Community Update and Fact Sheet, October 2009

Background: Seeking Non-Tax Revenue

Last year, as the district grappled with the impact of the unfolding financial crisis on its budget, it stepped up its search for non-property tax revenue sources. One of the ideas that came along was the prospect of leasing some district-owned land to a firm that develops communications towers and rents space on them to cell phone carriers. Investigating this possibility is at a very preliminary stage.

The process will not be fast.

It will take quite some time — likely a year or more — before any final decisions are made. A handful of agencies, or more, will play some role in the review, which will include the stringent State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) process. For applications with the town of Bethlehem, the district will need approval from both the Zoning Board of Appeals and Planning Board. Each of these processes will require a public hearing. Construction approval will also be necessary from the New York State Department of Education. Applicants for cell towers must also prove to the Federal Communications Commission that their project will fall below permissible radio frequency emission limits.

The Board of Education has not approved the construction of any cell towers.

The Board, heeding the call of community members to seek non-tax revenue, is simply investigating this possibility. As with any decision, the Board is highly interested in public input.

There are currently cell tower locations in the community, and others are proposed.

As public discussion surrounding this issue unfolds, community members should be aware that there are already cell towers in the community at locations such as the town's water towers both adjacent to Bethlehem Central Middle School and in the vicinity of the Elm Avenue Town Park, and in Glenmont off of Route 32 and on Route 9W. There are also other towers proposed for non-school district properties (also in the vicinity of schools). Also, Saratoga Springs High School and Schuylerville High School are two school locations in the region that are cell tower sites.

The district would never jeopardize the health and safety of students or residents.

According to the Federal Communications Commission, "radiofrequency emissions from antennas used for cellular and PCS transmissions result in exposure levels on the ground that are typically thousands of times below safety limits." Health and safety concerns will be evaluated and answered as part of the review process. For frequently asked questions regarding radio frequency safety, visit the FCC's site at <http://www.fcc.gov/oet/rfsafety/rf-faqs.html#Q16>.

Three sites for towers are currently being evaluated — and the location of any tower would be some distance from the school buildings and playgrounds.

The three sites are areas on the properties of Clarksville Elementary School, Hamagrael Elementary School and property adjoining Bethlehem Central High School and the district's Operations and Maintenance facility on Elm Avenue. All three sites will not necessarily be formally proposed, depending upon factors that may include suitability, the approval process and public input.

The district will update residents about this process through its Web site.

At this time, the district has filed its initial application with the Town of Bethlehem, and it is before the Zoning Board of Appeals for consideration for a special use permit. The district has not yet submitted any application to the town of New Scotland regarding the Clarksville Elementary School property. Stay tuned to www.bethlehemschools.org for updates on this process, including opportunities for public input. Outside of regular Board of Education meetings, special public information and comment meetings will be scheduled.