

Board to consider locations for cell towers

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The township could reap about \$7.5 million over the next 29 years, or an average of almost \$260,000 a year, if all potential cell tower sites are approved.

Those tall, imposing cell phone towers no one likes to look at but just about everyone needs could be going up at several more locations in Middletown.

Nicholas Pullen, one of the owners of TowerOne Partners, outlined to the council five more possible locations where cell phone towers could be erected and produce rental income for Middletown.

Three of the locations are owned by the township. They are the Middletown Country Club on Bellevue Avenue, Middletown Community Park on Langhorne-Yardley Road and Poplar Park on Poplar Street.

The other two spots are private lands where the township would have to work out an agreement to get an easement on the land and then split rental income with the landowner, said Pullen. Those locations are a spot near Core Creek Park and one on Woodbourne Road about a mile from Twin Oaks Park.

If all potential cell phone tower sites are eventually approved, Middletown would get about \$7.5 million in rental income over the next 29 years, an average of almost \$260,000 a year, Pullen estimated.

Supervisors Chairman Tom Gallagher said each location will be considered individually by the board, and residents will have a chance to comment before any final approvals are granted.

The supervisors last year approved an agreement with Doylestown-based TowerOne to market cell phone tower sites in the township. That agreement and subsequent changes to the zoning ordinance allow Middletown to erect towers on township-owned lands without going through the usual resident notification and zoning process.

Supervisors Gallagher, Patrick Mallon and Drew Kreiling took office in January and were not on the board when the TowerOne agreement was approved. Board member George Leonhauser said he remembered voting only to negotiate with TowerOne and not on the final agreement.

Leonhauser added it was his impression that all cell phone tower sites would still be subject to the notification and zoning process.

Gallagher said he was recently alarmed to see that a cell phone tower had been erected on a piece of township-owned land near his house in the Highland Park section of Levittown in Middletown.

That tower was erected under the agreement with TowerOne.

"Residents had no prior knowledge," said Gallagher. "They went to work and came home to see a cell phone tower practically in their backyard. These things have to be advertised and come before this board for consideration. Going forward, residents will be able to comment before these towers go up."

Added Mallon, "We have to look at every possible way to raise revenue without raising taxes, but we also need to communicate with our citizenship about when these things are taking place."

Several nearby residents are upset about plans to erect a tower on part of the township-owned Styer property. It would go up near the recently opened fire and ambulance substations building just off Langhorne-Yardley Road.

Tim Field, who helps his parents Mike and Karen Field run a pick-your-own fruit business on the Styer land, said Monday night he believed allowing a cell phone tower violates the agreement under which Middletown acquired the land in 1999.

Township Manager Ray Stepnoski has denied that contention.

"We're seriously considering (requesting a court) injunction against this being built," Tim Field said.

The agreement with TowerOne states Middletown gets 40 percent of the rental income from each cell phone carrier with an antenna attached to a tower on township-owned land, said Pullen. That's about \$10,000 a year for the township from each carrier, he added.

Each tower can hold up to six antennas, which would add up to \$60,000 a year for Middletown, Pullen said. That amount goes up 3 percent annually each year of the standard 29-year lease agreement, he added.

"Cell phone use has gone up dramatically over the last 20 years and the need for these towers will continue to grow," Pullen said. "All the smart phones are really taxing the network. We know this income (from cell phone towers) is not a panacea for all that ails the township financially, but we certainly hope it can help."

Robert McMonagle, the only supervisor other than Leonhauser who was on the board when the TowerOne agreement was approved, said more and more cell phone towers will inevitably be erected so the township might as well get in on the revenue, especially in these economically distressed times.

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