

Testimony presented at D.C. Zoning Commission
Tower Construction Round Table

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Good evening. My name is Cecily Patterson. I want to preface my remarks by noting that I am speaking tonight not only as the Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner for Single Member District (SMD) 4B02, I am also representing fellow colleague Sara Green, Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner for SMD 4B01. I am not representing nor speaking for the whole of Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B.

SMD 4B01 and 4B02 run from the edge of the city at Eastern Avenue, N.W. to Silver Spring, Maryland on the east, Georgia Avenue on the west to the north side of Whittier Street, N.W. on the south.

Like most city residents, we were concerned by news that a 75 foot broadcast tower was being built at 41st and Brandywine Streets, N.W., especially without notice to the Advisory Neighborhood Commission or the community, in general. Our concern was then compounded when we learned that mistakes had been made in the approval process which resulted in lawsuits that will likely cost the city millions of dollars.

Unfortunately, this is not a new issue and it continues to affect communities all over the city.

Over a decade ago, residents in our community in Ward 4 were surprised to see a tall radio/television tower going up at the 4th Precinct Police Station on Georgia Avenue. Again, no one in the community was notified about this project. When neighbors complained, they were told that no notification was necessary because the construction took place on D.C.-owned property and that its purpose was to improve 911-emergency services.

It turned out that a private, for-profit, television station was to use the tower facilities as well, but many of the financial details did not have to be disclosed to the public because city officials considered it a D.C. government project.

ZONING COMMISSION
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CASE NO. 01-02
EXHIBIT NO. 13

Today, the burgeoning electronic communications industry is telling us these structures are necessary to secure the District's new high tech economy. But residents are skeptical and with good reason. We are not being notified and we are not being assured that adequate safeguards are in place to protect us from public health hazards and from inappropriate and poorly designed construction.

We ask that the D.C. Zoning Commission ensure that:

1. Communities and Advisory Neighborhood Commissions be notified of any proposed tower and antenna construction, including construction on D.C. or Federal government-owned property or foreign embassies.
2. Companies coordinate and work together to avoid duplicative and unnecessary construction. Isn't it possible for several companies to use one tower?
3. We need to know that new construction will actually result in improved emergency/911 service. Recently, my elderly mother was lost in Rock Creek Park. She had a cell phone, but could not make a connection in the park. Emergency coverage must extend to isolated areas like Rock Creek Park, Fort Dupont, Haines Point, and other areas.
4. Significant set-backs are provided to protect the public from falling debris, ice, and other hazards. That means that streets, sidewalks, green space, and other typical set-backs should not be included in the calculations for necessary set-backs for these structures.
5. Additional set-backs should be required when towers are built close to schools, nursing homes, hospitals, and other health and education facilities.
6. Applicants should provide detailed information to the commission and to residents about emissions from the towers they propose to build and actual current measurements of cumulative radiation exposure from all sources at the site. We have been told that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) does not have the resources to monitor installations. So, the zoning commission must require that companies who want to build within D.C. show their facilities are in compliance with FCC emission standards.

7. Approved antenna and tower facilities come up for review, say every five years. Residents need to know that these facilities are being adequately maintained and that emissions are within a safe range. All records and independent evaluations of emissions should be available for public review. We have similar review requirements for businesses that sell alcohol or handle toxic waste. This new technology, which also affects public health, should be treated with similar concern.

Thank you for your consideration.