

LAURA AKGULIAN

8 February 2001

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Alberto Bastida
Secretary to the Zoning Commission
District of Columbia Zoning Commission
441 4th Street, NW, Room 210
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Case #00-29TA, Antenna Tower

Dear Mr. Bastida,

Here is the testimony I was going to present at the hearing on February 5. Since the hearing was postponed, Commissioner Hood suggested mailing it to you for circulation to the Commission.

Thanks for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Laura Akgulian

Laura Akgulian

~~ZONING COMMISSION
CASE NO. 00-29TA
EXHIBIT NO. 15~~

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ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.01-02
EXHIBIT NO.15

TO: District of Columbia Zoning Commission
441 4th Street, NW, Room 210 S
Washington, DC 20001

FROM: Laura Akgulian
4114 Ellicott Street, NW
Washington, DC 20016-1702
202-537-5996 (home/office)

DATE: 7 February 2001

RE: Case #00-29TA, Antenna Tower
5 February 2001 (postponed)

TESTIMONY

Honorable members of the Zoning Commission,

Thank you for this opportunity to express our thoughts about zoning and antennas.

Zoning, I believe, is particularly important to the people of the District of Columbia. My family and I have lived here 20-some years and hope to live here many more. As you know, we pay federal taxes yet have no votes in Congress. This is the only city in the nation where the long arm of Congress can reach into our lives to set up a control board, overturn referendums, and just about anything else it chooses.

That's why zoning matters so much. People here already are denied a voice at the congressional level. If our *local* government deprives us of the right to participate in *our own community's development*, it robs us of our last chance to exercise any measure of control over our lives. That in turn erodes our sense of civic duty and our ability to work together as a community.

One reason many residents were appalled by the proposed new broadcast tower in Tenleytown is that we were never notified about the tower in advance, much less permitted to express our ideas, explore options, ask questions, or voice concerns. This is unacceptable. No city should ever shut its citizens out of a process that directly affects their lives.

We need you to protect our right to support or oppose new antenna towers and other development projects through our ANC's. We need you to safeguard our health and well-being—and that of all of the other people who live, work, or go to school near antenna towers. We need you to be cautious and fair in the way you permit or deny new development in predominantly residential areas. This is what people *in every ward* are banking on you to do.

Much has been made of the notion that the District might lag behind without the "new technology" these towers and antennas will provide. Technology is a double-edged sword. Because it's new, it's also fresh

and tantalizing. That means, however, that sometimes we get swept up in the latest wave of technological change without adequately studying its effects.

Donald Rumsfeld, the newly appointed Secretary of Defense, has written a 19-page handout called "Rumsfeld's Rules." One of his rules is this, and I quote: "Beware when any idea is promoted primarily because it is 'bold, exciting, innovative and new.' There are many ideas that are 'bold, exciting, innovative and new,' but also foolish."

Erecting is the easy part; protecting is the challenge. The long-term effects of exposure to radiation from antennas and antenna towers have yet to be determined and are hotly debated among researchers. Assurances from industry are not the same thing as objective long-term scientific studies. Epidemiology must always play catch-up with technology. It takes many years—even decades—for researchers to analyze what effects a technology or product will have on animals and human beings and to accumulate definitive medical evidence. You'd need several dozen hands and feet to count the number of times a product or byproduct that at first was deemed harmless was later declared hazardous—dioxin, asbestos, DDT, the list goes on and on.

Everything has an effect on something else, and every human activity alters our environment in subtle or obvious ways. Only time will tell if the change is sustainable. In the meantime, why expose one group to all the risk? Four of the five broadcast towers above 400' in the District are located in Ward 3. The proposed new 756' tower, which Mayor Williams prudently halted in part because of its illogical location, would make the fifth mega-tower in a heavily populated area that also serves as home to numerous schools.

Is there a connection between these towers and some of the troubling health effects that have come to light recently? Groups of women in their 40s have begun comparing notes about why so many of them are experiencing breast cancer. The only common denominator they've discovered so far is they have all lived in Tenleytown for a decade or more. Are their illnesses related to the broadcast towers? To the water? The soil? Something else? Nobody knows for sure yet. But these people are alarmed—for themselves, their families, friends, and neighbors—and they plan to pursue this vigorously. In the meantime, prudence is paramount.

The last thing we want is to become human guinea pigs. One stated purpose of the city's antenna regulations is to protect residents' "health, welfare, or safety." Since no one is monitoring the output or the effects of the current antenna towers on our health or safety, my family and I believe it is incumbent on the Commission to proceed with the utmost care. We strongly believe that all antennas and antenna towers that violate the Height Act should be allowed only as a special exception and should be open to public review. We also believe that adding more antennas to existing towers must be strictly reviewed and regulated to protect those who spend time in close proximity to these devices.

We ought to rely on good old-fashioned common sense. *Just as you don't put all your eggs in one basket, you don't put all your towers in a single locale.* These structures serve the whole metropolitan area. So spread the technology around! Consider placing them in outlying areas with low population density. Work with Virginia and Maryland to identify sites throughout the entire geographical region the towers will serve. Ask yourselves whether our city really needs another tower or whether smaller antennas scattered throughout the area would accomplish the same objective while reducing the risk to the population. It's time we recognized the value of careful, sensible bio-regional planning.

Our future is in your hands. It's up to you, our city officials, to foster responsible growth. Thank you so much for your time.