

Resident questions on cell tower application status in Charlton (as of 12/21/18)

The following are some questions posed to Supervisor Alan Grattidge and Councilman Joe Grasso recently by Ken Crotty (Charlton resident), and Councilman Joe Grasso's responses:

1. What will it take for the Town to get this done? Including -not- just sitting on our hands waiting for Verizon to wake up.

Unfortunately the Town has not received a complete application on which to act. The Bowitch and Coffey letter brings up many very salient points that, although appearing easy to address by a cell provider, require action by the applicant, not the Town. The Town also had some basic questions and requests of the applicant, to which Verizon failed to respond. These items are required in order for any decision by the Town to be able to withstand a legal challenge. I call Verizon's representatives regularly letting them know the Town is anxious to move the application forward. Note that they have not officially "withdrawn" their application at 764 Charlton Road, but we consider it inactive for their failure to respond in over a year. Their representative has indicated that they may advance the application some time in 2019, which would then put it on a construction schedule for 2020. It is important to note that one new cellular location in Town, although sorely needed and desired, will not provide sufficient cellular coverage throughout the whole Town of Charlton. There have been some questions about cell coverage at Town Hall. As you can likely attest to due to your attendance at many Town Hall meetings, cellular coverage at Town Hall is extremely poor, hence the reason sites both to the north and south of Town Hall have been considered for cellular equipment.

2. What is the Town doing to resolve the issues in the February Lawyers letter?

The Bowitch and Coffey letter raises many issues, some of which have already been addressed by the Town Board during its year long review of alternative cell sites to which the letter fails to recognize. Other items in the letter require action by the applicant. Some procedural items included in the letter will be completed by the Town as part of the application's due process. Doing these things without an active applicant exposes the Town to a legal challenge and could easily delay an otherwise viable application.

3. Can the town ask Verizon to hide the tower installation with camouflage suggestions like trees, silos, and other things?

Yes, the Town can, and the Town Board has already asked Verizon to consider making the proposed tower north of Charlton Road to look like a pine tree, although given the tower's proposed height of 120 feet, this needs to be carefully considered. Making the tower look like a 120 foot silo is impractical, as most silos are in the range of forty to sixty feet. The many studies already done have proven that a tower would need to be over 100 feet above grade level to be effective in the desired coverage zone. Adding on other carriers adds another 10 to 20 feet to the required height of the structure. A silo at that height would be visually obtrusive.

4. The comments on the neighborhood blog are becoming stronger. Are you in touch with that?

I try to follow along comments and questions that pertain to the Town of Charlton on Charlton Next Door, but prefer residents contact me directly at 518-257-0224 or at councilmangrasso@townofcharlton.org. I'm not a fan yet of the use of social media by elected officials. As a Town Board we try to speak of resident's questions and concerns during Town Board meetings so that it can be discussed when the full Board is present and can be included in our meeting minutes which are always posted on the Town's official website. I would like to get more feedback on our residents' desire for Town Board use of social media. Any such use should have full Town Board support.

5. Should a public referendum be considered to show public support for a cell tower?

Regarding the need for a public referendum on the issue, I don't believe one is needed and it would not make the approval process go any quicker. Our Zoning outlines a straight forward process for the Town to review an application and we will follow the appropriate procedures. An alternative to a referendum would be to circulate a resident petition indicating residents' desire for expanded coverage by a particular cellular provider (AT&T or Verizon) which could then be sent directly to the provider so they know their service is needed and wanted. Let's discuss this more on January 5th.

As Alan has said, the Town Board continues to push Verizon to advance their application and is extremely frustrated at their lack of progress. As to the question of alternative sites, in my view both the water tower site (to which no application was ever submitted) and the 764 Charlton Road site are both viable sites for cellular equipment, and the Town Board is willing to consider any location.