

LOCAL

## Cell antenna back before York Water District following pause to study resident concerns

By **Dan Bancroft** The York Weekly

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YORK, Maine — A proposal to add an AT&T cell antenna array to the top of a water tank in the York Heights neighborhood is back on the agenda for this month's York Water District (YWD) Board of Trustees meeting.

The trustees will revisit the project at their June 16 meeting, after having paused it last year amid concerns from residents in the area who questioned possible health and environmental impacts.

The trustees decided, with a 4-1 vote, to "pause and study" the project further after hearing opposition from local residents, as well as support from some others. York Village Fire Department Chief Chris Balentine wrote a letter in support of the project, saying the proposed antennas would benefit FirstNet, a public safety communications platform designed to support public safety agencies and safety responders.

The board heard presentations from AT&T's representative, Smartlink, and its experts, who outlined the anticipated benefits: better cellular service and eliminating "dead zones" and gaps in coverage for more than 1,400 AT&T customers in York.

At the Sept. 16 meeting, YWD Board President Rick Bolton assured residents there would be "many steps to this process before anything is going to happen, if it is going to happen at all."

At its Oct. 21 meeting, the 4-1 decision to "pause and study" the proposal was based upon the perceived need to receive independent information about the possible dangers of radio frequency radiation (RFR) exposure to residents, especially children. The single dissenting vote was cast by Bolton, who expressed opposition to putting the project in this residential neighborhood.

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The board asked Smartlink to fund an independent study of the project's impacts, and Smartlink verbally agreed to pay \$6,000 for the study, according to an update posted June 1 on the YWD website. Neither Smartlink nor AT&T would have any control over the contents of the study, according to the YWD update.

## **Expert agreed to do formal review**

A subcommittee made up of YWD representatives and four York Heights residents worked from January to March and developed a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the study. That RFP was sent March 18 to three experts identified by the subcommittee, based upon their qualifications and experience in the study of the impact of wireless communications.

The supporting documents, which can be found on the YWD website, [yorkwaterdistrict.org/yht](http://yorkwaterdistrict.org/yht), included questions submitted by York Heights residents regarding the impact of the proposed installation.

One of the experts to whom the RFP was sent was David Maxson, founder and CEO of Isotrope LLC of Medfield, Massachusetts. Maxson's company was selected “because much of their work consisted of completing peer reviews for municipalities of proposed installations,” according to the YWD update.

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Isotrope’s proposal exceeded the \$6,000 study payment agreed to by Smartlink, so YWD Superintendent Don Neumann asked Isotrope to reduce the scope and fee of its proposed study. Neumann also asked Smartlink to increase its funding proposal.

As a result of these requests, Isotrope reduced the scope of its proposal, and reduced its price to “just above \$7,500,” and Smartlink agreed to increase its offer to \$7,500 in order to fund the study.

In reducing the scope of the study, Isotrope effectively eliminated the “broad and open-ended” item set forth as Task 3 in the original RFP, which had sought “any additional pertinent scientific RF (radio frequency) exposure information and interpretation of potential negative health effects as it applies to the proposed 4G installation as well as the

A copy of Isotrope's reduced scope proposal, as accepted by the YWD, is linked in the YWD update.

## **Locals asked for experts**

One of the other two experts identified by the subcommittee was Kent Chamberlin, Ph.D., a professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of New Hampshire. Chamberlin did not provide a proposal in response to the RFP, citing a desire to maintain his "unbiased status of not being financially invested in wireless."

Chamberlin referred the subcommittee to a YouTube video he created as part of a report prepared last year for the New Hampshire State Commission studying the health and environmental impacts of wireless communications (cellphones and 5G).

In his written response, Chamberlin offered to speak to the board as an impartial expert about his findings, and to "act as a resource as you evaluate proposals from others or if you would like additional detail on the findings of the NH Commission."

Chamberlin's response to YWD referred to the NH Commission's majority finding "that exposure to RFR (Radio Frequency Radiation) does have a negative impact and that current FCC regulations do not provide adequate protection."

The subcommittee's other expert, Paul Héroux, Ph.D., a professor of toxicology and health effects of electromagnetism at McGill University Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, also participated in the NH Commission's study. He declined to respond to the RFP, based upon prior scheduling commitments.

Since the York Heights residents had expressed a desire to hear from Héroux and/or Chamberlin, an agreement was reached to give Chamberlin time for a one-hour presentation, in addition to Isotrope's full review, according to the YWD update.

## **What to expect**

Chamberlin's presentation to the YWD trustees is scheduled for June 16 at 3 p.m. He offered to speak to the board as part of his "civic duty" and is not being paid for his time, according to Neumann.

Isotrope is scheduled to present the findings of its study at the July 21 meeting, at 3 p.m., Neumann said.

After hearing from Chamberlin and Isotrope, the trustees will determine what action to take on the proposal to install cellular equipment on the existing York Heights water tower, according to the YWD update. If the board rejects the proposal, it will go no further. If the board approves it, Smartlink will then be able to submit its application to the York Planning Board.

## **How to attend the virtual meetings**

Anyone interested in attending either of the meetings, which will be held remotely on Zoom, may register by sending an email, in advance, to [customerservice@yorkwaterdistrict.org](mailto:customerservice@yorkwaterdistrict.org).