

From: [Alise DeMaris](#)
To: [Bolstridge, Karen](#)
Subject: letter of rebuttal concerning Big Lake Township tower proposal
Date: Monday, September 01, 2014 8:45:32 PM

Dear Ms. Bolstridge and the Land Use Planning Commission,

I would like to submit a rebuttal for some of the statements recently filed in regard to the proposed U.S. Cellular communications tower in Big Lake Township, Maine.

I think what the proponents for the tower's current location are not considering is the long-term effects of this tower on the community. They also fail to acknowledge that the opponents of the current proposal are not against a tower in Big Lake Township or the surrounding area. They are merely against a tower in this particular location, which is in the community's population center and easily visible from Big Lake and Pocomoonshine Mountain. We are lucky to be in a position where we can have a tower in our area to provide the cell phone coverage we need for safety and communication while preserving our community's natural beauty. We do not need to simply choose one or the other; we can request that U.S. Cellular choose another location in the area. This compromise that would allow us to be responsible stewards of nature and preserve it for future generations while meeting the technological demands of today. Many people's statements made it clear that they appear to be forgetting about the possibility this middle ground, the possibility of having a tower that would provide the same benefits without the detrimental effects on our community.

I, too, am in favor of improving cell phone coverage to increase safety and ease of communication. I just think it should be done in a manner that preserves the aesthetics of the community. In fact, I can think of few locations in Big Lake Township that would be aesthetically worse than the one proposed, unless it were in the Big Lake Campground or on the lakeshore itself. Roger Ritter proposed a site in Indian Township which may meet the U.S. Cellular's needs as well as the community's. I know at least one other site has also been proposed by members of the community. Many people submitted comments that made the argument that we had to choose between safety and aesthetics. I suggest that we can have both if we move the proposed tower (and perhaps reduce the tower's height and lighting).

In addition, there appear to be several factual errors in the statements submitted that I would like to correct. Although Michele Cochran-Barnes stated that there were problems with landline phones on West Street and only dial-up internet access, she is mistaken. I lived in Big Lake Township for 21 years, and there has never been a problem to my knowledge with the landline phones in the area. Also, the community now has fiberoptic cable for broadband internet connections which provides high speed internet access. Time Warner Cable also offers cable internet services nearly to the border of Big Lake Township and Princeton on West Street (this services nearly the first four miles of the street). Although these services are not available at remote camps, they are available to the vast majority of residents in the area. This makes the issue of cell phone coverage and data more an issue of convenience than one of safety in many cases.

Sadly, some of the individuals supporting the tower may in fact not benefit much

from the tower's construction, as phone service is best at some distance away from the tower. This is another reason to support the tower being moved to an alternate location, away from the population center of Big Lake Township. It is ironic that the people who have to look at the tower in their backyards each day are those who would receive the least benefit and have the most detrimental effect on their property values. Many of the people who submitted statements in support of the construction of the tower as proposed live far enough away from the site that they would rarely have to see the tower, yet would benefit from the improved cell phone service. U.S. Cellular points to an unnamed study (that they admit was done with funding from a cell carrier and therefore has bias) that they claim shows no negative effects on property values. However, in a casual online search I found several articles that point to a significant devaluation of surrounding properties, both due to the visual impact and media-fueled concern about the health effects of living near such structures (see below for references).

Contrary to what Bob Norman said, I am convinced that erecting this tower at its proposed location would indeed affect surrounding properties (by lowering property values) and our community's way of life (by decreasing ecotourism and hurting our already poor local economy). Sandra Smith stated that "it seems like the tower companies are trying to help with the looks of the tower," but she must be unaware of the FAA and FCC regulations stating that a tower this close to the Princeton Municipal Airport and at this height must either be continuously lit or painted with red and white stripes and lit only at night. In addition, there is really nothing that can be done to improve the appearance of a 250 foot tower in an area with an approximate average tree height of 50 feet. It simply cannot be camouflaged. Brad Richards also brought up the point that there is already some minimal night lighting from the Princeton Municipal Airport and Woodland Pulp LLC. However, these are barely visible and pale in comparison to the proposed tower's lighting. In addition, why should the unfortunate existence of some light pollution be a reason to create more?

I also think that it is important to remember that U.S. Cellular has a distinct bias in their reporting on and investigation of this issue. They hired the company that completed the visual assessment, and have worked with that company repeatedly in the past. This business relationship between the company requesting approval (U.S. Cellular) and the company doing the assessment (Black Diamond Consultants, Inc.) seems to call into question the neutrality (and therefore, the accuracy) of the visual assessment. Although some parties noted that they could not see the visual assessment team's balloon from their part of the lake, they fail to note from which position they were looking - from near the tree line closest to the balloon, where the view would likely be obstructed, or from the other areas of the lake, where a 250 foot, continuously lit tower in a relatively flat landscape would be hard to miss. A lit tower is much easier to spot than a small balloon; in fact, the lighting on the tower is there for just that purpose - to make it visible enough at all times that pilots flying at high speed can see it from far enough away to avoid it. Just because not all areas of Big Lake are visually affected by the proposed tower does not mean that the assessment is correct in stating that you can not see the tower from the lake. Furthermore, due to the wind that was present at the time of the second (and possibly the first) flying of the balloon, the balloon was likely significantly (at least 35-45) feet shorter than the actual tower would be. Due to the incomplete, inaccurate, and likely biased report by Black Diamond Consultants, it is difficult to know for sure what the visual impact of the tower on the whole of Big Lake and the rest of the community might be. However, it should be obvious to anyone who has

visited Pocomoonshine Mountain or the part of the lake near the tower that the tower will be inescapably visible.

Another thing that should be carefully considered is the assumption that having this tower will improve everyone's cell phone coverage, and that a 190 foot tower as opposed to a 250 foot tower would actually make a significant difference. U.S. Cellular intends to attempt to market several portions of the tower, down to 200 feet, to other cell phone carriers for their equipment. If a shorter tower would really be so ineffective, how do they expect to be able to lease that space? In addition, older cell phones (those over about two years old) often lack the ability to connect with newer communication towers. Connecting with these newer towers may require the purchase of a new device. In addition, different phone manufacturers produce products that vary in their ability to get service, even with a new tower. People may also not get service based on their particular cell phone carriers, depending on their company's licensing agreements. Unless you are a U.S. Cellular customer living far enough away from the tower and use a new phone that is a good brand, you may not receive the expected benefits of this tower. U.S. Cellular's report about the 190 foot tower vs. the 250 foot tower does not take these factors into consideration (all the factors they are using to create these models also were not stated, so they are difficult to fully evaluate). Consequently, it is quite possible that people may still not have cell phone service in case of an emergency even if the tower were constructed.

In conclusion, U.S. Cellular is not here to make the people who live in Big Lake Township's lives better. It appears to simply be trying to meet FCC requirements about cell phone coverage in rural areas and paying for their own tower by leasing out space on it to other companies. The community's needs are not factoring into their considerations. If they were, U.S. Cellular would put the tower in a place that would benefit Big Lake Township's residents, rather than in a place that will limit their cell coverage, devalue their properties, and negatively impact their economy.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Alise DeMaris

Windham, ME

Bond, S. (2007). The Effect of Distance to Cell Phone Towers on House Prices in Florida. The Assessment Journal, Fall Volume, Pages 362-370.

Bond, S. & Wang, K. (2005). The Impact of Cell Phone Towers on House Prices in Residential Neighborhoods. The Assessment Journal, Summer Volume, Pages 256-273.

McDonough, C.C. (2003). The Impact of Wireless Towers on Residential Property Values. *Assessment Journal*, Volume 10, Issue 3, Pages 25-32.