

Wi-Fi transmits heavy debate

Residents say Thorold's new wi-fi technology is dangerous for health

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New Wi-Fi technology recently installed in Thorold's Confederation Heights neighbourhood is transmitting some controversy within the city.

Anca Gaston says the wireless transmitters are a potential health risk to residents, releasing harmful waves of radiation 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week.

Gaston, along with resident Stephanie Soccio who doesn't want the transmitters in her neighbourhood, and a Brock university employee who said she becomes physically ill when around wireless technology, urged city council on Tuesday night to do away with the pilot project from their neighbourhood or to install them away from residential homes to reduce the risk of emitting harmful radiation onto citizens.

"I recommend (the technology) be placed in an area where it can minimize exposure as much as possible," said Gaston, a St. Catharines resident.

Although the technology itself is almost too new for many studies to conclude there are in fact health risks associated with Wi-Fi transmitters, Gaston presented council with a number of statistics outlining the potential health hazards.

She cited examples such as cell phone towers and also said that residents of Thorold are already at a higher risk than others because there are 75 different transmitters atop the Schmon Tower at Brock University.

"The people who are living here are already exposed to radiation," she said, "the presence of Wi-Fi within the community will only further complicate people with symptoms (to radiation) in the community."

Those symptoms can vary from vertigo, depression, headaches, cognitive dysfunction, irritability and poor sleep, she said. She said that exposure to radiation can result in a condition called "electro-hypersensitivity." She also linked the Wi-Fi technology to cancer.

The issue sparked a two-hour debate in council chambers, reminiscent to a debate in March that had council divided on whether or not to allow ReliaClear to install the technology. That issue was settled in a 5-4 vote with Mayor Henry D'Angela breaking the tie.

The debate on Tuesday had Coun. Tim Whalen suggesting ReliaClear, the company that is providing the technology to the city, to respond to Gaston's concerns and asked for a report from the company that includes customer satisfaction and subscription numbers.

Coun. Mike Charron said the decision was going to be difficult to come by, he said the city should look into the issue, but he wasn't sure where to go for information.

"Does Brock have information to confirm the health risks?" he asked.

Mayor Henry D'Angela warned council that they were being unfair to ReliaClear.

"If we're going to single out one company, that's inappropriate," said D'Angela, "We're attacking ReliaClear when there are other Wi-Fi technologies here."

"Are we going to eliminate all wireless technology?" asked Coun. Jim Handley, "Jogging behind busses is bad ... are we going to get rid of busses?"

Coun. Sharon Rogers said she thought the group had valid points.

"When somebody presents us with a valid case, we as a council must look into this -- that's why we were elected," she said.

Rogers said limited studies on the health risks of Wi-Fi should not be a reason to ignore Gaston's request.

She cited how Thorold was one of the first municipalities to ban the use of pesticides despite evidence saying there were no hazards using the fertilizer on lawns. She told council she was "very glad" she voted against the technology.

Coun. Jonathan LePera asked if there was ever a report from ReliaClear outlining the potential health risks, to which CAO Mike Weir said no. After several attempts to pass a motion, it was decided that the Wi-Fi technology will be examined. A motion was passed inviting a representative from Health Canada to speak on the issue, for the presenter to provide ReliaClear with research information and for all other Wi-Fi technology in the pilot area to be identified.

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