

Rogers Park Community Council

March 25th, 2016

Mr. Hal Hart, Director
Planning Division
Department of Community & Economic Development
Municipality of Anchorage
4700 Elmore Road
Anchorage, AK 99507

Re: GCI's summary of March 7th Rogers Park Community Council meeting

Dear Mr. Hart,

The Rogers Park Community Council (RPCC) has had GCI attend several community council meetings since GCI provided notice of their intent to build a large cell phone tower on top of an existing power pole in the Rogers Park neighborhood. Because the height of this pole is unprecedented in a residential neighborhood GCI is required to apply for a variance from planning and zoning. Understandably, the residents of Rogers Park have had many questions and concerns about GCI's proposal. The summary of council comments and concerns GCI has provided to the Planning Division on March 7th reflects only a portion of the concerns that have been raised at the community council meetings as well as an inaccurate characterization of Rogers Park residents' views on GCI's business success. In addition, they failed to provide the three resolutions that the RPCC has passed which each outline specific concerns.

I hope this letter and the attached resolutions will provide some much needed clarification about the specific questions and concerns that the RPCC has raised with GCI.

1. Rogers Park residents are concerned about preserving the character of their neighborhoods and their view shed. Large commercial structures are eyesores, devalue neighborhoods and property values and destroy and pollute views.
2. Rogers Park residents who live close to the proposed tower are concerned about any variance given that that would allow a tower to be constructed that doesn't conform to the 200% setback required by code, as a variance would mean that their homes and garages are in the proposed tower's "Fall Zone" and they have safety concerns about this.
3. Rogers Park residents are concerned that the height of the pole that GCI has initially proposed is unprecedented in a residential neighborhood, and will result in setting a precedent that will similarly impact many other neighborhoods in the future.
4. Rogers Park residents are concerned that GCI does not actually need the tower. As noted in the documents submitted, GCI does not have a lack of coverage in the Rogers Park area. They have too much coverage which has created considerable interference. GCI has indicated at RPCC meetings that they are unwilling to adjust or optimize the signal from other towers that could result in reduced interference and lessen the need for the tower as originally proposed.

Iris Matthews
President

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Vice President

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Secretary

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5. Rogers Park residents support the municipal code that requires co-location wherever possible and feel that GCI did not adequately explain why the many locations within or adjacent to Rogers Park where cell phone towers already exist would not be able to meet GCI's needs. The existing sites may not be optimal, but might be good enough, particularly if other signal optimization is performed.
6. Rogers Park residents do not feel that GCI has adequately explained why small-cell technology wouldn't be appropriate in their neighborhood. The issues GCI has raised, such as having several shorter towers instead of one larger tower is not an insurmountable obstacle. The RPCC has passed a resolution stating a clear preference for this option. Unfortunately, GCI has been unwilling to explore this option further.
7. Rogers Park appreciates that GCI has provided additional information when requested by the RPCC members, however most of the documents provided have raised more questions than answers. Additionally, this new information usually comes shortly before the next meeting, giving residents little time to review and digest complex information, seek outside independent review, or even to ask follow-up questions. Many questions have never been adequately answered.
8. Rogers Park residents are strongly opposed to the 79.5 foot cell phone tower that GCI has proposed in the alley behind 27th Avenue, squarely within a residential neighborhood. Rogers Park residents believe that the municipal code prohibits such structures for good reason. However, the sentiment that Rogers Park residents would like GCI to go out of business is ludicrous, and not a position that has been taken by the RPCC. It is my understanding that during the March meeting, one person, feeling frustrated by GCI's attitude towards residents during the meeting did make an off-hand comment to the effect of, "GCI can go broke for all I care." However, that comment was an illustration of how frustrated Rogers Park residents have felt by GCI's dismissive approach to concerns and questions raised during meetings. In fact, it has been the express intention of the Rogers Park Community Council to find a solution to GCI's desire to improve coverage in Rogers Park that is also acceptable to the residents of the neighborhood, as they will be the ones who live with whatever structure(s) results.

We also feel strongly that many of the misunderstandings and mistrust that have resulted during this process could have been avoided with a more collaborative process between GCI and a small subcommittee of Rogers Park residents. During the January 11th 2016 meeting of the Rogers Park Community Council it became apparent that Rogers Park residents still had many unanswered questions, as well as numerous ideas for alternate possibilities that they wanted GCI to consider. At this time, it was proposed that a subcommittee be formed to look into these questions in more depth with GCI and see if a resolution could be reached between Rogers Park Community Council and GCI. After all, it is difficult to have a technical, nuanced conversation during a large and contentious meeting. GCI's counsel Becky Windt Pearson indicated that GCI was not interested in participating in a subcommittee to work through these issues, and was simply fulfilling their duty to appear at the community council meeting. As a result, Rogers Park residents still have many unanswered questions and feel that GCI has not adequately responded to their concerns and been up front about their intentions.

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While GCI has attended many meetings, it often feels that we are talking past each other, rather than to each other in a collaborative way. Rogers Park is an older, established neighborhood that attracts people to it in large part for its character. Children who grow up in Rogers Park frequently return to raise their own families here. We understand GCI's desire to improve service in our community, but have yet to see compelling evidence that this can't be accomplished through alternative options. The alternatives may not be the easiest solutions for GCI but we feel that preserving the character and integrity of our neighborhood deserves just as much consideration in this process as their purported business need does. We are certain we can find a solution, but it may require GCI to come to the table with a more open mind, and to engage in more in depth discussions with the affected community about the pros and cons of various approaches.

Thank you for the opportunity to clarify Rogers Park Community Council's concerns with the cell phone tower that has been proposed by GCI. I have also attached three resolutions passed by the Rogers Park Community Council that reference state the official position of the RPCC on the cell phone tower that has been proposed by GCI.

Sincerely,



President, Rogers Park Community Council

Cc: Mayor Ethan Berkowitz
Chris Schutte, Director, Community & Economic Development Department
Planning & Zoning Commission
Dick Traini, Anchorage Assembly
Elvi Gray-Jackson, Anchorage Assembly
Sherrie Greenshields, New Horizons Telecom, Inc.
Becky Windt Pearson, GCI

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