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Terence H. Young

Member of Parliament for Oakville

May 14, 2012

A letter from Terence Young to the people of Oakville riding about cellular towers

Dear Constituent,

I am writing this letter to inform you of my activities to date with regard to the placement of cellular towers in Oakville.

This issue is important because there are six cellular suppliers who want to establish a high grade of service in the GTA which will require many more cellular towers. These suppliers claim it's all about providing cellular telephone service in Oakville. It is really about building a much more comprehensive network so that consumers can watch TV shows on hand held devices, which will require broadcasting stronger radio frequency everywhere, reaching even the basements of our homes.

It is also important because parents and activists are very concerned about the potential health risks from the Electromagnetic Radiation (EMR) cellular towers emit (also known as radio frequency), and some people suffer sensitivity to EMR that causes unpleasant physical symptoms when the source is too close.

These concerns arose originally out of a report from the World Health Organization's (WHO) International Agency for Research on Cancer in May, 2011 that classifies Electromagnetic Radiation (EMR) as 'possibly carcinogenic,' as well as further evidence from other countries. I have reviewed all the available evidence I can find, and I share their concerns.

The Precautionary Principle

There is no broadly based consensus regarding proof that EMR from cellular antennae on towers is a serious health risk, but I believe in the precautionary principle when it comes to your health: better safe than sorry, and I am acting accordingly.

Health Canada's Official Position

Health Canada and the WHO state that more research on the health effects of EMR is needed. I agree. But their current safety standard, known as Safety Code 6, the model Industry Canada uses to identify health concerns from cellular towers, is in my view both inadequate and outdated.

It measures only how much radio frequency (EMR) heats up body tissue over six minutes. It does not properly address recent concerns over the risk of cancer and EMR, or those persons who have sensitivity to EMR.

I believe that Industry Canada should recognize the early evidence as the European Parliament has done. They should issue new regulations that will allow municipalities like Oakville to reject any proposed location that is close to homes, schools, health care facilities or day care centres just as Oakville's Draft Telecommunication Protocol demands. I am working towards that end.

What should the cellular suppliers like Bell, Rogers and Telus do if they want to be good corporate citizens?

Based on the precautionary principle, a reasonable first step would be to remove any antennae that are currently placed close to homes, schools, health care facilities and daycare operations that are causing distress to residents. They should do this immediately.

That includes the Bell Canada antennae at the tower at the Bronte Fire station, the facilities on the chimney of the Bell Canada building on Balsam Avenue - where antennae are less than eleven metres from children's bedrooms - and the antennae in the clock tower at the Upper Middle Road Shopping Centre.

Since the strength of EMR drops off fairly quickly as the distance increases from the tower, a reasonable second step would be to place new towers at least 200 metres away from homes, schools, health care facilities and daycare facilities, exactly what the Town of Oakville's Draft Protocol demands.

My Actions to Date

Starting back in May 2011 working with Councillors Duddeck and Damoff and local residents I expressed my serious concerns on this issue to the Minister of Industry, the Honourable Christian Paradis and his senior staff, and formally wrote to him to request new regulations at Industry Canada that will provide municipalities with more power to determine where these towers should go.

This makes perfect sense because towns and cities have control over long term planning, zoning and building permits. How can a bureaucrat in Ottawa properly decide where a tower should go in Comox, British Columbia, St. John's, Newfoundland, or Oakville, Ontario?

I raised the issue in national caucus and GTA caucus, and held successful meetings with officials from Rogers and Telus, both of whom have agreed to do their utmost to establish new towers away from residential areas, near railways lines, highway interchanges and industrial areas. They have also agreed to share existing towers wherever possible. This means fewer towers in Oakville overall and less demand near residential areas.

I also met several times with Professor Magda Havas, the leading Canadian authority and I am hosting a meeting in June for MPs in the GTA where she will present her research on health issues related to the radio frequency from cellular towers.

As a Member of Parliament I have the right to introduce a Private Member's Bill onto the Order Paper in Parliament to address this issue. This would probably take years to wind its way through the parliamentary process but would certainly be helpful in drawing attention to these concerns in the coming weeks.

What is the solution?

I have spoken with officials at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities who propose three changes that I support:

1. The current exclusion from public scrutiny, local planning and zoning for new commercial towers fifteen metres high or less is ridiculous and unfair. It has to go.
(Otherwise, you may go out one day and find your neighbour is being paid a few hundred dollars a month to have one installed a few metres from your barbeque.)
2. Cellular telephone companies must be directed to a higher degree by Industry Canada to share their existing and future communications towers so we have fewer towers overall.
3. Safety Code 6 must be updated every two years and set stringent standards to protect human health.

I support these changes and wish to add the addition of new power for municipalities to decide where cellular towers go by way of a Private Member's Bill.

Why it's important for Town Council to Act on this Issue, and not simply point the finger at the federal government?

I believe this is an issue where municipalities must lead the way. Oakville's 200 metre setback is a good start. I have advised Council to stick to their guns on this and maintain their position on the 200 metre setback to support my position in Ottawa, even though they may be overruled by Industry Canada at some future time.

I have learned from experience that changes at Health Canada on safety matters take years.

Mayor Burton claims the town has no authority to demand this setback, and appears ready to abandon it, yet the Industry Canada Circular states in Section 4.1 Industry Canada believes that any concerns or suggestions expressed by land use authorities are important elements to be considered by proponents regarding proposals to install or make changes to antennae systems.

But more importantly there are two highly relevant precedents where towns and cities in Ontario led the way for upper levels of government on matters related to human health. The first was pesticides where the Town of Hudson, Quebec went to the Supreme Court of Canada to claim the local power to ban them and won. This opened the door for every town and city to do so.

The second was smoking in restaurants, where GTA municipalities including Oakville under the leadership of former Mayor Ann Mulvale adopted a gold standard by-law that made it easy for the province of Ontario to later ban smoking in public places. These two examples prove that municipalities can determine public policy on health issues when they take a stand.

Last December, Mayor Burton proved he is not reluctant to pass a by-law on a matter that is under federal authority: endangered species. He spoke in favour of and voted to ban shark products in Oakville saying, "It's all about thinking globally and acting locally". So there is no reason he should not support maintaining the 200 metre setback in the Oakville Telecommunication Draft Protocol to assist my efforts in Oakville.

I believe elected officials should direct civil servants, not simply take their direction and rubber stamp their positions.

I have always acted to protect the health of you and your family, regardless of the positions bureaucrats at any level of government take.

I supported the fight against the proposed power plant, and supported C4CA in their successful efforts to stop it. I am very pleased C4CA is now working on this issue.

I recommended to Mayor Burton and our regional councillors they should vote to stop putting fluoride, a recognized poison, in our drinking water, to no avail.

For twelve years I have worked to get the pharmaceutical industry and Health Canada to issue plain language warnings with prescription drugs to reduce adverse drug reactions.

I have advised Council to maintain their commitment to the 200 metre setback in the attached letter which I sent to each Council member. I will continue to work with Oakville Council in your interest.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Terence Young". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Terence Young
MP for Oakville