

The Cell Towers and Schools Issue

Parents at Holmes Middle School in Fairfax County, VA, were fighting against a proposed cell tower. Our strategies and efforts paid off. On December 8, 2010, the applicant's attorney announced that the application was suspended indefinitely.

In each of three proposed cell tower cases that we battled against within the Northern VA area, the cell site application was either indefinitely suspended or withdrawn.

In the end, the school board member and principal helped cause the victory at Holmes. Pressure on the principal at Longfellow caused her to withdraw her support of the cell tower.

Christine Hoch
Executive Director
Center for Safer Wireless
www.centerforsaferwireless.org
703-431-1558

Regarding cell tower battles, success depends on a combination of strategies. These can include a website, a Facebook webpage, an on-line petition, signage . . . Community meetings build awareness. In a public forum, the film *Full Signal* is a good springboard, and community meetings could use it as a rallying point.

A combination of the following strategies is recommended by parents in Fairfax as the best way to produce a positive outcome and raise awareness about the cause:

- Convincing the principal to change his/her mind is the best way to make a difference. Send letters and e-mails to the principal.
- Send emails to parents at the school.
- Generate discourse within the school.
- Involve the Parent Advisory Council.
- Print and distribute flyers in the neighborhood.

- Create and distribute buttons.
- Send emails to School Board members and local government leaders.

We recommend that attendees raise any or all of the following issues during the planning and zoning meetings:

1. **Alternative sites** - If no alternative sites are identified in the application, demand that the applicant submit information about alternative sites. Ask for a delay in the application process.
2. **Property Values** - There is evidence that cell towers lower the property values of nearby houses.
3. **Endangered species** - If endangered species live near the school, one can argue that these habitats are protected by the Endangered Species Act or its equivalent.

(Canada's Species at Risk Act)

<http://www.davidsuzuki.org/issues/wildlife-habitat/science/endangered-species-legislation/canadas-species-at-risk-act/>

4. **Historic properties** - Find out if any of the land is on historic property that could be classed as a protected area.
5. **Comprehensive Plan** may give reasons for how the proposed tower violates the objectives of the District or County.
6. **Donated land** - Sometimes, proposed site locations are on land donated to the County. If so, check if the donor requires that no commercial interests be established on such donated land.
7. **Prove via testimony** from cell phone users who use the carriers that cell phone service is adequate and further services are not needed in

the area.

8. **Prove adequate resident access** to fire, EMT and other emergency services.

9. The **Telecommunications Act** of 1996 (U.S.), or its equivalent elsewhere, states that residential areas are the lowest preference for cell tower locations, so the proposed site is not a priority.

10. **Inadequate camouflage** of the site will render the tower an “eye-sore.”

11. **More appropriate locations** exist in commercial areas away from living spaces and children.

12. **Safety** - Falling ice formed on antennas is a safety risk for children. Also, children have been known to climb these towers, which can be dangerous.