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CIA Tower Plan Draws Ire

By DAVID LERMAN

THE CONNECTION

A proposal by the federal government to build a large microwave tower for the Central Intelligence Agency on Fox Mill Road at Reston's western border has drawn fire from Centreville Supervisor Martha V. Pennino, who assailed U.S. officials for their "arrogance."

Pennino and Centreville Planning Commissioner John H. Thillmann said they will fight construction of the tower. Since federal authorities could condemn the site, which presently has a Bell Telephone tower, there could be a confrontation between the county and the U.S. government.

The proposal calls for Overseas Telecommunications Inc., a private contractor for the CIA, to replace the four-foot-wide Bell tower with one that would be 27 feet wide at its base and 8 feet wide at the top. As many as six microwave dishes would hang from the top of the tower, at a height of 203 feet. The present tower is 205 feet high.

Overseas Telecommunications would pay for construction of the tower and would pay rent to Bell for use of the site. The plan must still be approved by the Fairfax County Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors, but the U.S. government could choose to condemn the land and build the tower without county approval, according to Dan Wallace, project manager for Overseas Telecommunications.

The CIA refused to comment on the tower proposal.

The controversy has already sparked a heated exchange of comments between local officials and federal representatives.

In a stern letter of objection to the plan, Supervisor Pennino said, "I will fight this action, urge others to do the same, and hope that reason prevails over arrogance."

"I can't understand their opposition to rebuilding an old tower," Wallace said. "Maybe they like to flex their muscles."

Pennino said the proposed tower would "impose a significant visual impact" on the communities of Polo Club Village, Stratton Woods and Fox Mill Estates.

Patrick F. Kane, a Reston-based planner who evaluated the site for Bell to assess the impact of a bigger tower, said he found no significant esthetic difference to surrounding homeowners.

"It's my feeling that from most views it would be hard to distinguish which kind of tower is there," he said.

Kane said the 27-foot base would lie "well below the tree line," keeping it out of sight. He said the tower would be most visible to residents of Polo Club Village, who would see the upper half of the tower.

Planning Commissioner Thillmann said he disagreed with Kane's study. "There's



JACKIE HEITCHUETHE CONNECTION

Bell tower on Fox Mill Road and drawing of proposed tower (inset).

absolutely no question you're going to see this huge monstrosity in the skyline," Thillmann said. "I'm going to do everything I possibly can to see it stopped."

He said the tower will be made even more visible from Fox Mill Estates when trees are cleared to construct the Springfield Bypass.

Charles Nelson, president of Polo Club Village Citizens Association, said he could not take a stand on the project until he heard more details, but added, "It seems to be awfully big, out in my backyard practically."

Pennino also said in her letter, addressed to Bell Attorney Frank W. Stearns, that she was concerned about "the unknown and unanswered health effects caused by radiation" from the microwave dishes.

Wallace said his company completed a study which he said showed there was no danger of excessive radiation. "Your microwave oven puts out more radiation

than our transmitters do," he said. "There's no health potential problem whatsoever."

Stearns, who represents Bell, said the firm accepted the offer by the government to let the county's Park Authority have more recreational space on the site, which is planned for a park.

The larger tower would allow Bell to remove the three sets of guy wires which support the present telephone tower. Kane said removing the wires would provide an additional three acres of recreational space. He said the Park Authority would be able to build a full-size soccer-football field, two volleyball and basketball courts and a playground.

"We're happy with what's out there now," Stearns said. "If [county officials] don't want it, we'll stick with where we are, but I don't know what the federal government will do."