

Residents sour on 80-foot radio tower

BY JEFF DAVIS, THE STARPHOENIX APRIL 19, 2013



Ham radio operator Sean Cavanaugh is asking the city for permission to build an 80-foot tower in Lawson Heights.

Photograph by: Greg Pender, The StarPhoenix

Residents of Lawson Heights are up in arms about a local man's plan to erect an 80-foot radio tower in his yard.

Ham radio enthusiast Sean Cavanaugh's equipment allowed students in Martensville to speak with Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield aboard the International Space Station in March. He currently lives on Saskatoon's east side, and has a 55-foot radio tower on his property.

Cavanaugh said he uses the tower to compete in amateur radio competitions in which competitors try to contact as many other ham radio users in the world as they can within 24 or 48 hours. While he has won competitions and contacted as many as 1,300 people in 24 hours, he said the tower is not tall enough to reach the whole world.

"There are places I have a great deal of difficulty contacting," he said. "Mostly in the south Indian

Ocean, India, Thailand and that region."

Cavanaugh will soon move to Dore Crescent in Lawson Heights, and he wants to build a bigger, better tower when he arrives. About six weeks ago, he circulated a notice to local residents informing them of his plans to build a transmission tower twice the height of a standard telephone pole. The plan has met with some fierce opposition.

Sidney Hayes, 70, lives on Dore Crescent and started a petition to quash Cavanaugh's tower plans. He said 29 people, representing 21 local households, have signed it.

"The main issue is people don't want this tower," he said. "They're just totally unsightly and noisy."

Hayes said he started operating ham radios when he was 11 years old, and it was a great way to experiment with electronics and speak with people in far off countries. In the past, he erected towers of his own - including one 40 feet high - but Hayes said they're more trouble than they're worth.

"Back in those days, there was a lot of appeal," he said. "But since the Internet came in ... I am no longer and active ham radio enthusiast."

Although it was anchored to the ground with a deep concrete foundation, Hayes said his 40-foot tower would "howl like a coyote" in high winds, and swung so violently it damaged his house. That tower was eventually ripped down by a tornado some 15 years ago and never replaced.

Hayes said another, shorter tower he once had was struck by lightning, setting part of his house on fire and causing his television to explode, injuring him with shrapnel.

Cavanaugh's proposed tower is not only very tall, it will also feature a rotating part on top to help direct the signal, Hayes noted.

"This is like the top-of-the-line Cadillac," he said. "You don't need this ... this is a super-luxury tower for some kind of competition."

Local resident Joe Burnett is also opposed to the tower, and said he will hold the city liable for any damages or problems it causes if civic officials allow it to be built. He said it's "nuts" to allow a huge, unsightly tower in a neighbourhood where all electricity and phone cables are buried out of sight.

"We'll go to whatever extreme we have to to make sure this doesn't happen," he said. "We're not compromising."

Cavanaugh said he has no idea whether he'll get approval from the city to build the tower. He said it should not be a problem, since there's another ham tower just 800 metres from his new home, and another four within a two-kilometer radius.

"In all honesty, they're not as intrusive as people think they are," he said.

Tim Steuart, manager of development review with the City of Saskatoon, said the city has received a number of comments on the proposed tower.

They will be reviewed and the city will likely take a position on the tower next week, he said. After that, the city will send a letter of approval or disapproval to Industry Canada, which will ultimately

decide whether Cavanaugh can go ahead.

Because the tower is over 15 metres tall, Steuart said it must go through the same Industry Canada approvals process as commercial cell-phone towers.

Steuart said the city may hold a public information meeting to discuss the plan in detail with local Lawson Heights residents.

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