Frequently asked questions – Telecommunication and Antenna Systems

The following questions and answers are general in nature and do not necessarily reflect every situation, or cover all circumstances related to the Municipality's involvement in the regulation of antenna systems.

Who regulates and approves antenna systems?

In Canada, all antenna systems are governed by Federal legislation and regulations. For antenna systems such as cell towers or amateur radio antenna towers, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, Spectrum Management & Telecommunications, is the licensing body. Companies and individuals must apply to Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada for a licence to operate an installation at each specific location.

The Municipality is not the approving authority for antenna systems; however, as part of the licensing process, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada requires that licensees (referred to as proponents) seek input in certain circumstances from the Municipality and the public.

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada encourages local land use authorities to adopt their own processes to manage municipal and public consultation by proponents in accordance with its Client Procedure Circular CPC2-0-03(link is external). Mississippi Mills' Telecommunication Tower Protocol can be found here: PLAN-11.-Telecommunications-Protocol.pdf (mississippimills.ca)

The Municipal Concurrence and Public Consultation Process for Antenna Systems sets out when and how the proponent must consult with the Municipality and members of the public. The Municipality reviews the licensee's proposal and sends a response to the proponent and to Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada indicating whether or not the proposed installation can be supported by the Municipality.

Where an antenna system is proposed within a municipal right-of-way, municipal consent is also required from the Municipality.

What role does the Municipality play in the location and design of antenna systems?

Where consultation is required, the Municipality will receive and review proposals pursuant to the Municipal Concurrence and Public Consultation Process for Antenna Systems. Each proposal would be reviewed for information regarding the design, size, location of the installation, as well as comments received by the proponent from the community.

The Municipality will require proponents to demonstrate why a proposed antenna could not be located on an existing tower, building or structure, and provide a rationale for why a new tower is necessary.

The Municipality may also negotiate with proponents regarding the location, height, type or size of a proposed antenna system. The aim is to reduce the visual impact of proposed towers as much as possible.

Placing antennas on existing towers, buildings or structures, such as on the rooftops of tall buildings is preferred and encouraged (but cannot be compelled). Where an antenna system is proposed in or near residential areas the use of monopoles rather than latticework towers may be another preference that is negotiated with the various proponents.

Note that in cases where the Municipality does not support a proposal, it cannot prevent a proponent from ultimately gaining permission from Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada to install the antenna system.

Where an antenna system is proposed within a municipal right-of-way, municipal consent is required from the Municipality.

Does a tower associated with an antenna system need a Building Permit?

No, a building permit is not required. Antenna systems are under Federal jurisdiction and subject to licensing by Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. In certain circumstances a building permit may be required for any accessory buildings associated with an antenna system.

The submissions by proponents to the Municipality are not development approval or building permit applications, and the Municipality does not "approve" or "refuse" these submissions. Rather, the Municipality indicates its support or lack of support for each proposal based on an evaluation of each proposal.

Why does the antenna system have to be in my neighbourhood?

The location of antenna systems is important in providing the quality of service that the public expects. Radio waves are limited in how far they can travel while still being reliable. Demand for wireless services is increasing rapidly; to meet this demand, more antenna systems are required, often closer to users.

Can existing towers, or other antenna-supporting structures, be used?

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada requires antenna system proponents to use existing structures. In some circumstances, because of technical or other constraints, sharing a structure is not always feasible.

Can I appeal the proposed installation of an antenna system to the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT)?

No. As antenna systems are federally regulated and licensed, and, as there is no development application approved by the Municipality, there is no appeal procedure to the OLT for proposed antenna systems.

If you have a question concerning an antenna system in your neighbourhood you should contact Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada.

Does the installation of an antenna system require an amendment to the Zoning By-law?

No. Because antenna systems are Federally regulated and licensed, a zoning by-law amendment would not be needed to allow the location of an installation on any site within the Municipality.

Are antenna systems used solely for personal use subject to this process?

Any antenna system falling under the jurisdiction of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada is subject to the proposed process. Antenna systems used solely for personal use, such as by amateur radio operators, are specifically exempted from the process provided they meet all of the location and design criteria listed therein. If not, and the process applies, application submission and public consultation requirements have been reduced.

Why must the tower be painted and have lights?

Paint and lights ensure that the tower is visible to aircraft. Proponents must ensure their proposals for an antenna system are first reviewed by Transport Canada to determine which lighting and marking requirements may apply. Transport Canada will advise the proponent of any potential hazard to air navigation and the standards relating to painting and lighting for the antenna system.

Are there any safety guidelines to protect the public's health?

Health Canada has safety guidelines for exposure to radio frequency fields in its Safety Code 6 publication entitled Limits of Human Exposure to Radiofrequency Electromagnetic Fields in the Frequency Range from 3 kHz to 300 GHz. While the responsibility for developing Safety Code 6 rests with Health Canada, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada has adopted this guideline for the purpose of protecting the general public.

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada requires all radiocommunication and broadcasting operators to comply with Safety Code 6 at all

times, including the consideration of combined effects of nearby installations within the local radio environment. Further, operators must respect updates made to Safety Code 6.

Are environmental concerns taken into consideration?

Yes. Installation and modification of antenna systems must comply with the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. Depending on the location of the proposed antenna system the Municipality may also require additional studies or reports for the purposes of its evaluation to determine whether it will support the proposal.

Given this, the municipal concurrence and public consultation process will not address health concerns related to exposure to radio frequency fields.

How does Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada ensure that radiocommunication and broadcasting installations respect Health Canada's limits for the protection of the public from radio frequency fields?

While the responsibility for developing Safety Code 6(link is external) rests with Health Canada, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada has adopted the same guideline for the purpose of protecting the general public. Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada requires that all proponents and operators ensure that their radiocommunication and broadcasting installations (antenna systems) comply with Safety Code 6(link is external) at all times.

Proponents and operators must also consider the combined effects of nearby installations within the local radio environment. For more information, consult CPC-2-0-03(link is external). Furthermore, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada conducts its own assessments and audits as required.

Where can I find more information?

The process for all antenna systems in Canada is outlined in Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada's Client Procedures Circular CPC-2-0-03(link is external) entitled Radiocommunication and Broadcasting Antenna Systems.

More information is available on Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada's Spectrum Management and Telecommunications website at http://www.ic.gc.ca/antenna(link is external), including CPC-2-0-03.

Who can I contact at the Municipality if I have more questions about the Municipal Concurrence and Public Consultation Process for Antenna Systems?

Please call the Municipality 613-256-2064 ext. 209 and asked to speak with Planning Clerk (Roxanne Sweeney) in the Planning Department or email rsweeney@mississippimills.ca