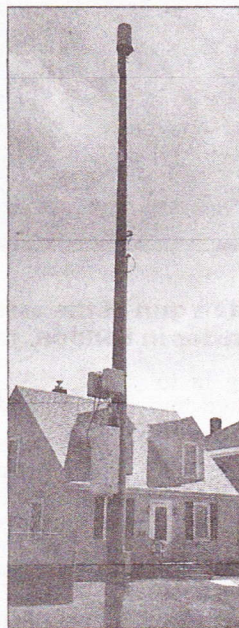


Can you hear us?

Public deserves say in 'small cell' placement

Jim Sack was not happy when a new utility tower popped up along his beloved Rudisill Boulevard.



"I called the city and acted like a spoiled brat," he said, "That boulevard is my baby. I was jumping up and down and insisting they move it, so it went from the north side of the road to the south side. I called again and it finally got moved to Bluffton Road and Broadway."

But the city wasn't behind the new pole. It was Verizon Wireless, which is installing small towers across the city as part of its new 5G network expansion. Last June, The Journal Gazette's Frank Gray reported on a Wallen Road resident who had a similar experience, with a pole originally planted in the right of way in front of his home.

If Senate Bill 213 passes the Indiana General Assembly in its current form, there will be many unhappy property owners, and local elected officials will have no authority to intervene when a telecommunications company decides a spot outside a home, business or church is the best place for its tower. The legislation makes placement of a "small cell facility" exempt from local zoning review.

Make no mistake: A 5G network is a good thing to have. It delivers data at up to 10 times the speed of the current LTE network, so video streams smoothly; websites load instantly. As with most new technology, consumers will demand it once it's available

to support economic development.

Bill Soards, president of AT&T Indiana, reminded lawmakers his company had selected Indianapolis as one of the first two 5G markets in the country. A day earlier, he tweeted to SB 213's sponsors – Sen. Brandt Hershman and Rep. David Ober – that the bill could make Indiana "lead the 5G economy."

But Sack, who traveled to Indianapolis at city officials' urging to testify, asked legislators to consider their own homes and communities.

"I'm guessing none of you in this room would like to have one of these things right up against the side of your house; in the park strip between the sidewalk and the street – that's right of way," he said. "Every block and a half they are going to have these things the size of a Volkswagen? Does that look pleasing to you? Would you like to have that in your community?"

Sack asked for "just a little local control – so those people in Fort Wayne or in your community can look at it and say, 'You know – not quite there – let's move it half a block away.'"

Brian Gould, government affairs director for Accelerate Indiana Municipalities, the former Indiana Association of Cities and Towns, also urged lawmakers to amend the bill.

"Currently, constituents know they can go to city hall or town hall, talk

to their mayor and that we will assist them in working through the process with their provider to perhaps identify

a new location. But that's no longer going to be the case."

Gould said AIM would like to see a process that doesn't require property owners to hire an attorney.



Sack

CONTACT INFO

For state representatives: 1-800-382-9842

For state senators: 1-800-382-9467

Mailing address: 200 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204

But for now, the technology requires many smaller towers – ideally about every 500 feet – in addition to the large towers. With five wireless carriers in Indiana, it could mean *thousands* of new towers in densely populated areas.

The House Utilities, Energy and Telecommunications Committee last week heard representatives for the industry extol the benefits of 5G, suggesting Indiana needs to pass the bill

Ober, an Albion Republican and the utilities committee chairman, said amendments are in the works. The revisions should give communities a voice. They can encourage telecommunications companies to place the new wireless equipment on existing poles or on buildings. They can work with neighborhood associations and property owners to find locations that are the least objectionable.

Progress is good, but it should come with the cooperation and collaboration of everyone involved.