

Battle over cell phone tower builds up in Bath Twp.

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BATH TOWNSHIP — Signs clamor throughout Hammond's Corners, propped in the window of the old general store, planted in front of an antique home.

"Keep Bath rural. No cell phone tower!" they urge, punctuating their plea with a no-smoking-like graphic of a crossed-out cell phone.

T-Mobile wants to build a 30-foot cell phone tower topped with an 8-by-12-foot American flag behind the parking lot of Ken Stewart's Lodge, near the intersection of Cleveland-Massillon

and Ira roads.

Residents argue the tower has no place in Hammond's Corners, which since its founding in 1818 has served as a business hub of the rural suburb. It would mar the landscape, designated as a state scenic byway, they say.

But since the tower is proposed in a commercial area zoned for cell towers, proving the tower would harm the crossroads' historic integrity seems to be the only way the township can fight back.

In 2002, residents of Fowlers Mill in Geauga County's Munson Township had a lattice cell tower removed because a study showed

it diminished the integrity of the historic district. And this month, Bentleyville in Cuyahoga County rejected T-Mobile's overtures to place a tower in the village.

"We all want to use our cell phones, and no one wants a gap in service," said Mayor Michael Canty. "But those things are pretty ugly."

Thousands of cell phone towers dot Ohio's vistas, and piles more have been proposed, all to keep up with the universality of cell phones — of text messages, video streaming and Web surfing.

Ten years ago, 48.7 million Americans used cell phones, according to CTIA — The Wire-

less Association, an industry group. Now, there are more than 233 million users.

"You constantly need more towers when you're adding so many users," said spokesman Joseph Farren. And, a T-Mobile spokesman said the company is convinced the site will best suit its needs.

Tower opponents say they have perfectly good cell phone service, thank you very much.

→ They have written Stewart letters, promised to boycott his restaurant, distributed signs and fliers, collected signatures and created a Web site, www.bath-green.org. They have urged the

Summit County Council to pass a resolution against the tower and compiled loads of data for the FCC, which has the final say.

Now, with documents due to the FCC today, they will wait.

→ "It's a monstrosity; it's ugly; it's horrible," resident Richard Bradner said of the proposed tower. "It clearly does not have the aesthetics required for an area like we live in. Bath is a green jewel."

Bath is a land of sprawling parks and big spread-out homes, with retail clustered in the Montrose corridor and cell phone towers limited to Interstate 77. It's a town that supports a luxury

restaurant like Ken Stewart's Lodge, where portions are big and prices are bigger.

But it's also a place with a Circle K gas station sitting squarely at the intersection of Cleveland-Massillon and Ira roads and a motel up the road.

→ "We learn from our past," said Jeff Andrew, president of the Bath Township Historical Society and president of Garth Andrew Co., which is housed in his great-great-grandfather's general store. "Sooner or later, you have to take a stand."

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