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Cellular tower remains controversial at Knaust Road Park

Residents consider structure 'eyesore'

By Alan George
Staff writer

A meeting to discuss the future of Knaust Road Park Monday at the O'Fallon Municipal Centre became an anti-cellular tower discussion.

Alderman Cynthia

Davis, Ward 2, and Aldermen Dave Hinman, Ward 2, and Mark Perkins,

Ward 1, presided over the meeting. Residents were invited from the Butternut Stage, Timber Hills, Huntington Downs, Calumet, and Hutchinson Farms subdivisions, which encircle the park.

"We didn't expect our park meeting to be a cell tower meeting," Hinman said. "We need to decide what we want to do with this land. Basically, all we want to do is try to get some feedback. We sent out a survey to 1,100 homes."

Davis said the controversy surrounding the

park and its cellular tower began in 1994.

"One of the first projects I was involved in as an alderman was how we were going to make a park there," she said. "At the time, the city didn't have much money for parks. The city only had three parks — Civic, Westhoff and Fort Zumwalt."

"The city planner at the time had a creative idea to get more parkland, and that was to have the developers donate the corners (of their subdivisions)," Davis said. "Two of the developers donated their corners, and that's when the city put the tower in." The other two corners were never donated because the developers thought the terms of the agreement had been violated, she said.

Although it was originally intended to be 10 acres, the park is only 4.5 acres today, Davis said.

"There is something called 'eye pollution' out there now," she said. "Something flat that takes up half an acre like a detention basin wouldn't be nearly as offensive as that tower."

Davis said the most logical solution to the residents' concerns would have been to simply not renew the contract with AT&T, which is leasing the

ground from the city for its tower.

"I took a look at the lease in November (2000), and to my horror, the city staff had already signed it (in September 2000) for a 15-year extension," she said. "The Board of Aldermen was horribly circumvented. They went behind our backs and I feel terrible about it. This is how we got a very sorry excuse for a park."

Becky Walter, whose lot adjoins the park, said her homebuilder neglected to inform her of the park or the tower before her house was built.

"We moved into our house in August of 1997, and one week later they started putting up that horrible tower — one week later I was crying in my back yard, saying 'I want to move,'" she said.

Walter said most of the 1,100 homes that were sent questionnaires are not substantially affected by the tower.

"It's only the 30 or 40 people that live along it," she said. "Has anybody every seen a tower stuck in the middle of people's back yards like this? I saw teenage boys climbing halfway up it



Alan George photo

Jessica Walter, left, and Jessica Hoering, right, both 10, play catch. The cellular tower in the distance is at the center of controversy for some O'Fallon residents.

once. It's an eyesore and a sore subject with everybody that lives near it."

The next meeting to discuss Knaust Road Park is scheduled for 7 p.m. June 25 in multipurpose room of the O'Fallon Municipal Centre. The results of survey will be released at that time, Davis said.