

Telecommunication Towers

By Dave Gross, Hardwick Planning Commission Chair

There has been much interest and concern regarding telecommunication towers in the Hardwick community. Hardwick is not alone in this as telecommunication towers are being discussed and debated in many parts of Vermont, the US, and other countries. Some of the concerns that have been expressed locally relate to the impact of such a facility on the local plants and animals. Some relate to the aesthetics of the tower and how it would impact the scenic views for citizens and visitors to Hardwick. Some concerns relate to the radio waves (radio frequency emissions) that such towers broadcast and what, if any, impact these waves may have on the health of humans and wildlife. The concerns of the local community are considered by the Vermont Public Utility Commission (PUC) when it is evaluating an application for a new telecommunication tower or a modification of an existing tower. It is important to note that the Town of Hardwick does have input on the potential impacts to the environment or to aesthetics but it does not have any regarding the radio waves themselves. This is because Federal law grants the authority over radio waves (RF emissions) to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

*[Section 332\(c\)\(7\) of the Communications Act](#) preserves state and local authority over zoning and land use decisions for personal wireless service facilities, but sets forth specific limitations on that authority. Specifically, a state or local government may not unreasonably discriminate among providers of functionally equivalent services, may not regulate in a manner that prohibits or has the effect of prohibiting the provision of personal wireless services, must act on applications within a reasonable period of time, and must make any denial of an application in writing supported by substantial evidence in a written record. **The statute also preempts local decisions premised directly or indirectly on the environmental effects of radio frequency (RF) emissions, assuming that the provider is in compliance with the Commission's RF rules.** (Bold emphasis added by author)*

To respond to Hardwick community's interest and concerns, we have provided the following links to these webpages in the hopes that the information will be useful in better understanding this complex topic.

A good refresher of what we learned in science class:

<https://www.dummies.com/article/technology/digital-audio-radio/ham-radio/basics-of-radio-waves-160691>

FCC Tower and Antenna Siting:

[Tower and Antenna Siting | Federal Communications Commission \(fcc.gov\)](#)

FCC RF Safety FAQ:

[RF Safety FAQ | Federal Communications Commission \(fcc.gov\)](#)

Vermont Public Utility Commission

[Home | Public Utility Commission \(vermont.gov\)](#)