

Authority to reconsider Middletown cell tower plan

By [Kevin Penton](#) • KEYPORT BUREAU of the Asbury Park Press • June 21, 2009

MIDDLETOWN — The state Turnpike Authority will re-evaluate its proposal for a 140-foot-tall cell tower near Exit 109 of the Garden State Parkway, officials said.

Several neighboring residents have questioned whether the tower is needed and whether they were properly notified of the proposal.

"We're revisiting the site and its impact on the community," said Joseph Orlando, an authority spokesman. "We haven't come to a final decision, but we're revisiting our options."

In early June, Middletown and state Sens. Amy Handlin and Joseph Kyrillos wrote letters to state Turnpike Authority Executive Director Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti requesting a second public hearing on the proposal.

The authority held a public hearing on the proposal in August 2007, but few if any residents attended, said Anthony Mercantante, Middletown's administrator.

Because the T-Mobile tower is proposed for a site on state property, Middletown does not have any regulatory powers over it, Mercantante said. The tower would be located north of Newman Springs Road, between the Parkway's southbound local lanes and the southbound entrance ramp, according to state documents.

Before applicants can appear before the township's Zoning Board, they must send notification letters to property owners within 200 feet of the property where a development is proposed, Mercantante said.

The authority was required to advertise the public hearing only in the classified section of a local newspaper and on a bulletin board at Town Hall, Mercantante said.

"A lot of people are not happy about this," said Mercantante, who has fielded several calls from residents who said they did not know about the proposal. "There's no legal authority for the township to do anything."

In recent months, the state's proposal was discussed publicly as the Zoning Board considered two separate proposals for cell towers in different parts of town. Zoners rejected both applications.

Middletown Mayor Pamela Brightbill said she has heard from at least 20 residents who thought they had learned too late of the authority's plans. Brightbill said she would also like to learn more about what the state is proposing.

"I'm glad to hear that they're rethinking this," Brightbill said. "Hopefully, they'll decide it's not worth the headache."

Orlando declined to elaborate on whether the authority is considering holding another public hearing on the tower, which he said would be 140 feet tall. Previous drafts for the tower listed its height between 120 to 150 feet.

"We understand how important of an issue it is," Orlando said. "We want to make a decision as quickly as possible."