



CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND

**HB 654
Oppose**

Economic Matters Committee

February 21, 2019

HB 654 – Wireless Facilities – Installation and Regulation

Contact: Kate Stewart, Mayor

kates@takomaparkmd.gov, 301-891-7230

As the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) moves forward with regulations that could result in the installation of small cell towers in close proximity to homes, many residents of Takoma Park, Montgomery County, and indeed the State of Maryland are concerned about the potential impacts the location of these towers may have on their health, property values, the environment, and safety. The City of Takoma Park is also concerned about a proliferation of towers and equipment in City rights-of-way and their potential impact on neighborhood aesthetics, sidewalks, streets, and trees. Importantly, the FCC's action is another example of where another level of government is preempting a local government's right to regulate its own rights-of-way as it deems is in the interest of residents.

For our part, the City of Takoma Park is taking steps to regulate the placement of antennas in our rights-of-way. Our goals are to protect and preserve the aesthetics in the community, the values of properties, and to ensure that all wireless telecommunications facilities are installed using the least intrusive and safest means possible. We also wish to have high-speed wireless service throughout the community that is accessible to all.

The City of Takoma Park stands with the Maryland Municipal League and municipalities across the state in opposition to any effort to take away the ability of local governments to regulate cell towers on our own. While we recognize that cell wireless antennas and equipment are used by telecommunications companies to increase network coverage and capacity, and that such enhancements are advantageous and necessary as we become more reliant on electronic devices, we strongly believe that local residents and local government officials should play an integral and primary role in decision-making about the location and design of these small cell facilities. After all, it is the people who live nearby who will have to live with and look at these facilities once they are installed, not the telecommunications companies who will be profiting from them.

We believe it is vital to protect our residents' voices regarding installation decisions to ensure that they work for the community, protect our neighborhoods and allow local government oversight. If passed, this bill would permit installation of poles up to 50 feet in height and equipment structures measuring up to 28 cubic feet throughout the City, including residential neighborhoods. That could mean any number of poles being installed that are more than twice as tall as the surrounding homes, and equipment boxes larger than refrigerators taking the place of natural areas and land and streetscapes. These types of decisions should be left to the municipalities in which they are to be sited.

For these reasons, the City of Takoma Park opposes HB 654 and urges unfavorable consideration of the bill.