

THURSDAY  
JANUARY 5, 2006  
50¢

Volume 54 — Number 210

## Ham Radio Tower Proposed

## Hartford Neighbors Oppose Extension

By BRENDAN COONEY  
Valley News Staff Writer

**HARTFORD** — A proposed amateur-radio tower on Hurricane Hill is getting a bad signal from neighbors.

A couple say they want to build a 103-foot radio tower on their land to feed their amateur-radio hobby, and neighbors told the Hartford Zoning Board last night that they don't want to look at it or have it interfere with their TV reception.

"I don't want to sit on my deck and look at a tower," said Allen Hall, whose property is 150 feet away from the Hurricane Drive site.

The zoning board voted to resolve the issue following a Jan. 20 site visit, during which the couple will float a yellow balloon 103 feet in the air so people can gauge how visible the tower would be.

Neighbors said they would borrow a helicopter and do a fly-by in order to observe the balloon from the sky. They said views from the ground would not give the full picture of how the tower would alter the landscape.

The applicants said this would be pointless.

"That's the only place you could see it from," said Gina Watkins in a later interview. She and Robert Jacobson are seeking a conditional-use permit to extend their existing 40-foot radio tower into a 93-foot structure crowned by a 10-foot antenna. "When you travel to work, do you travel in a helicopter?"

The zoning board in 2004 gave the couple approval for the 40-foot tower, according to Jo-Ann Ells, the town's zoning administrator.

The couple's Massachusetts attorney, Fred Hopengarten, last night showed the board a six-minute video narrated by Walter Cronkite showing how ham-radio operators keep communications up during tornadoes and wildfires.

"As Walter Cronkite says, 'When all else fails, you will have amateur radio,'" said Hopengarten. He said he has a 100-foot radio tower in his back yard.

Neighbors were unimpressed.

Referring to the video, neighbor Tom Price Sr., said, "I don't understand why one would go to this extent for an amateur-radio tower."

Price told the board and the applicants that he was concerned about interference on his television.

"That's a subject that's forbidden to you," Hopengarten admonished the board, referring to federal case law that he said demonstrated citizens' radio rights and limited what

# Hartford Neighbors Oppose Proposed Extension of Ham Radio Tower

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

factors local boards could consider.

When pressed by board members, he said extending the tower would only ameliorate the interference question. "If there's no problem today, it will be less of a problem, because the signal will be further away."

But Price said there is a problem with the current tower. Addressing Jacobson, he said, "We could actually hear you talking in the television and on the radios."

Asked later what they could hear, Tom Price Jr. said, "Just (Jacobson) talking. It's not really what you're interested in when you are trying to watch TV. We had to change the channel."

Neighbors also say they're concerned that the couple intend to use the radio tower for commercial purposes.

"The airwaves will be full of things we do not want," said Tom Price Sr.

The couple runs WaveComm, which provides high-speed Internet, paging and two-way radio in rural parts of Vermont and New Hampshire. The couple said in an interview after the meeting that they have 2,500 customers and provide wireless communications to 500 people in the Upper Valley.

But they said they would not use this tower for commercial uses.

"We have three sites that can hit Hartford," said Gina Watkins, referring to other towers.

Hopengarten told the board his clients would accept written conditions that they would not extend the tower beyond 103 feet and that they would not use the tower for commercial purposes.

Neighbors were skeptical.

"This is only a springboard" to commercial uses, said the elder Rice in an interview after the meeting.

Hopengarten told the board the couple is on firm legal ground. "This is their hobby. It is their home. There is 60 years of unbroken law of this being an ordinary use of a home."

Interested parties will meet at the Hartford town hall at 7:15 a.m. on Jan. 20 and go to the site for the balloon test. The zoning board will hold a public hearing at town hall following the site visit.