

Fury over Edgemead cell mast

Residents say they were not consulted

ATHINA MAY

Edgemead residents believe public participation has become a mere formality for cell tower developers who have put up two masts in the suburb before the consultation process was over.

Those who had received a brown envelope on June 6 containing a request for consent to put up a cell mast on Southdale Road were shocked when they viewed the site on Sunday June 13 and saw the 15m mast next to a store when the public participation deadline was Wednesday July 6.

According to Edgemead Residents' Association chairman, Emile Coetzee, it was not the only one to go up illegally: another half-built mast was spotted outside the Engen garage, on the corner of Edgemead

Drive and Bosmansdam Road. He witnessed work starting on that one on Saturday June 11.

"I received an email on Sunday June 12 from a resident who had received a registered letter, dated June 6, for consent of the installation of a cellular base station in Southdale Road by Warren Petterson Planning. The following evening, I took a drive to go look at the proposed site only to discover the tower had already been built.

"Coincidentally another mast was also erected by a different construction company, other than Warren Petterson Planning, on Saturday June 11 at the Engen garage on the corner of Edgemead Drive and Bosmansdam Road.

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No consent needed, says Telkom

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"The building inspector went onsite on Monday after I had notified our ward councillor about it, and it was discovered that the contractor had no plans. They were told to cease further work," said Mr Coetzee.

Mr Coetzee said Warren Petterson Planning had pulled the same "stunt" in Edgemoed in 2013 when the community discovered a mast built with invalid plans, as the constructed tower was higher than was stipulated on the final plan.

"The problem is the City," said Mr Coetzee.

"There appears to be no consequences for building towers without approved plans. The tower Warren Petterson Planning built in 2013 was allowed to remain while new plans were submitted, despite numerous objections from residents.

"We are now in the exact same situation again where a tower has been built without approved plans, and I would like to know what action the City will be taking against this contractor."

When contacted, Warren Pet-

tersson of Warren Petterson Planning said his company had not erected the mast, but simply did the application for it on behalf of Telkom.

Mr Petterson said that if Telkom had built the mast before the public participation was concluded then it was Telkom who were being "naughty".

Telkom spokeswoman Jacqui O'Sullivan said the construction of the tower had not required any public participation and that all requirements were met.

"The law requires public participation when the structure is higher than 15m.

"In this case, in Edgemoed, the structure is less than 15m high. So no public participation was required for the erection of the mast. Telkom is, however, following the necessary public participation with the municipality, for the relaxation of the building line.

"The municipality was informed of the installation. But, as long as the installation is less than 15m high, the installation is allowed by provisions within the Public Finance Management Act," said Ms O'Sullivan.



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However, the City's mayoral committee member for energy, environmental and spatial planning, Johan van der Merwe, said the City's planning and building development management (PBDM) department's was taking action against the illegally erected cell masts on Southdale Road and Edgemoed Drive.

"It was brought to the City's PBDM department's attention that the cell mast was already erected by the time the application for consent was submitted and accordingly advertised to surrounding property owners via registered mail in June 2016.

"Therefore, notices will be served in terms of the erection of an unauthorised structure and for the land use contravention, as there are no land-use rights applicable to the property to operate a telecommunication mast, irrespective if an application is being processed or not," said Mr Van der Merwe.



■ **Left:** The cell tower on Southdale road has been constructed before the public participation has been completed.

■ **Far left:** The cell tower outside Engen petrol station in Edgemead was built without approved plans.

Editorial

Citizens' right to know

There's something of a cruel irony in the fact that cell-phone masts are supposed to help improve communication and yet it seems no-one can, or wants to, hear residents who complain about them going up in their neighbourhoods.

The masts have become so contentious, in part due to the health fears, that residents seem to have become increasingly suspicious of what they see as attempts to sneak them into their neighbourhoods.

The usual response from the City in approving many of these applications is that there is no scientific proof that radiation from

the masts is hazardous to human health. This is far from reassuring for many who argue that the absence of evidence proving harm doesn't mean they are safe. And a "100 percent safe" stamp is what many would like to see on something erected so routinely next to schools, creches and hospitals. But radiation fears aside, the strong winds in this city mean that it's vital that large structures are properly inspected and approved before going up. Building approval is not just a "nice to have". It means public safety has been considered. When shortcuts get taken, someone gets hurt or

dies. In November, 2012, a woman was killed and 20 people were injured after scaffolding supporting an advert collapsed before a Linkin Park concert at Cape Town Stadium. A few months later, in March 2013, a couple were seriously injured when scaffolding collapsed on them at the V&A Waterfront. It had been put up by a contracted rigging company.

Telkom representative, Jacqui O'Sullivan says public participation wasn't needed in this case, but the distribution of forms seeking resident's consent says otherwise. Somebody has their lines crossed, it seems.