

http://www.examiner.com/a-756116~Group_takes_issue_with_Wi_Fi.html

Group takes issue with Wi-Fi

May 31, 2007

by Joshua Sabatini, The Examiner

SAN FRANCISCO - San Francisco residents may have to wait at least another year for free citywide wireless Internet access, if an appeal by a group calling for more review is successful.

On Wednesday, the San Francisco Neighborhood Antenna Free Union filed an appeal with the Board of Supervisors of the Planning Department's April 20 decision to exempt from environmental review the installation of an estimated 2,200 wireless, or Wi-Fi, transmitters in various locations throughout The City. Mayor Gavin Newsom has struck an agreement with Google and EarthLink to blanket San Francisco within a free Wi-Fi network.

The Board of Supervisors has 45 days to schedule a hearing on SNAFU's appeal. If upheld, the agreement would have to undergo an environmental review, which generally takes about a year.

"We're concerned about the potential health and environmental effects from the microwave radiation used by these transmitters," SNAFU spokesman Doug Loranger said. "At this point, we're simply saying, 'You shouldn't proceed at all without an environmental review.'"

The appeal is the latest setback for the Wi-Fi agreement. In May, a Board of Supervisors committee postponed consideration of the deal until a July 11 hearing. Board members have said that the terms of the agreement should be better and some are advocating moving forward with a city-owned Internet network instead.

Newsom spokesman Nathan Ballard said the SNAFU appeal "is a frivolous maneuver designed to delay free Wi-Fi for no good reason."

Ballard stopped short of saying Newsom would bring the agreement to voters this November should the board uphold

the appeal or not approve the contract. A voter initiative can go to the ballot without a California Environmental Quality Act review, according to city attorney spokesman Matt Dorsey.

Wi-Fi transmitters emit about the same radio frequency radiation as cell antennas, which SNAFU members say studies have shown cause a range of health problems. The Wi-Fi transmitters are considered within an acceptable range under federal guidelines for exposure to radio frequency radiation.

The San Francisco Department of Public Health has determined that the level of emissions generated by the project "would not be of sufficient intensity to result in a health hazard to the general public," according to the Planning Department's April 20 decision.

The California Environmental Quality Act requires an environmental review of a project that would have significant impacts.

Under The City's agreement, Google would provide free wireless Internet service at a rate of 300 kilobits per second. EarthLink would pay The City about \$2 million during the initial four-year term of the contract and offer a faster 1 megabit-per-second service for a charge of \$21.95 per month. EarthLink says it could have a citywide Wi-Fi network in place within 18 months after the contract is approved.

A Controller's Office report released earlier this month estimated that existing Internet service customers in San Francisco could save as much as \$18 million annually if the Wi-Fi deal were approved.