The Township of The Archipelago

Information Report to Council

Report No.: Connectivity 2023_05   **Date:** May 18th, 2023

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Subject: Connectivity – Activity Report

HISTORY

Internet Connectivity remains a topic of interest for many residents and both Council and Staff are active pursuing several initiatives that will improve internet service throughout the township. Reference: https://www.thearchipelago.on.ca/p/internet-connectivity

MAY INTERIM

Ongoing activity related to the ***Province's Accelerated High Speed Internet Program (AHSIP) installation through Bell*** for connectivity.

The Province of Ontario has launched the Ontario High-Speed Internet Access Map. https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-connects-making-high-speed-internet-accessible-in-every-community This interactive map identifies the locations and details of provincially funded high-speed internet projects, as well as the location of existing high-speed internet service availability.

This map service will make it easier for people to learn more about provincially funded high-speed internet projects in their communities. The map will provide users with the ability to search by address, community or municipality to find project details, including construction status, provincial and federal contribution, and who the internet service providers are.

This map service also shows where high-speed internet service is currently available in communities across Ontario. This includes the minimum service standard of 50 Megabits per second (Mbps) download and 10 Mbps upload speeds, or 50/10 as set by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).

The high-speed internet map will be updated by the Ministry of Infrastructure when new information becomes available, including modifying project details, or adding new government funded projects. Additional provincially funded high-speed internet projects will also be added to the map as project agreements are finalized.

The mapping also officially informs us where funding is not being allocated to improve internet coverage. Here at the township we will be able to quantify the underserved/unserved internet areas and focus on solutions to address internet needs in these areas.

Canada's Rural & Remote Broadband Community (CRRBC) Eastern Conference in North Bay Ontario May 9th & 10th 2023.

The conference was well attended and provided an opportunity for the main stakeholders in community broadband, Network Suppliers and Developers, Government Funders, (Infrastructure Ontario), Municipal and Community User groups, and Policy Makers, (CRTC), to share and discuss their perspectives and needs for new high-speed infrastructure.

There was a willingness to listen to these perspectives and an appetite to adapt various initiatives to try to accommodate the best solutions for all parties. It's a slow process particularly for the policy makers. In terms of Policy, the comments from the communities included a need for *open networks* and *local access* to the backbone to enable connection for smaller ISP's to provide service to smaller communities and last mile clients.

There is a strong sentiment that Ontario needs to 'future proof' whatever infrastructure is being funded and implemented now. It is too costly to enhance (add more capacity) or build over (by competitors) again later. The main issue facing network developers is labour shortage. Labour is the biggest cost to build and deploy new infrastructure.

The AHSIP build-out (via fibre infrastructure) should be big with many fibres to have much more capacity than what is currently needed in order to accommodate applications not even considered at present. There must be many access points to accommodate future new community developments along newly built fibre infrastructure.

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) has an important role to play in getting government funded infrastructure addressed appropriately. Currently, the CRTC has the "Call for comments – Broadband Fund policy review" open for providing input. To provide comment visit: https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2023/2023-89.htm

Also, the CRTC has an open feedback and engagement session around the *Broadband Fund*. Comments are being collected until July 21 2023, please click here: https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/consultation/broadband.htm

(For further conference networking takeaway comments and details there will be an ADDENDUM provided at May Committee Meeting)

Further engage with area Internet Service Providers

Utilizing existing infrastructure there are further possibilities to enhance coverage to areas not within scope of the ASHIP (fibre build) through existing ISPs. During the North Bay conference staff was able to connect with several companies to evaluate possibilities given the new mapping release and knowing what areas are not being funded with new fibre infrastructure.

Network with area Connectivity Advocates

Hon. Graydon Smith (MPP of Parry Sound—Muskoka), Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. Currently through the provincial government there is over 4 billion dollars committed to enhancing Broad Band in Ontario – primarily through the Accelerated High Speed Internet Program (ASHIP).

West Parry Sound SMART - The West Parry Sound Smart Community Inc. evolved from the Regional Economic Development Committee of West Parry Sound to seek a solution for the lack of adequate, affordable internet bandwidth and technological capacity for our area.

Blue Sky Net – Facilitates the development of Information Communications Technology (ICT) projects throughout Northern Ontario. The focus at Blue Sky Net is to facilitate network expansion by helping to bring all levels of government together with one strategic goal and that is to resolve the ever-growing need for Broadband in your community so that we can all be on that level playing field to grow our communities.

NEXT STEPS

1) Analyze the recently released Ontario High-Speed Internet Access Map to determine what in NOT in scope with the ASHIP.

2) Launch the Residential Internet Connectivity Survey with the aim to determine current connectivity demand, speeds currently available, what effect connectivity might have on duration of seasonal residence and resulting Economic Impact this might produce for local businesses, employment and accommodation.

3) Consider a provisioning plan for the remaining underserved/unserved Archipelago residences. Utilizing our Guiding Principals, we continue discussions with local ISP's to deliver Canadian connectivity solutions to non-served and off-shore residents.

4) Ongoing engagement with Blue Sky Networks, Hon Graydon Smith and WPS SMART for additional connectivity support.

Respectfully Submitted,

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