

For Information Only

Enhancing Community Broadband Coverage in Greater Sudbury and across Northern Ontario

Presented To:	City Council
Presented:	Tuesday, Jul 07, 2020
Report Date	Monday, Jun 22, 2020
Type:	Referred & Deferred Matters

Resolution

For Information Only

Relationship to the Strategic Plan / Health Impact Assessment

Improving rural broadband is a CGS strategic priority within the strategic objective “Economic Capacity and Investment Readiness”. Improving broadband is a definite need, at least 13% of land parcels in Greater Sudbury are below the Canadian government’s target Internet speeds. Some land parcels in this area have insufficient broadband connectivity and some have no connectivity at all.

Report Summary

The City is leading a collaborative effort with other public and private sector organizations to identify priority areas for broadband improvement. The data, experience and past successful track record of Blue Sky Net improves our ability to prepare for and successfully submit funding applications. The application process for both Federal and (when available) Provincial funding will be seeking evidence that there is broad based community support for individual projects. Council resolutions and letters of support from public and private sector partners will benefit applications for broadband project funding.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications with this report.

Blue Sky Net is funded by the federal government through FedNor so there is no cost to the City in obtaining its assistance to prepare applications. There are however potential financial benefits to our community. In the past year, the provincial government has announced \$315 million toward their broadband and cellular action plan. The federal government, through the CRTC announced an \$750 million “Broadband Fund” is open to applications until March 27, 2020, and the 2019 Federal budget

Signed By

Report Prepared By

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Digitally Signed Jun 22, 20

Financial Implications

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Recommended by the Department

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announced another \$1.7 billion for a “Universal Broadband Fund”.

(Note due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the CRTC Broadband Fund application deadline was extended first to April 30, 2020 and then to June 1, 2020.)

Executive Summary

This report introduces how the City is working to enhance broadband capacity across the community and highlights that the Mayor recently issued a letter of support for an application to the Federal Government's 'CRTC Broadband Fund'.

In response to Council's strategic priority of, 'Support private, Provincial and Federal programs to improve rural broadband', City staff are leading a collaborative effort with other public and private sector partners to identify priority areas for broadband improvement and then to pursue mechanisms to fund these improvements. This includes actively pursuing Federal and Provincial funding as it is announced.

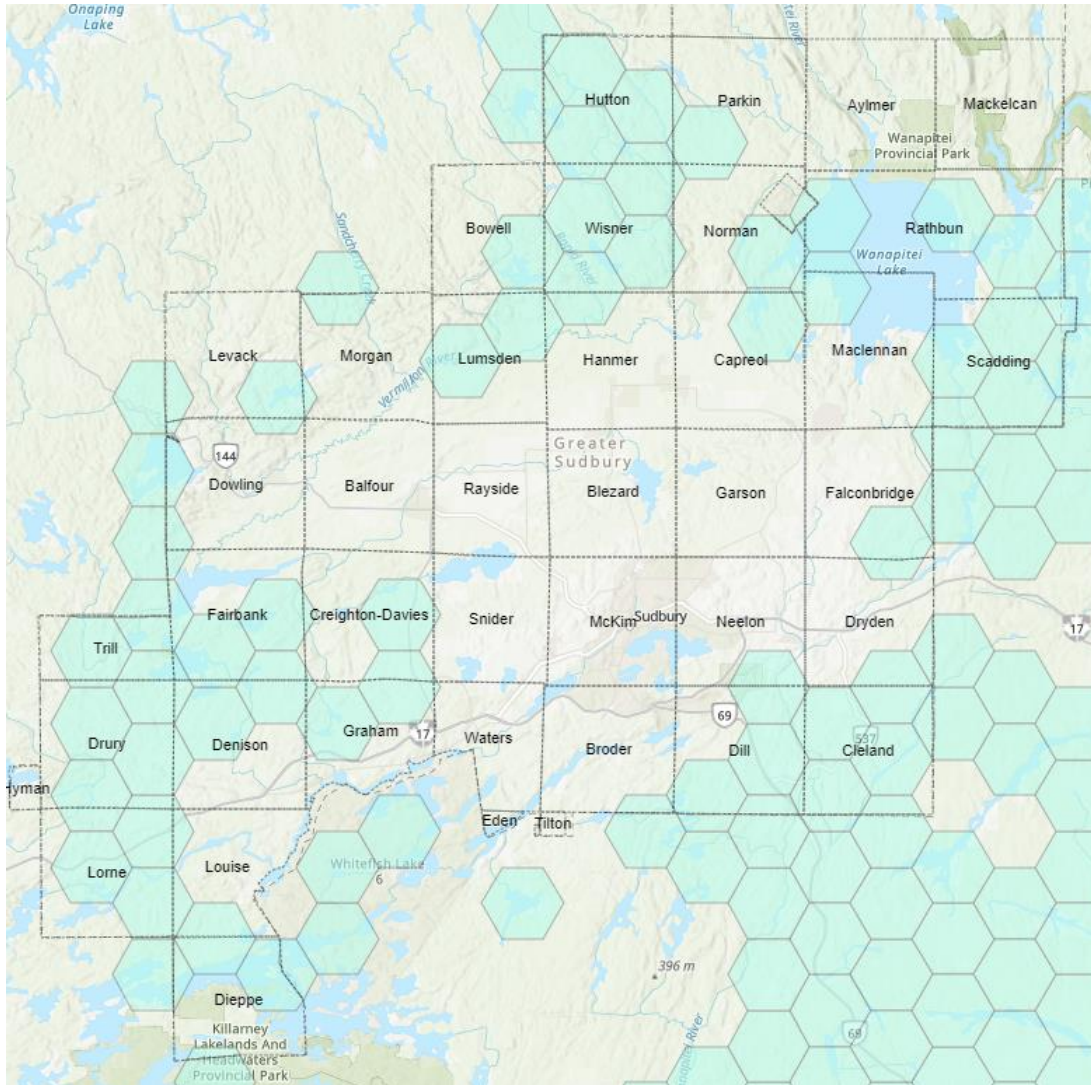
One of the City's partners is Blue Sky Net, an organization funded by FedNor to prepare broadband improvement funding applications. Blue Sky Net helped prepare an application that addresses parts of our City, in time to meet the most recent deadline for the 'CRTC Broadband Fund'.

An earlier version of this report is attached for Council's ease of reference. It was originally published on the March 10th City Council agenda and deferred with a number of other reports in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic response. That report contained a resolution indicating Council support for Blue Sky Net's request for proposal and submission to the CRTC. The deadline for applications to the CRTC broadband fund was originally March 27, 2020. This deadline was extended twice by the Federal government, first to April 30th and then to June 1st. To assure we met the deadline and to indicate our support, which many of our public sector partners did as well, Mayor Bigger signed a letter of support in lieu of the Council resolution and that letter is also attached to this report.

Background

This background section provides a summary of the latest CRTC Broadband Fund application process and the resultant underserved areas of the City that will be covered by the latest application.

First the CRTC provided a map of funding eligible hexagons (in green below), each a 25 Km area, covering populated, underserved areas across Canada.



Second our local group which included internet user organizations and internet service providers identified priority hexagons in our area.

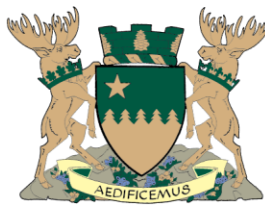
Next, Blue Sky Net following CRTC guidelines facilitated the creation of an application, and this required an internet service provider to propose a solution they would build and to identify the areas they would service.

This resulted in an application that addresses some but not all of our priority areas. The areas it proposes to address are: Township of Cleland, Township of Dill, Wahanapitei Lake west side, Wahanapitei Reserve No. 11, Township of Waldon (Fairbank Lake), and Township of Wisner.

The Mayor's letter and the earlier Management Report on this topic are included as an attachment for further background.

Conclusion

The CRTC Broadband Fund is only one source of funds. To achieve the Internet capacity the community needs, the City plans to continue to work with local public and private sector partners cited above and invites others. The City will actively pursue and be open to pursuing other funding opportunities. Expect this to take years of continuous effort.



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April 29th, 2020

Mr. Chris Seidl
Executive Director - Telecommunications
Canadian Radio-television and
Telecommunications Commission
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N2

Re: City of Greater Sudbury's support for Blue Sky Net's application to the CRTC's Broadband Fund

Dear Mr. Seidl,

As the Mayor of the City of Greater Sudbury I am writing to express our support for the application by Blue Sky Net to the CRTC Broadband Fund to enhance broadband connectivity in Greater Sudbury and across Northern Ontario to address longstanding issues in some parts of our region including poor to no internet coverage.

The City of Greater Sudbury has lead a group of local organizations, including education, health care, industry, etc., to align the needs of these organizations with broadband survey data collected by Blue Sky Net and CRTC information on broadband coverage in our area. Through this effort the City and these organizations have contributed to the Blue Sky Net's application. As an organization, the City of Greater Sudbury is advancing several projects aimed at digitizing our processes and realizing our vision of providing great citizen services, powered by technology and data, anytime, anywhere.

The findings of the survey mentioned above indicated that 13% of the land parcels in our community have internet speeds less than 5MBps, which is well below the CRTC standard of 50/10 Mbps. As an example of the impact of having below standard internet speeds, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the City of Greater Sudbury has a declared a state of emergency and the lack of good internet has proven to be a real barrier to enabling work from home for its citizens, which is needed to both support Public Health's 'stay at home' recommendations and to support our economy. It creates issues for educational institutions, telemedicine opportunities and public health communications and resourcing in an event like we are currently navigating.

Generally for a project of this importance, Council would provide a Resolution of Support, however due to a focus on the immediate needs of the community during this current state of emergency, I as Mayor, am sending this letter of support for Blue Sky Net's application to the CRTC's Broadband Fund.

Should you have any questions regarding the statements I have made, please don't hesitate to contact my office.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of Blue Sky Net's application.

Sincerely,

Brian Bigger
Mayor

Executive Summary

The City is looking to enhance broadband connectivity in Greater Sudbury. To accomplish this, the City is leading a collaborative effort with other local public and private sector organizations with an interest in the City and surrounding area. Further the City has initiated work with Blue Sky Net, a Fednor funded organization, to aid in successfully collecting data, planning improvements and applying for funding.

This activity supports a Council priority and it has the potential of taking advantage of recent announcements of provincial and federal broadband funding.

Background

This is a summary of work by City staff to address Council's strategic priority to 'Support private, Provincial and Federal programs to improve rural broadband'. The City has an Information Technology vision of: "great citizen services powered by technology and data, available anytime, anywhere". This strategy includes a goal to enhance community data networks and prepare all residents and businesses for a future in which digitized systems allow for services to be accessed from home or a mobile device rather than in person or on paper.

The term **broadband** refers to high-speed Internet access. The Canadian Radio and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) states their objective as, "we want all Canadian homes and businesses to have access to broadband Internet speeds of at least 50 Mbps (Megabits per second) for downloads and 10 Mbps for upload." The challenge in the City of Greater Sudbury is that a recent broadband survey, conducted by Blue Sky Net, shows that 13% of land parcels in Greater Sudbury are well below 5Mbps. This percentage is even higher in areas outside our City boundaries, areas key to connecting more broadly across an underserved or unserved Northern Ontario.

The provincial and federal governments have stated their commitment to fund broadband improvements. In the past year the provincial government has announced \$315 Million toward their broadband and cellular action plan. The federal government, through the CRTC announced an \$750M "Broadband Fund" that is open to applications until March 27, 2020, and the 2019 Federal budget announced another \$1.7 Billion for a "Universal Broadband Fund".

Analysis

Broad Public and Private Sector Interest in Improved Broadband

The City as a corporation is one organization that would benefit from improved broadband, but so would others, so City staff engaged a number of other local public sector organizations including: Rainbow District School Board, Health Sciences North, Greater Sudbury Police Service, Laurentian University, Northern Ontario School of Medicine, Cambrian College, Collège Boréal, Sudbury Catholic District School Board, Conseil scolaire public du Grand Nord de l'Ontario, Conseil scolaire catholique Nouvelon, Centre for Excellence in Mining Innovation, Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board and NORCAT.

In addition to this list of participants the City continues to encourage interest from others.

The group has created a comprehensive list of interests that improved broadband would address for their organizations, here is a sampling of these:

- Physician / patient connectivity and integrated care delivery
- Teacher / student connectivity
- Pre and post hospital care connectivity
- Support for mining cluster connectivity and innovations
- Work from anywhere
- Economic Development and Investment Readiness

An Experienced Network of Internet Service Providers

Telecommunications service providers operating in the City including, Agilis Networks, Net Spectrum, Vianet, Eastlink and Bell Canada were also engaged. Many have competed directly for broadband funding in the past and most have worked through requests for proposal issued by Blue Sky Net for inclusion in funding applications for given regional broadband projects.

Blue Sky Net Process

Blue Sky Net describes itself as, "a Regional Technology Development Organization, part of Blue Sky Economic Growth Corporation, contracted by FedNor, the Northern Ontario regional development organization for the Government of Canada. Blue Sky Net's goal is to enhance Broadband connectivity, awareness and applications in the Districts of Nipissing, District of Parry Sound, Greater Sudbury, Sudbury East and Manitoulin Island."

Blue Sky Net has an established strength in collecting broadband data from Internet Service Providers, analyzing that data and making it available in Geographic Information System (GIS) format or in reports. Additionally, Blue Sky Net has a good understanding of funding application requirements and an

established process for preparing and submitting applications for provincial and federal funding.

As part of the process, for the current federal Broadband Fund application, Blue Sky Net issued a Request For Proposal (RFP), which is now closed. This RFP was open to all Internet Service Providers to define the best possible broadband projects that meet the criteria of the Broadband Fund application.

To further strengthen this application, Blue Sky Net is asking for the support of the City and of the organizations that the City is already collaborating with.

As stated above this application is due to be submitted to the CRTC on March 27, 2020.

Recommendations

The City of Greater Sudbury, citing broad community interest in enhancing broadband connectivity in Greater Sudbury and across Northern Ontario, supports working with Blue Sky Net and having them submit on the community's behalf, to the current CRTC funding application process and to subsequent provincial or federal broadband funding opportunities.

City staff will continue to collaboratively lead a group of local organizations to further align on project areas of interest using survey data collected by Blue Sky Net and the CRTC information on broadband coverage in our area. We also plan to reach out to private sector businesses and First Nations communities to ensure that their interests in enhanced broadband are represented in our funding applications. If there are projects of interest that our community wants to bring to the forefront, we may continue to work with Blue Sky net or engage more directly with internet service providers to pursue available funding.