

Request for Decision

Enhancing Community Broadband Coverage in Greater Sudbury and across Northern Ontario

Presented To:	City Council
Presented:	Tuesday, Mar 24, 2020
Report Date	Wednesday, Mar 11, 2020
Type:	Referred & Deferred Matters

Resolution

THAT 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, as outlined in the report entitled "Enhancing Community Broadband Coverage in Greater Sudbury and across Northern Ontario", from the General Manager of Corporate Services, presented at the City Council meeting on March 10, 2020.

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

Signed By

Report Prepared By

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Digitally Signed Mar 11, 20

Financial Implications

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Recommended by the Department

Kevin Fowke
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Recommended by the C.A.O.

Ed Archer
Chief Administrative Officer
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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 announced another \$1.7 billion for a "Universal Broadband Fund".

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.