

CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday, December 17, 2020
2:00 p.m.
Meeting to be held electronically.

Agenda

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Adoption of November 19, 2020 Minutes
3. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interest and the General Nature Thereof
4. Summary and Highlights: Canada's Rural and Remote Broadband Conference Fall 2020 – Councillor Giguère, Vice Chair (to be circulated in advance of the meeting)
5. Summary #2 of Mountain Connect Virtual Conference, Legislative Services Coordinator
6. Discussion Question Feedback – Internet Forum – Supervisor of Legislative Services
7. Correspondence – A Path to Better Connectivity – ROMA Launches Municipal Broadband Resources
8. Date of Next Meeting
9. Adjournment

Meeting: Connectivity Committee
Date: November 19, 2020
Time: 10:00 a.m.
Location: Webex

Attendees: Tom Marks, Councillor and Committee Chair
Dominique Giguère, Councillor and Committee Vice Chair
Dave Mennill, Warden
Justin Pennings, Community Member

Regrets: Shawn Southern, Community Member
Joshua Kiirya, Community Member
Mike Andrews, Community Member

Staff: Julie Gonyou, Chief Administrative Officer
Jim Bundschuh, Director of Financial Services
Alan Smith, General Manager of Economic Development
Al Reitsma, Manager of Information Technology
Cecil Coxen, IT Manager – Township of Malahide
Katherine Thompson, Supervisor of Legislative Services
Carolyn Krahn, Legislative Services Coordinator

DRAFT MINUTES

1. Call to Order

The Connectivity Committee met this 19th day of November 2020. The meeting was called to order at 10:06 a.m.

2. Approval of Agenda

Moved by: Warden Mennill
Seconded by: Councillor Giguère

RESOLVED THAT the agenda be amended to include a review of the Connectivity Survey results as the last item of business.

Recorded Vote

	Yes	No
Councillor Giguère	Yes	
Warden Mennill	Yes	
Justin Pennings	Yes	
Councillor Marks	Yes	
	4	0

- Motion Carried.

3. Adoption of November 5, 2020 Minutes

Moved by: Councillor Giguère

Seconded by: Warden Mennill

Resolved that the minutes of the previous meeting be adopted.

Recorded Vote

	Yes	No
Councillor Giguère	Yes	
Warden Mennill	Yes	
Justin Pennings	Yes	
Councillor Marks	Yes	
	4	0

- Motion Carried.

4. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interest and the General Nature Thereof

None.

5. Action Plan Update

The Supervisor of Legislative Services presented an update on the Committee’s Action Plan, noting completed actions, ongoing actions, and upcoming activities.

6. Summary of Meetings with MP and MPP – Councillor Marks

Councillor Marks met with the MP and MPP to discuss the need for broadband all across the County. The MP and MPP agreed to keep the County updated on funding available from the provincial and federal governments for broadband projects.

7. Internet Service Provider Survey Results – Supervisor of Legislative Services

The Supervisor of Legislative Services presented the results of a survey sent to local Internet Service Providers (ISPs). The survey sought feedback from local ISPs on a number of connectivity related issues, and it was sent to ten (10) ISPs with a personalized letter from the Chair. Six (6) responses were received.

8. Summary of Mountain Connect Virtual Conference, Legislative Services Coordinator

The Legislative Services Coordinator provided a summary of the Mountain Connect Conference held on October 26-27, 2020. The Mountain Connect Conference included more than forty (40) sessions focusing on three distinct tracks: Community Development, Emerging Technologies, and Wireless.

9. Chatham-Kent TekSavvy Partnership, Supervisor of Legislative Services, Director of Finance and Manager of IT

The Supervisor of Legislative Services, the Director of Financial Services, and the Manager of IT presented information gathered from their meeting with staff from the Municipality of Chatham-Kent to discuss their partnership with Internet Service Provider (ISP) TekSavvy.

10. Follow-up to Literature Review, Supervisor of Legislative Services

The Supervisor of Legislative Services presented further information on two (2) communities included in the Literature Review previously presented to the Committee regarding rural communities who have successfully implemented connectivity solutions.

11. Review of Connectivity Survey Results

The Supervisor of Legislative Services presented the results of the Internet Connectivity Survey, which was launched on October 16th to gather feedback from residents about their experiences with internet connectivity in Elgin.

12. Date of Next Meeting

The Committee will meet next on December 17, 2020 at 2:00 p.m.

13. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:03 a.m.





REPORT TO THE CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

FROM: Carolyn Krahn, Legislative Services
Coordinator

DATE: December 11, 2020

SUBJECT: Mountain Connect, Broadband
Development Conference – Summary

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the December 11th report titled, Mountain Connect, Broadband Development Conference Visionary Solutions for the West – Summary, submitted by the Legislative Services Coordinator, be received and filed for information.

INTRODUCTION:

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the Mountain Connect Conference held on October 26-27, 2020.

The Mountain Connect Conference included more than forty (40) sessions focusing on three distinct tracks: Community Development, Emerging Technologies, and Wireless. A report on the Community Development track was presented to the Committee at its last meeting, and this report will focus on presentations from the last two (2) tracks.

DISCUSSION:

Digital Government Strategy in the Age of COVID

This session explored how the pandemic has disrupted government operations and has required local governments to revisit how they are operating on a day-to-day basis. Panelists included Ernie Staten, Director of Public Service – City of Fairlawn, and Mike Lynch, Boston Department of Innovation and Technology Broadband & Cable – City of Boston.

Mike Lynch addressed some of the challenges that the City of Boston faced in adapting to the new work environment. Before the pandemic began, employees were not



encouraged to work from home, and like most other municipalities, they scrambled to get everyone ready for remote work. As the pandemic continued, they have been looking for more long-term solutions and are working on a digital government strategy, which would include updating systems for citizen transactions and engagement.

In addition to transitioning to digital government, the City deployed connectivity solutions to help students with remote learning. While the City has good coverage, approximately 5% of students lacked a stable home environment and did not have good connectivity. The City supplied students with new Chromebooks and hotspots, which were locked for school use only. The City is currently exploring a long-term solution to get students connected with Internet Essentials, a Comcast program that provides low-income Americans with low-cost, high-speed Internet at home. They have also made a one (1) year commitment to purchase home broadband for populations who do not have the means to get connected.

Ernie Staten provided an overview of FairlawnGig, a municipal broadband utility in Fairlawn, Ohio. Four (4) years ago, the City decided to provide Fiber to the Home of every Fairlawn resident. They took out \$10.1 million from their general fund without payback requirements to build the infrastructure, and they now service 60% of the population, including local businesses. They do not ask for assessments, and they have not raised taxes to fund the utility. They charge a service fee but try to keep it as low as possible. Currently, their revenue is greater than their operating expenses, and the surplus is used for upgrades, including upgrades brought on by the pandemic. At the onset of the pandemic, FairlawnGig noticed an uptick in home connections, and most residences jumped up to a higher service level to accommodate working from home.

The utility currently has a satisfaction score of up to 89%, and Ernie Staten attributed this level of satisfaction to keeping customer service local. He also noted that FairlawnGig has encouraged businesses to locate to Fairlawn instead of neighbouring communities.

San Mateo County's Approach to Digital Equity and E-Learning

This session explored how San Mateo County prepared for remote learning in the event that schools would not reopen. Benny Lee, Director SMC Public Wi-Fi Program for the County of San Mateo, highlighted that getting students ready for remote learning required more than just getting them devices. Low income families in currently served areas were connected to the Internet Essentials program offered by Comcast. The County also established Wi-Fi hotspots in more rural areas. For example, hotspots were established in a small town with a population of around 600 people, and on an average day in the summer, approximately 3,000-4,000 devices would connect to the different hotspot locations in town.



Benny Lee explained that these were only the first steps in solving the community's connectivity challenges and that they had a long way to go. Some of the challenges he named were similar to the current challenges in Elgin County including terrain, trees, and low population density. He also emphasized that there are no silver bullets and that a solution will take commitment, time and partnership.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

None.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Serving Elgin	Growing Elgin	Investing in Elgin
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensuring alignment of current programs and services with community need. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exploring different ways of addressing community need. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engaging with our community and other stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Planning for and facilitating commercial, industrial, residential, and agricultural growth. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fostering a healthy environment. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Enhancing quality of place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensuring we have the necessary tools, resources, and infrastructure to deliver programs and services now and in the future. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Delivering mandated programs and services efficiently and effectively.

LOCAL MUNICIPAL PARTNER IMPACT:

None.

COMMUNICATION REQUIREMENTS:

None.

**CONCLUSION:**

The Mountain Connect Broadband Development Conference highlighted the vital importance of connectivity to all communities and the need for local municipalities to work with ISPs, community organizations, and the different levels of government to develop creative solutions to current connectivity challenges.

All of which is Respectfully Submitted

Approved for Submission

Carolyn Krahn
Legislative Services Coordinator

Julie Gonyou
Chief Administrative Officer





REPORT TO CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

FROM: Katherine Thompson, Supervisor of
Legislative Services

DATE: December 11, 2020

SUBJECT: Discussion Question Feedback – Internet
Forum

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the December 11, 2020, report titled, Discussion Question Feedback, submitted by the Supervisor of Legislative Services, be received and filed for information; and,

THAT staff be directed to circulate this report to the participants of the December 3, 2020 Internet Forum and publish these results on the Elgin County website.

INTRODUCTION:

On December 3, 2020 the Elgin County Connectivity Committee hosted an Internet Forum. The Forum attracted approximately 29 participants who took part in the morning session that consisted of presentations from public sector and industry representatives regarding rural internet connectivity. Participants were then split into virtual breakout rooms to provide feedback on a series of discussion questions. The combined results of this feedback are attached to this report.

DISCUSSION:

Participants at Elgin County's Internet Forum were a combination of elected officials, municipal staff, and industry professionals. After informative presentations from the Thames Valley District School Board, Infrastructure Ontario, the Municipality of Chatham-Kent, Uplink Wireless, and North Frontenac Telecom, participants were presented the results of the Elgin County Internet Connectivity Survey. The survey was open to the public from October 16- November 16, 2020 and received over 400 responses from Elgin County residents about their internet connectivity experiences. The results of this survey helped Committee members identify trends and develop five

(5) discussion questions which were considered by Forum participants in three (3) small break out sessions that followed the presentation. These questions were as follows:

1. How can we encourage Internet Service Providers to offer higher service levels (i.e. More data, faster speeds)?
2. How can we encourage increased competition?
3. How can we encourage better customer service from Internet Service Providers?
4. What could municipal advocacy look like?
5. What could a “Made in Elgin” solution look like?

Feedback from each break out session was combined into the document below for the Committee’s consideration.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Serving Elgin	Growing Elgin	Investing in Elgin
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensuring alignment of current programs and services with community need. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exploring different ways of addressing community need. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engaging with our community and other stakeholders.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Planning for and facilitating commercial, industrial, residential, and agricultural growth. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fostering a healthy environment. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Enhancing quality of place.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensuring we have the necessary tools, resources, and infrastructure to deliver programs and services now and in the future. <input type="checkbox"/> Delivering mandated programs and services efficiently and effectively.

LOCAL MUNICIPAL PARTNER IMPACT:

None.

COMMUNICATION REQUIREMENTS:

This report will be circulated to the participants of the Internet Forum and published on the County of Elgin’s website for public access.

**CONCLUSION:**

Discussion with Internet Forum participants garnered valuable feedback about the current state of internet connectivity in Elgin County and provided insight into what a possible solution for improving this connectivity could look like. This feedback is attached for the Committee's consideration.

All of which is Respectfully Submitted

Katherine Thompson
Supervisor of Legislative Services

Approved for Submission

Julie Gonyou
Chief Administrative Officer



CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE INTERNET FORUM

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

<p><i>How can we encourage Internet Service Providers to offer higher service levels (i.e. More data, faster speeds)?</i></p>	<p>To determine how we can increase speeds and data allocations we will first need to determine which method we will be utilizing to deliver internet. The ways of increasing speeds and data may differ from wireless to fibre etc.</p> <p>We need to determine the demand for speeds first. Then we can build to that demand. The demand during the COVID-19 pandemic has increased so much over the past several months that customers are now demanding the speeds and data that ISPs had predicted they would be demanding in two years time. COVID-19 has accelerated demand significantly.</p> <p>For wireless it is a matter of increasing the tower to tower links. Heavily treed areas and houses surrounded by tall trees cause connection challenges for wireless. Clear direct signals are important. In heavily treed areas providers are required to utilize lower frequencies to get through tree cover which leads to lower speeds for the end user. More clusters of smaller towers to increase saturation and get more direct signals would allow for increased speeds in this case.</p> <p>The cost to the end-user drives the feasibility of the service. Most rural customers will upgrade if costs are similar to current DSL costs or if other services like phone are bundled in and costs net out to the same price. There is a limit to how much residents will pay, even if service is significantly better. In many cases higher speeds are available to customers already but in order to receive these speeds they must pay higher prices to ISPs. Many are unwilling or unable to do so.</p> <p>Significant fibre backbone already exists in the county. Look to provide financial support to support small wholesalers to use that backbone.</p>
<p><i>How can we encourage increased competition?</i></p>	<p>More accurate mapping is needed to determine where gaps exist. ISPs will then know where they could provide their services. Accurate mapping is difficult to obtain as existing ISPs consider it a competitive disadvantage to share this information with potential competitors.</p> <p>CRTC has asked Bell and Rogers to share their towers with smaller ISPs; however, it is the experience of small local ISPs that they are not receptive to this request.</p> <p>Increasing competition in an area where there is existing service is difficult. Unless a new ISP is able to provide a service that is much better than what is in place it will be hard to convince customers to</p>

	<p>switch. If an ISP doesn't believe that enough customers will switch, they will not invest in expensive infrastructure which may not yield significant return on investment.</p> <p>Funding. Smaller ISPs don't have the funds in the bank to qualify for funding programs from the Federal and Provincial Governments.</p> <p>Open access to existing infrastructure in Elgin is a challenge given areas under control in East Elgin particularly. The amount of territory that Eastlink has in East Elgin poses difficult challenges in Elgin County for smaller players to buy wholesale to gain enough backbone to enter the rural market. The situation is more open in West Elgin.</p> <p>A major risk with small scale wireless solutions is that they are using unlicensed spectrum that could get crowded in the future if other devices take up spectrum or if that spectrum gets so popular that it will eventually require licensing.</p> <p>Connectivity for all is the first priority – competition comes next.</p>
<p>How can we encourage better customer service from Internet Service Providers?</p>	<p>They system is asymmetrical in terms of customer service. Generally smaller, local ISPs provide more responsive customer service than larger ISPs.</p> <p>Municipalities should support smaller ISPs working in the community that provider faster, better more responsive customer service. Local reputations are on the line and they want to fix the problem.</p> <p>Larger companies care about shareholder dividends and do not want to put money into increased customer service.</p> <p>Help manage the expectations of residents by providing education about who is responsible for restoring service when there are outages. This will direct inquiries to the right providers. For example, when wireless infrastructure is installed on hydro poles and there is a pole down, it is the hydro provider that needs to restore that service.</p> <p>One of the main complaints of rural residents is that ISPs provide slower service than they promised to customers when they signed up. If ISPs were candid about the service they are actually able to provide, the customer would be less likely to complain about a lower speed as it is what they signed up for.</p> <p>Customers should vote with their money. This will encourage better service from providers.</p>
<p>What could municipal</p>	<p>Advocate on behalf of the smaller providers. Who do not have the capital in the bank to qualify for funding.</p>

<p>advocacy look like?</p>	<p>There are major flaws with existing infrastructure programs offered by senior levels of government. Not every project is shovel ready. They need to support smaller players to enter the market who may not yet have a shovel ready project.</p> <p>County could support projects submitted to the Canada Infrastructure Bank and lobby to decrease the threshold for projects that get funded. They need to support smaller projects, not just those that are \$100M+. The County shouldn't promote any one business but should increase its promotional efforts around what connectivity options are available in the area for residents (Wireless, Fibre, Satellite).</p> <p>Could advocate for better customer service from large ISPs on behalf of residents.</p> <p>Even SWIFT's best-case scenario under current multi-year rollout will leave many parts of the County underserved. We can't wait for SWIFT 2 to come along to fill those gaps.</p> <p>County could look to providing financial support to smaller players who purchase from the wholesale market.</p> <p>Getting lines across the 401 is a major issue in the western part of Elgin County. A recent estimate for one conduit under the 401 came in at approximately \$400,000 from MTO. You cannot make a business case with this overhead cost. County could assist with working with MTO to bring these costs down.</p>
<p>What could a "Made in Elgin" solution look like?</p>	<p>A made in Elgin Solution must consider the needs of businesses and farms who will have massive data needs in the future, not just the residential market. For instance, a large farming operation should really have a fibre connection with wireless relays for field operations.</p> <p>Telephone big providers were not interested in providing services to small rural areas either. Small rural telecoms were developed to meet this need. We should look at what they did at the time and is it a possibility now?</p> <p>The solution is going to have to consider Elgin's geography; lots of trees, topographic challenges which are difficult to address no matter how many towers are installed.</p> <p>County and LMPs need to provide even greater access to infrastructure at a reasonable price in future projects.</p> <p>Solution is a combination of a robust fibre optic network, with smaller wireless players who are supported to service pockets in between fibre lines. It is not feasible to run fibre to every concession even with</p>

increased funding given the business case but wireless can fill in these pockets.

The return on investment (ROI) in higher density areas should be able to subsidize offering service in smaller communities.

There needs to be a balance between wired and wireless solutions for long-term sustainability and ROI. The backbone of the network should come from fibre as it offers the most growth potential for the massive data expansion that is inevitable with smart technologies. 50/10 service offered by wireless providers today will not be enough to meet these future needs, even double that will not be enough five years down the road. Fibre can handle massive data growth; wireless less so.

Keep an eye on solutions being offered globally such as Starlink satellite service which has now expanded to Canada.

The Chatham-Kent C-K funding to TekSavvy is an interesting concept to be further explored. Was funding a loan or forgivable loan (i.e. grant) and was the company selected through a competitive process? Is Chatham-Kent working exclusively with TekSavvy or are other ISPs expected to be involved?



UPDATE

November 19, 2020

A Path to Better Connectivity: ROMA Launches Municipal Broadband Resources

Dear ROMA Members,

Your ROMA Board is pleased to announce the release of two comprehensive resources tailored specifically for Ontario's rural municipalities about broadband and cellular connectivity.

The [Municipal Primer](#) gives an overview of the broadband landscape, including Canada's regulatory framework. The [Municipal Roadmap](#) lays out components of a municipal connectivity plan that municipal councils and staff can implement to create local solutions. Both of these can found on ROMA's website at:

<http://www.roma.on.ca/broadbandandcellularconnectivity.aspx>.

Investing in connectivity remains a choice at the municipal level because local governments do not have a mandated role in telecommunications. That said, ROMA is aware of growing demand in our communities that has increased during the pandemic for elected officials at all levels of government to help improve broadband and cellular connectivity.

These new resource documents will serve as a foundational briefing for municipal elected officials and staff who are interested in improving connectivity in their communities. By increasing knowledge for municipal officials, we can work to serve our communities and advocate for better connectivity outcomes that will improve social connections, cultural opportunities, services and overall prosperity.

To help explain the documents and answer members' questions, ROMA will be hosting a webinar on Tuesday, December 1st from 12:00-1:30pm. To register, click [here](#).

Finally, note that the federal government's Universal Broadband Fund opened in November, and information including upcoming webinars can be found [here](#). The Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure's Improving Connectivity in Ontario (ICON) [program](#) also remains open for applications.

Thank you for your continued membership in ROMA.

Sincerely,

Allan Thompson
Chair of ROMA.

***DISCLAIMER:** Any documents attached are final versions. ROMA assumes no responsibility for any discrepancies that may have been transmitted with this electronic version. The printed versions of the documents stand as the official record.



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