

Municipality of Chatham-Kent
Finance, Budget, Information Technology & Transformation
Administration
Information Report

To: Mayor and Members of Council

From: Gord Quinton, MBA, CPA, CGA
Chief Financial Officer / Treasurer /
GM, Finance, Budget, Information Technology & Transformation

Date: September 4, 2022

Subject: High-Speed Fibre Update

This report is for the information of Council.

Background

For nearly a decade, it has been a Council Priority to facilitate and encourage the expansion of high-speed fibre and broadband networks across the municipality; however, many of Chatham-Kent's smaller urban and rural communities still struggle to access basic internet service. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, students moved to online learning and many companies offered their staff the ability to work from home. This has highlighted the need for reliable internet access to every corner of our community. This report provides an update to Council on recent success in this endeavor.

Comments

Chatham-Kent has recognized the importance of the role of local government in supporting high-speed internet for the community and has invested funds to contribute to broadband opportunities. In recent years, the Municipality implemented a Fibre Engineering team to streamline permit approvals and assist internet service providers in accelerating their investment in the community. There will be a 2023 Budget ask to continue this higher level of service until all work is done.

In addition to the original Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) partnership contribution of \$762,400, in 2020 Council authorized the loan agreement of \$3.6 million to SWIFT to be invested in fibre-optic internet infrastructure within Chatham-Kent. These actions combined enabled \$19.3 million broadband upgrades across rural areas of Chatham-Kent.

On September 14, 2020, Council approved a \$6.5 million investment in five fibre backbone facilities with TekSavvy Solutions Inc. that would enable future fibre to the home investments, including Chatham to Blenheim, Blenheim to Ridgetown, Wallaceburg to Dresden, Wallaceburg to Grande Pointe, and Tilbury to Wheatley.

In June of 2022, SWIFT announced that TekSavvy Solutions Inc. had completed the construction of a fibre-optic network in Chatham-Kent to provide high-speed internet service to an additional 422 homes and businesses throughout the communities of Mitchell's Bay, Dover Centre, Grande Pointe and Pain Court.

Work is nearing completion by TekSavvy on the area northwest of Wallaceburg to Babys Point, east of Wallaceburg, Tupperville and to the north and south of Dresden for 500 more homes. TekSavvy is also completing work on servicing Louisville, Kent Bridge, Muirkirk, Highgate and Duart.

In addition, TekSavvy provided fibre during the construction of the Greenfield Global Trail, and to Cedar Springs, Blenheim and parts of Chatham.

Cogeco Connexion has begun work deploying fibre on 115 kilometers of roadways of underserved areas of Erieau, Erie Beach, Dealtown, North Buxton, Charing Cross, Cedar Springs, Shrewsbury, Rondeau Bay Estates, New Scotland, Rondeau Park and Morpeth that will connect 2,802 more homes by summer 2023.

Recently, the Ministry of Infrastructure announced the province of Ontario would be bringing high-speed internet access to up to 266,000 unserved and underserved homes and businesses across the province. With an investment of nearly \$4 billion in funding-based opportunities, it is their hope to have all regions in Ontario connected by the end of 2025.

As part of a two-stage competitive process, Xplornet Communications Inc. was selected as the internet service provider to bring access to high-speed internet to those within Chatham-Kent. Much of this expanded service to more rural areas will be completed by the use of new tower and wireless technologies. We anticipate that this will get Chatham-Kent to 100% coverage by the end of 2025, but we are unable to confirm this at the time of this report. Administration expect more details on the rolling out of this project by the end of 2022.

Consultation

There were no consultations with this information report.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications of this report.

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Attachments: None