

*The Corporation of the  
Municipality of Huron Shores*



**Office of the Mayor**

July 31, 2020

Dear Chiefs and Mayors:

**RE: *Community Owned Broadband Network  
Improving Connectivity for Ontario Program***

The Municipality of Huron Shores appreciates the strong support received for our broadband endeavors to improve internet services in our areas for our residents, businesses and institutions.

The proposed project, currently dubbed, Huron Shore and Manitoulin Community Owned Fibre Infrastructure (H&M COFI), will serve the Municipal and First Nation communities located along the northern shore of Lake Huron, between Nairn Centre and Echo Bay, including Elliot Lake, Espanola, St. Joseph Island, and Manitoulin Island.

It is the goal of Municipal Council to keep our friends and partners informed as to the progress and steps undertaken by the Huron Shores Ad Hoc Broadband Committee of the Municipality of Huron Shores. , Municipal Council and its partner, Rock Networks Inc.

On July 9, 2020 the Province of Ontario announced the Improving Connectivity for Ontario (ICON) program. The Council of the Municipality of Huron Shores held a special meeting on July 15<sup>th</sup> and resolved to make an application for funding to the ICON program, in partnership with Rock Networks Inc. Rock Networks Inc. is working in conjunction with Nokia to assist with the application.

The Municipality of Huron Shores has advanced H&M COFI to this level due to the resounding support found in the region. Support and encouragement received, to-date, represents 86% of all households within the catchment area.

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Chiefs and Mayors

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Again, it is a pleasure to work for you in this very important project.

The Ad Hoc Committee has successfully moved the Rural Broadband issue forward, further than any other organization in this area and we will continue in that fashion. Stage 1 of the first intake of the ICON application is due August 21, 2020. Applications will be assessed against five pass/fail criteria. We are currently seeking support from the Federal Government to fund a business case and high level engineering study in time for the second stage of the ICON application, due November 28, 2020. Stage 2 evaluates proposals on six criteria and would provide up to 25% funding for the project.

Please find attached a letter submitted to MPP Michael Mantha requesting his help at the provincial level for the ICON funding request. MPP Mantha has been one of our greatest supporters by encouraging us to move forward with H&M COFI. A similar letter is being sent to MP Carol Hughes requesting assistance for funding for: (1) business plan; and (2) high level engineering study. We have been in contact with other sources and are seeking the best fit for our needs at this time.

We are also researching costs and processes to create a numbered corporation, in trust, necessary for a future community owned network should it be required to move forward with the ICON application.

As indicated through our ongoing dialogues for the last few months, I am always open to receiving your calls or questions at any time.

Respectfully yours,



Georges Bilodeau  
Mayor

Encl.

- c.c. - MP Carol Hughes  
- MPP Michael Mantha  
- Chiefs and Mayors within the catchment area  
- Shawn Heard, EACFDC  
- Suzanne Astles, MNDM  
- William Elliot, ELNOS



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MPP Michael Mantha,

The Council of the Municipality of Huron Shores requests your support for our funding submission to the recently announced Improving Connectivity for Ontario (ICON) Program. The ICON Program, published on 9 July 2020, could provide up to 25% of the total cost of the project and, in doing so, improve Internet connectivity for residents and businesses of the region. The project, called Huron Shore and Manitoulin Island Community Owned Fibre Infrastructure (H&M COFI), will serve the communities, including First Nations, located along the northern shore of Lake Huron between Nairn Centre and Echo Bay, including the City of Elliot Lake, St Joseph Island and Manitoulin Island. ICON support of the H&M COFI project would make this Community-Owned Broadband initiative a showcase for the Province of Ontario.

Northern Ontario is seemingly always behind in the application of new technologies, and that implementation still requires support from provincial and federal programs. Usually, a telecommunications company receives those funds, which implements the minimum standard and makes no further investments. The result is that we quickly fall behind and are unable to catch up without renewed government funding. A community-owned network will break that cycle.

The region of Algoma East and Manitoulin Island is too large and sparsely populated for telecom companies to operate and compete. Also, the incentivization to invest in new technology by the incumbent company is not present, due to the high entry costs for the next vendor. Vendors have cherry-picked the various communities of the region to meet their goals and not the requirements of our residents and businesses. The consequence is a patchwork of solutions that result in expensive and limited Internet access for the region. It was clear to the Council of Huron Shores and other Councils in the area that we must explore alternative solutions.

In December 2019, Huron North Community Economic Alliance (HNCEA) and Blue Sky Net issued Requests for Proposals (RFP) seeking submissions that would provide broadband infrastructure and service improvements to access the Internet for their respective areas. ROCK Networks submitted a community-owned network solution for both proposals. The HNCEA Technical Evaluation Committee selected the ROCK Networks community-owned project, and ROCK Networks was the only respondent to Blue Sky Net's Manitoulin RFP. Both the HNCEA Board and Blue Sky Net required more time to consider the community-owned proposal.

With no progress towards broadband Internet access occurring for the region of Huron North Shore, St. Joseph Island and Manitoulin Island, the Municipality of Huron Shores formed a committee to investigate the community-owned solution further. We approached ROCK Networks and requested a detailed explanation of their proposals and asked if they would honour their bids for the respective regions. We have reviewed their submissions to HNCEA and Blue Sky Net and found out that they are implementing their proposed solution for our region in Pictou County, Nova Scotia. We found the estimated cost reasonable, given the value of the telecommunications dollar. We established that the technology is available today, resulting in a low to medium risk project.

We have embarked on the path towards understanding the feasibility and business case for the Broadband Internet project. We have received endorsements from 23 of the 28 municipalities, representing 86.3% of the region's homes. We are also in discussions with nine First Nation Communities to ensure they have access to this network. The result is that there are over 31,000 homes and businesses that would benefit. In addition to the achievements mentioned above, we have secured the endorsement of a few regional ISPs, who welcome the opportunity to provide retail internet services on a community-owned network. Equally important, HNCEA and the regional economic development agency ELNOS supports our initiative.

Given the incredible support we have received from communities in the region, the Council of the Municipality of Huron Shores authorized that ROCK Networks Inc. to commence preparation of the ICON Program Application on 15 July 2020. The Ad Hoc Broadband Committee will submit the application on or before 21 August 2020, as part of the first uptake of submissions.

Your support of our initiative and the concept of a broadband community-owned network will bring economic benefits to the region and improve the lives of its community members significantly.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Georges Bilodeau". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline.

Mayor Georges Bilodeau