

Councillor Jones-Scissons, Councillor Kirby, Committee Member H. Bilodeau

The Municipality of Huron Shores

Ward 2 Ratepayer Concerns on Broadband

Executive Summary

A meeting with the Municipality of Huron Shores Ward 2 Councillors was requested by a group of 5 ratepayers concerned with the current direction concerning a community owned broadband project. Councillors Jones-Scissons, Kirby and Ad Hoc Committee representative Helen Bilodeau gladly accepted the invite and agreed that the best place to meet would be the Gazebo in Little Rapids, as the Province had just returned to Stage 2 of the Covid-19 regulations of no more than 10 people were permitted to gather.

It was discovered at this meeting that despite our efforts to keep our municipality informed by providing our reports and minutes on our website, we were asked to improve our method of sharing our desire to work with the Communities and First Nations along the North Shore of Lake Huron Shore in developing a Community Owned Fiber Infrastructure for Broadband delivery. This report will attempt to provide both the AdHoc Broadband Committee and Council their concerns along with how we could approach the dissemination of information going forward.

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On October 6th 2020 Ratepayers Joanne Falk, Peter Falk, Reg Gardiner, Tim Currie, Dave Smith, met with Ward 2 Councillor Jones-Scissons, & Councillor Kirby, and Committee Member Helen Bilodeau to discuss their concerns about the broadband project currently being developed with communities along the north shore of Lake Huron (Nairn Centre to Echo Bay, Manitoulin Island, Elliott Lake and St. Joseph Island). They were very concerned that we - Huron Shores - are taking on a project that they had not heard about.

I asked for a time to bring them up to speed with how we got here, and why we thought “a community owned fibre infrastructure” was needed. After a brief overview, the ratepayers began to raise questions with us as to who was doing this, their expertise, and why we thought Rock Networks was the company for us. They were leery of our latest insertion the Sentinel stating the ICON project would need us to develop a corporate entity to be on standby, and their understanding of a total of 86% of households did not represent them, as they were never consulted.

It was pointed out that each Council for the Communities and First Nations provided their interest which encompasses the number of households for application purposes.

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PROJECT HISTORY - November of 2019, Councillor Jones-Scissons and Committee Member Helen Bilodeau were charged with investigating various communities were involved with a Broadband delivery system and were sent to North Bay, Ontario to attend the “Rural and Remote Conference”.

It was during the 3 day conference that Councillor Jones-Scissons and Helen Bilodeau were introduced to many leaders of communities who were in various stages of developing internet services. With over 200 representatives from across Canada and The Northern United States – both municipalities and corporate internet providers – gathered together to discuss the vast discrepancies of broadband delivery and how many communities have joined forces to obtain the rural and remote internet systems they deserve.

HNCEA - Once we arrived back home and at a HNCEA public meeting, I along with Helen introduced the attendees comprised of residents of the region from Spanish to Echo Bay along with residents from Tunnel Lake and Kynoch. The presentation provided a summary of the groups of communities throughout Ontario who had banded together to form community owned fibre networks because they were not on the list to ever have the big 3 develop a broadband delivery system due to the high cost and ROI. It was clear that there was another way and we both discussed the development in depth to ensure our information would be beneficial to both the end user and ISP’s who would undoubtedly join us along the way.

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It was decided that with the help of the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre's help we would move forward to a Request for Proposal in bringing Broadband to our area. The RFP process was shared on MERX and we received 7 requests and resulted in just 2 bids. As a result it was decided by the members of the HNCEA board, to withdraw and revisit at a later date. The Chair of the HNCEA then disbanded the Broadband Task Group.

At the following meeting of Huron Shores' Council, March of 2020, I requested that Huron Shores form a small Ad Hoc Committee to further efforts to obtain a more comprehensive broadband delivery system. The members appointed to the committee are: Councillor Jones-Scissons, Councillor Walsh, and Helen Bilodeau. We wanted to continue our investigation of how we could get a community owned fibre rich network in the region. We contacted ROCK Network to continue the discussion as to how we would be able to move this project like the one that was introduced to us during the RFP process and we set out a path.

Phase 1 – Establish Interest in neighboring communities along the North Shore of Huron, and include Manitoulin Island and Elliot Lake.

Our Mayor along with members of ROCK Networks put together a Power Point presentation that would enable us to discover who would be interested in joining us in developing a fibre rich network. They presented via ZOOM to Municipal and First Nations Councils the concept and received Resolutions/Letters of Support from each of the communities in favour.

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Update 1-

On July 31st Mayor Bilodeau sent out a letter to the many communities who provided their support regarding our first application with respect to the first intake of the ICON application which was due in August. We also provided our request to Mike Mantha, MPP and Carol Hughes, MP to assist us in for their help in obtaining grants to develop our business governance and our Engineering Plan. Both of these would assist us in moving this forward.

While we are at this stage we are not neglecting any funding options being announced from both Federal and Provincial Governments. We will endeavour to obtain any and all grant moneys available.

Update 2 - *ICON Stage 1*

On August 28th, Mayor Bilodeau sent out another update for the group of Communities and First Nations leadership to let them know the application for ICON has been accepted and we are now about to move into the second stage of the ICON Broadband application. An important step to the funding is the organization that would be heading up the project and it has been suggested that we form a corporation so as to not cause any delay in the process.

Update 3 – *Improving Connectivity for Ontario Program*

On September 28th Mayor Bilodeau sent out his third letter to the Communities and First Nations who are in support stating that the The Huron Shore & Manitoulin Island Community Owned Fiber Infrastructure (“H&M COFI”) had been selected for Stage 2 of the ICON funding

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program. This stage is all-encompassing and extremely detailed, thus a request was made for a formal list of contacts as part of our efforts to obtain the 25% grant.

As of October 6th, the date of the small gathering of concerned rate payers, is where we learned of their concerns. While we can not answer many of their detailed questions because the governance and engineering studies have not yet been completed, below are the concerns we are able to provide at this time.

List of Concerns:

1. Communications

While each of the ratepayers at the gathering indicated that they are in favour of a better service of broadband, however, they are worried worried about exposure. It is important we provide them with a list of the communities currently onboard with us. More so, we could recommend a financial committment from each community, once the governance and engineering plans have been completed.

Throughout Rural and Remote areas of Canada, everyone is interested in getting broadband and it is up to the elected officials to see what they can do to help. Rock Networks are working on a survey tool that will allow people to respond online to the questions and at the same time check their bandwidth and location.

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2. Technology/Security

Hospitals, schools, and police have high speed internet , that is true, however, it does not mean it is sufficient. We have received information that there is a need for more bandwidth due to the increased demand for Telehealth services. Hospitals that have 100 MBPS today, will need at least 1 Gbps. Ones that have 1 Gbps will need to upgrade potentially to 10 Gbps. What we want throughout the H&M COFI region is a system to ensure everyone has equal and up-to-date broadband services.

3. Setting up of Corporation

The setting up of a corporation to be ready for Stage 2 of the ICON process is just a shell entity. If the broadband internet does not materialize it can be used for another purpose in the future.

4. Partners

With respect to ROCK Networks, they are currently contracted with Pictou County for an 11 Million Phase 1 of a 70 Million project to build a municipal broadband network. ROCK has major partners including Nokia – the second largest telecom company in the world. Their corporation is currently being recognized as the “fastest growing new company in Canada.” We are pleased with their knowledge, their team of experts and their ability to align with world class companies that see their path to success.

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5. Financials

Regarding the financials, design engineering, etc., we are in the process of obtaining the funding to help us get this information. Until we have completed this stage we are not able to be specific. This project is to build the fibre infrastructure and is ISP friendly.

As for Ownership, this will be designed as per the governance plan. Multiple ownership models exist from 100% like in Pictou County, to a Public Private Partnership (P3) to a Community Endorsed model (0% Ownership) to give a few examples.

While a Communications Plan will also be completed once we have our governance and engineering reports to present, it is recommended that we include on our Municipal Website copies of the presentation to the Municipalities and First Nations minus the proprietary information, along with the November 2019 presentation to Council and HNCEA on the various groups who have taken a similar route. As we go forward we will endeavour to provide the information on our site.

TO VIEW GO TO: <https://huronshores.ca/government/boards-and-committees/hm-cofi-project/>

Exhibit 1

<https://1drv.ms/p/s!Am4FLGAfAD0ahWGrya3ug1AQsqZS>