



Staff Report

Administration

Report To: Committee of The Whole
Meeting Date: March 23, 2021
Report Number: FAF.21.051
Subject: Request for Additional Funds to Support the Rural Access to Broadband Internet Technology (RABIT) Task Force
Prepared by: Shawn Everitt, Chief Administrative Officer

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report FAF.21.051, entitled “Request for Additional Funds to Support the Rural Access to Broadband Internet Technology (RABIT) Task Force”;

AND THAT Council approve additional funding for the Rural Access to Broadband Internet Technology (RABIT) Task Force to an upset limit of \$10,000 to complete a Community Internet Speed Challenge throughout the month of May 2021 and as outlined in this report;

AND THAT Council acknowledge and endorse the staff resources required to complete The Blue Mountains Internet Speed Challenge as presented and highlighted in the financial impact section of this report.

B. Overview

The Town’s Chief Administrative Officer was requested by the members of the Rural Access to Broadband Internet Technology (RABIT) Task Force to formally request additional funding to execute an Internet Speed Challenge within the community.

C. Background

The RABIT Task Force has been very active in considering opportunities to provide an enhanced level of internet service to the Town’s rural areas.

The RABIT Task Force recently had a very successful Public Information Centre on February 16, 2021 that was attended by 8 Internet Providers, a representative from the Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA), a representative from the Centre of Excellence in Next Generation Networks (CENGN), and Council and staff representatives from Grey County, Municipality of Grey Highlands, and Township of Clearview. The purpose of the Public Information Centre was to allow Internet Providers to introduce themselves and explain the potential opportunities that are available to enhance the provision of internet services to the rural areas of our region.

Through these presentations, the concept of a High-Speed Internet Challenge Campaign was outlined and the RABIT Task Force identified the need to move forward with this opportunity.

The RABIT Task Force is requesting \$10,000 in additional budget allocation to complete The Blue Mountains Internet Speed Challenge.

D. Analysis

As a result of the success of the RABIT Task Force's Public Information Centre on February 16, 2021, a series of meetings have been required to ensure that project momentum is maintained. These additional meetings have required additional staff resources and support. It is anticipated that a similar amount of staff resources will be required until at least the end of the second quarter of 2021. As such, additional funding for these staff resources and support will need to be identified in the RABIT Task Force Budget. These additional expenses will be identified as interdepartmental transfers for existing staff time resourcing.

Staff have provided information relating to The Blue Mountains Internet Speed Challenge marketing and community engagement to assist in the execution of this proposed campaign along with the platform being recommend to permit residents to test the speed of their home and business internet.

Challenge Platform

Staff have recommended that the Town partner with the Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA) to use their existing platform to run The Blue Mountains Internet Speed Challenge. The CIRA partnership will provide the Town with a dedicated landing page through the CIRA Smart Community Performance Program. Through this partnership, all campaign marketing will direct residents to a platform specific to The Blue Mountains. The cost of this partnership is \$3,000 per year and requires a minimum of 1-year commitment. This partnership will provide the Town a fully integrated system for internet speed testing, result submission, mapping, and data export opportunities. The Town of Oro-Mendonte has been an active partner with the CIRA <https://performance.cira.ca/oromedonte>.

The RABIT Task Force supports this recommendation and have requested that it be brought to Council consideration via this report.

Communication Plan

The Communication Plan is the most significant expense related to executing The Blue Mountains Internet Speed Challenge. However, proper marketing and adequate community engagement is critical to the success of the Internet Speed Challenge as it will help ensure that enough information is collected for the RABIT Task Force to make informed decisions as they move forward with their mandate.

The Communication Plan presented to the RABIT Task Force recommended the following elements to properly message The Blue Mountains Internet Speed Challenge to the community, particularly the rural areas that the RABIT Task Force is specifically focused on:

Communication Methods

- Use of Town website and Press Release – Staff time only
- Road Signage placed at key intersections in rural areas – \$750 material costs
- Advertising Campaign
 - Radio: 95.1 Peak FM – \$1,500
 - Printed Circulation: Blue Mountain Review and Collingwood Today – \$1,500

Internet Speed Test Signage being proposed

The RABIT Task Force suggests that signs (that use a speedometer type design) could be placed throughout the municipality and updated on a weekly basis to promote the campaign and track the number of tests completed through The Blue Mountains Internet Speed Challenge on a weekly basis. The costing is based on purchasing and installing 5 signs at the following locations:

- Ravenna Hall/Ravenna Roads Work Yard
- 171 King Street – Former Foodland Site
- Grey Road 19 Municipal Gateway Sign
- Grey Road Heathcote Park
- Beaver Valley Community Centre

E. Strategic Priorities

1. Communications and Engagement

We will enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders.

2. Organizational Excellence

We will continually seek out ways to improve the internal organization of Town Staff and the management of Town assets.

3. Community

We will protect and enhance the community feel and the character of the Town, while ensuring the responsible use of resources and restoration of nature.

4. Quality of Life

We will foster a high quality of life for full-time and part-time residents of all ages and stages, while welcoming visitors.

F. Environmental Impacts

No impacts at this time.

G. Financial Impact

The RABIT Task Force has an approved budget of **\$8,115** for 2021.

- \$5,000 was allotted for Communications as a result of Council deliberations on December 2, 2020 that added the \$5,000 to the draft budget
- Funding in the amount of \$3,115 was allocated for Administrative support based on a total of 12 meetings for 2021. The RABIT Task force has had 10 meetings to date in 2021.

Total Costs for Internet Speed Challenge (not including staff time)

Item	Detailed Breakdown	Cost
Communication Advertising (Radio and Newspaper)	n/a	\$3,500
Signage Large 4'x8' Challenge Tracking Roadside	5 signs at \$550 each = \$2,750 30 signs at \$25 each = \$750	\$3,500
Membership/Partnership with Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA)	n/a	\$3,000
Total		\$10,000

Staffing Costs

Item	Detailed Breakdown	Cost
Communications Staff	Marketing material development logistics = \$500 Managing Challenge logistics = \$550	\$1,050
Sign Installation and Collection	5 Challenge tracking signs = \$345 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (2 staff x 5hrs = \$250) ○ (Pickup truck use = \$95) Roadside signs = \$350 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (1 staff x 8hrs = \$200) ○ (Pickup truck use = \$150) 	\$695
Weekly Updating Challenge Gateway Signage	Managing Challenge communications logistics = \$250 Updating Signage = \$440 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (1 staff x 2.5hrs x 4wks = \$250) ○ (Pickup truck use = \$190) 	\$690
Total		\$2,435

Staffing and Administrative Costs Associated with Meetings in 2021

Since the RABIT Task Force has matured, the subject matter is very focused and has presented the opportunity to utilize additional internal staff with skillsets that provide an enhanced understanding and additional knowledge for advice to the RABIT Task Force. Generally, each RABIT Task Force meeting is conducted within a 1-hour time frame. Based on these 1-hour meetings alone, the cost to the Town is estimated to range between \$345 - \$475 depending on if additional staff are required to attend.

Based on the current workflow, meeting attendance by staff, and administrative support, costs are based on 15 additional meeting beginning in April of 2021 at a cost ranging from \$5,175 to \$7,125, depending on the attendance of key staff.

H. In consultation with

RABIT Task Force Members

Tim Hendry, Manager of Communications and Economic Development

Ryan Gibbons, Director of Community Services

I. Public Engagement

The topic of this Staff Report has been subject to a Public Information Centre that was held on February 16, 2021 as outlined in the analysis section of this report.

Comments regarding this report should be submitted to the Chair of the RABIT Task Force, Deputy Mayor Rob Potter at rpotter@thebluemountains.ca.

J. Attached

None

Respectfully Submitted,

Shawn Everitt
Chief Administrative Officer

For more information, please contact:
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