Minutes

Rural Access to Broadband Internet Technology (RABIT) Task Force

Meeting Date: **October 1, 2020**
Meeting Time: **12:30 p.m.**
Location: **Microsoft Teams Meeting**
Prepared by **Sarah Merrifield, Executive Assistant Committees of Council**

A. Call to Order

Deputy Mayor Rob Potter called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. with Mayor Alar Soever and Councillor Rob Potter present.

Town staff present were Chief Administrative Officer Shawn Everitt. Director of Operations Shawn Carey joined the meeting following the call to order.

▪ **Task Force Member Attendance**

▪ **Additions to the Agenda**

Bruce Street Technologies ICON Application Update

Declaration of Pecuniary Interest and general nature thereof
NOTE: In accordance with the *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* and the Town Procedural By-law 2019-56, Rural Access to Broadband Internet Technology (RABIT) Task Force members must file a written statement of the interest and its general nature with the Clerk for inclusion on the Registry.

None

▪ **Review of Minutes (August 21, 2020)**

The group reviewed the August 21, 2020 minutes and deemed them acceptable.

B. Staff Reports and Deputations

B.1 Deputations, if any

None

C. Matters for Discussion

C.1 Introduction of RABIT Task Force and Representatives from City of Stratford and Festival Hydro

RABIT Task Force

- Deputy Mayor Rob Potter
- Mayor Alar Soever
- Councillor Rob Sampson
- Chief Administrative Officer Shawn Everitt
- Director of Operations Shawn Carey

City of Stratford

- Mayor Dan Mathieson

Festival Hydro

- Vice President of Information Technology Delia Campbell

C.2 Summary of RABIT Task Force – Deputy Mayor Rob Potter

- Reviewed RABIT Task Force summary document

C.3 City of Stratford and Festival Hydro Broadband Internet Overview – Mayor Dan Mathieson and Vice President of Information Technology Delia Campbell

- Every home and business in Stratford have option for 1gb fiberoptic through the services of Wightman, using cable previously installed by the City
- Small royalty will be levied for the use of the network (fibre backbone installed by City of Stratford/Festival Hydro with budgeting for the backbone funded through hydro rates)
- Had good luck with the program to date that has allowed Stratford attract professionals, increase in residents – the internet service is a source of community pride
- Approx. 74 access points directly contacted with fibre (route repeater system)
- Internet access from $1.25/day no-contract basis for residents, pay-as-you-use service
- Businesses using wifi network, and dark fibre network
- During COVID-19 pandemic, City of Stratford/Festival Hydro implemented a "technology re-use" program where residents were encouraged to donate technology in partnership with RiZone and United Way, along with free wifi (throttled, but still full service)

- In response to community concerns with children and teachers returning to school, some of the network connectivity was not robust enough to provide coverage in school areas, so Festival Hydro and City of Stratford invested capital and updated the service with free internet connectivity provided to support social distancing and outdoor education activities

C.4   Questions

- SWIFT does not impact the work of Festival Hydro and City of Stratford – the municipality is single-tier and did not "opt in" to the SWIFT program
- Festival Hydro to provide initial capital investment totals, joint use charges, initial estimates of underground versus aerial installation, and mode of installation to members of RABIT for information
- Relationship between internet service and other internet service providers: hydro utility works with other internet providers to allow them access to the same infrastructure
- Cost of attaching fibreoptics to hydro poles is prohibitive, but the same charges, engineering effort, and process for approval is used for all internet service providers interested in laying cable
- Installation of fibreoptics underground is laid through conduit however, part of the construction architecture still allows for some use of Festival Hydro poles (aerial overground) at market rate
- Stratford is seeing increased real estate values, and an influx of residents, with a number of residents working from home – the ability to work from home with reliable connectivity is a huge draw for the Stratford area
- TBM is noticing the same growth, particularly due to the number of part time residents who are moving to the area full time, and the resultant need for services
- Line of sight was an issue in City of Stratford to ensure uniform coverage which required significant planning

D.   Correspondence

D.1   Mayor Alar Soever to MPP Stephen Crawford
Re: The Importance of Internet Access for Rural Municipalities

For Task Force information

E.   New and Unfinished Business

E.1   Additions to the Agenda

E.1.1   Bruce Street Technologies ICON Application Update

- Received confirmation that Bruce Street Technologies received approval for the first stage of the ICON program

- Shawn Everitt met with Bruce Street Technologies – the company is trying to confirm what the stage 1 approval allows in terms of field investigation, etc.
- Bruce Street Technologies has identified 3 projects that could be acted on quickly

E.2   Items Identified for Discussion at Next Meeting

- The Blue Mountains portion of SWIFT investment
- Potential Grey County and Ontario Hydro Role in Provision of Internet in The Blue Mountains, if any

F.   Upcoming Meeting Dates

October 14, 2020

G.   Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 1:23 p.m.