Minutes

Rural Access to Broadband Internet Technology (RABIT) Task Force

Meeting Date: **September 22, 2021**
Meeting Time: **11:00 a.m.**
Location: **Microsoft Teams Meeting**
Prepared by **Kyra Dunlop, Administrative Assistant Committees of Council**

A.   Call to Order

Deputy Mayor Potter called the meeting to order at 11:04 a.m. with all members present.

Town staff present were Chief Administrative Officer Shawn Everitt and Director of Operations Shawn Carey.

▪   **Task Force Member Attendance**

▪   **Additions to the Agenda**

None

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 11, 2021)**

Minutes reviewed and deemed sufficient

B.   Staff Reports and Deputations

B.1.1   Matthew Henderson, P. Eng., Senior Manager – Network Planning
Re: Bell Outreach

Matthew Henderson noted that Bell had a few products deployed that could assist with broadband connection including a fibre home product and Bell wireless home internet. Matthew noted that some of the projects were proprietary at this time. Matthew noted that Ontario was currently the primary focus of providers regarding rural connectivity and services. Matthew advised that according to the Accelerated High Speed Internet

Program (AHSIP) mapping that the region had been classified as 'wired'. Matthew noted that the Bell fibre-to-home solution was forthcoming through a provincial reverse-auction bid process.

Shawn Carey left the meeting at 11:45 a.m.

Matthew noted he would be willing to attend a future RABIT Task Force meeting to speak to the members regarding opportunities in the area and to look at getting tower data to bring back and discuss, as well as provide information on AHSIP.

Councillor Sampson asked if Bell would be interested in working with the Town to establish an infrastructure backbone and whether the Town could take part in the provincial reverse-auction bid process. Deputy Mayor Potter noted that the Town would be interested in partnerships that help ensure that every home receives a connection. Matthew noted that a significant component of AHSIP was coverage and that the bid process included certain requirements in order for providers to receive subsidies. Matthew noted that the SWIFT maps are often cherry-picked and that the Universal Broadband Fund (UBF) maps were vastly different to the SWIFT maps, as UBF required higher coverage in areas.

Shawn Everitt left the meeting at 11:49 a.m.

Councillor Sampson asked if Bell was conducting any partnerships with municipalities in project areas. Matthew noted that Bell did have a partnership in Nova Scotia, and noted that Bell had pay-for-fibre programs that were ongoing. Deputy Mayor Potter noted that the Town remained open to partnerships and that the Town was interested in being active early in the process to ensure gaps could be filled by other providers if needed. Deputy Mayor Potter noted that the Town had a burgeoning population and that the community needed reliable internet. Matthew noted that the number of underserved homes was quickly dropping.

Matthew asked what providers were currently working with the Town. Deputy Mayor Potter noted the list included Bruce Street Technologies, GBTel Inc. and Eh!tel Networks.

Joe Hickey asked if the Town already had applications to serve all needs in the area. Deputy Mayor Potter noted that pockets of the Town were being serviced and noted that if the Town could avoid doing a lot of piecemeal connections that that could be beneficial. Deputy Mayor Potter noted there were some existing barriers to be addressed, including difficult terrain and that some members of the community were resistant to the impacts that towers have on the skyline. Deputy Mayor Potter noted that financing was an issue and the Town would need to plan the funding for increasing broadband coverage. Mayor Soever noted that the Town should develop a plan for the end of the year that identifies the best way to increase coverage, how to build the infrastructure, how to connect with providers, and what role the municipality could play in efficient build-outs and economic profit. Joe Hickey noted that the Town may want to consider having a plan in place before year end as Infrastructure, Science and Economic Development (ISED) Canada would be completing their Request for Proposal process in November 2021. Joe noted that the Town should also consider what companies they want to work with prior to the final issuance of the Request for Proposal. Joe noted that

through the municipal procurement process that the Town would be able to do a contract with providers to assist in completing work.

Matthew asked whether Ravenna had received a subsidy, and Mayor Soever advised that Ravenna did not receive a subsidy. Mayor Soever noted that Swiss Meadows received servicing through Bruce Street Technologies without any subsidy.

B.1.2. Joe Hickey, President and CEO, Rock Networks Inc.
Re: Digital Infrastructure Planning

Joe Hickey noted that he had been requested to attend the RABIT Task Force after members had heard his presentation at the Association of Municipalities Conference.

Joe provided an overview of his presentation:

- Community Broadband Networks
    - Affordable and Equitable
    - High Quality
    - Municipally Governed
    - Future Proof
    - Open Access Networks
- Project Example
    - Pictou County, Nova Scotia
    - H&M COFI, Ontario
- Some Questions to Ask
- Connected Community: How we get there
- Thank You

Deputy Mayor Potter thanked Joe for the presentation and for attending the Task Force meeting. Deputy Mayor Potter noted that the Town had been working with CIRA to conduct broadband mapping of the Town. Deputy Mayor Potter noted that the Town was in the process of requiring that new development install fibre connections. Deputy Mayor Potter noted that the Town did have a GIS database and that the Town would be interested in P3 Partnerships and exploring that connection.

Mayor Soever noted that the Town had collected a lot of primary data and that Council wanted to proceed with the next steps. Mayor Soever noted that the Town was home to a lot of high-end customers who would be interested in larger internet packages. Mayor Soever noted that the Town would be interested in putting conditions in place through municipal controls to make broadband economic but that the Town would want to be involved as little as possible in the servicing. Mayor Soever advised that the goal would be to secure access points for private companies to be able to service customers, and the Town wanted to know what would need to be put in place to make that happen and to ensure the access points were economic.

Mayor Soever noted that local internet service providers were servicing areas with 20-30 customers. Mayor Soever asked how the Town could make itself more attractive for providers to service the area. Joe noted that an economic business case was a key challenge in Canada as the most economically profitable were always in the centre of municipalities. Joe noted that often the densely populated areas would subsidize

servicing of periphery areas. Joe noted that this would require a huge investment, and that without subsidies it would be difficult for providers to service rural Canada.

Deputy Mayor Potter thanked Matthew Henderson and Joe Hickey for attending the Task Force and noted his thanks for the discussion. Deputy Mayor Potter noted the Town was an attractive community for many people to move to and that people moving to the Town would be a significant driver for getting faster internet.

Task Force members discussed the potential of inclusion through the 2022 budget of a Town staff member that could assist with the portfolio.

C.   Matters for Discussion

C.1   Follow-up and Council Direction from August 23, 2021 RABIT Task Force Report to Council – Deputy Mayor Potter

Item deferred

NOTE: The following motion was passed by Council August 23, 2021

WHEREAS: In the 21st century, access to reliable, high-speed, and affordable broadband internet and long-term-evolution cellular mobile connections are a necessity, not a luxury, and that connectivity has become almost as vital to a community's economic prosperity and quality of life as traditional infrastructure such as clean drinking water, electricity, and well-maintained roads, AND

WHEREAS: The Town of The Blue Mountains needs to declare that it is vital that local residents, farmers, workers, students, businesses, emergency responders and medical providers –everyone -- have access to reliable and affordable broadband internet service across the entirety of our municipality, AND

WHEREAS there is no program in place which is providing affordable broadband internet service to our community, nor is there a program that appears ready to serve our community within a reasonable time frame, AND

WHEREAS it is clear that TBM will need to be prepared to invest financially and in staff resources to have an active, leading role in how connectivity is delivered and adopted and make pivotal decisions that will affect TBM connectivity and is consistent with a Digital Infrastructure Plan that maximizes the benefits and return to our constituents and that:

- Ensures equitable carrier access to municipal assets to ensure competition;
- Uses common infrastructure to minimize development impact and cost;
- Identifies municipal applications that can benefit from and be deployed during the implementation process.

NOW THEREFORE: Council hereby declare that it is vital that local residents, farmers, workers, students, businesses, emergency responders and medical providers –everyone -- have access to reliable and affordable broadband internet service across the entirety of our municipality, and

Council reaffirms the appointment of a Task Force composed of the Deputy Mayor, The Blue Mountains Grey County Council Alternate, the Mayor, and the CAO along with the

Director of Operations, to work with public and private interests, including Grey County, South West Integrated Fiber Technology (SWIFT) group and Provincial and Federal governments, to secure broadband internet for as much of the Town of The Blue Mountains as technology will permit, and

Council direct staff to work with the RABIT Task Force to build a Digital Infrastructure Plan that secures and enables a competitive digital infrastructure and provides for simplified and cost-effective implementations, and

Council direct staff to include the hiring of a "Smart Cities" staff person to manage all of TBM Smart Cities initiatives including broadband investments and initiatives for consideration in the 2022 budget, CARRIED.

C.2   Follow-up from August 9 and 10 Deputations to Council

Item deferred

For Task Force Information

Direction from August 9, 2021 Council meeting:

> THAT Council of the Town of The Blue Mountains receives for information the deputation material from Grant Street, Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA) regarding CIRA's internet performance test results and recommendations, CARRIED.

Direction from August 23, 2021 Council meeting:

> THAT Council of the Town of The Blue Mountains receives for information the deputation material from Michael Stephens, Vice President, Business Development, BAI Communications regarding rural broadband overview, CARRIED.

C.3   Follow-up regarding AMO Delegation with Minister of Infrastructure

Item deferred

C.4   Data to Provide to Enquiring Internet Service Providers

- Internet Speed Test results

Item deferred

C.5   Action Item Tracking

Item deferred

- Installation guidelines for conduit in The Blue Mountains Road Allowance ("Variation Agreement")
- Conduit Installation in Developments
- Eh!Tel and GBTel Inc. Universal Broadband Fund Proposals
- Bruce Street Technologies – Successful in ICON Grant
- R2B2 and The Town of The Blue Mountains
    - Consideration of hiring a student intern from the University of Guelph R2B2 program in Fall 2021 to assist in data mapping

- Will bring funding request through 2022 budget related to RABIT activities
- Telecommunications Protocol Update
  - Staff are preparing a public engagement plan to determine areas of need and potential strategic sites for new telecommunications tower facilities in the Town

D.   Correspondence

D.1   MPP Jim Wilson
Re: Government of Ontario Press Release – Connecting More Homes and Businesses in Simcoe County to Broadband

Item deferred

For Task Force information

D.2   Municipal Information Net
Re: Township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands Council authorizes cancellation of Broadband RFP

Item deferred

For Task Force information

E.   New and Unfinished Business

E.1   Additions to the Agenda

E.2   Items Identified for Discussion at Next Meeting

- **Next Steps regarding R2B2 following September 13 Touching Base**
- **Telecommunications Protocol Update – Director of Planning and Development Services Nathan Westendorp**
- **CIRA and SBA Canada Deputation**
- **Items C.1, C.2, C.3, C.4, D.1 and D.2**

F.   Upcoming Meeting Dates

October 6, 2021 at 11:00 a.m.

Town Hall, Council Chambers (virtually)

G.   Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 12:39 p.m.