

## Report ITR-PCD-06-15

**To:** Chair Arlene Wright and Members of Planning & Community Development Committee

**From:** Ashleigh Weeden, Communications & Community Engagement, Connected County Initiative  
Geoff Hogan, Director of Information Technology

**Meeting Date:** April 21, 2015

**Subject:** **Connected County: Potential & Possibilities**

**Status:** Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution PCD50-15; Endorsed by County Council CC72-15 May 5, 2015;

### Recommendation(s)

**WHEREAS Grey County resolved to pursue Connected County Initiative;**

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Report ITR-PCD-06-15 - Connected County: Potential and Possibilities, be received for information purposes.**

### Background

In order to prosper in today's global economy, communities and regions must have the right tools to grow their economies from within so they can compete for investment on the global stage.

Worldwide experience shows that extending ultra-high speed broadband to as much of the population as possible produces significant and measurable economic and social benefits. Continued innovations in e-health, e-government, e-commerce and digital entertainment are extending the societal reach of and dependence on the Internet, which is, in turn, fueling an unprecedented revolution in how we all live, work, and play.

The ability of businesses and governments to adapt and innovate using the skills and creativity of the local labour force to leverage high capacity broadband to access to the Internet is what powers wealth creation, entrepreneurial activity, job creation and overall community prosperity in the new global economy.

## *Success Stories: What We Can Learn from Intelligent Communities*

### **Western Valley, Nova Scotia (Top 7 Finalist, 2004)**

The Western Valley of Nova Scotia is rural region of some 5600 km<sup>2</sup> facing challenges common to rural areas in the industrialized world: declining population, job losses in its primary industries, low average educational achievement, and a high unemployment rate. Yet when polled, residents had strong positive feelings about their community and believed it would become a substantially better place to live and work over the next five years. The Western Valley Development Authority (WVDA), an economic development partnership of seven local municipalities plus representatives from the provincial and federal governments, believed that this attitude was a resource not to be wasted.

In February 2001, WVDA became one of 12 municipalities and regions awarded a Smart Community grant by Industry Canada to conduct three-year demonstration projects, as part of a national strategy to ensure Canada's leadership in information technology and innovation. Over the course of three years, WVDA and its local communities introduced innovations in nearly every critical area for becoming an Intelligent Community. Plans were made to install fiber-optic infrastructure to meet the Valley's connectivity needs. The Nova Scotia Community College introduced new information technology courses, and a geographical information system called CLICK put 50 years of infrastructure data online, making it possible for workers to use GPS-linked laptops to precisely located underground water, power and sewer systems. Internet kiosks were deployed to 14 sites in the region and have been transitioned to a private-sector company that is adding commercial content in order to sustain the project. Two IT business incubation centers were created that have facilitated the opening of eight IT businesses, and outreach efforts offered training and promotion of Internet and PC literacy for local businesses, community groups and individuals. The project created over 50 jobs in new industries and produced over \$4 million worth of in-kind contributions from governments and private-sector partners. In a traditional rural economy, WVDA has planted the seeds for major change in how local cultures and economies interconnect with the rest of Canada and the world, to their mutual benefit.

### **Key Lesson**

The key to transformative change is long-term, coordinated efforts across a broad spectrum of sectors, all driven by common values and principles. In order to build capacity and leverage supports, Grey County needs a collaborative, long-term strategy that integrates concrete, actionable ICT-based initiatives into infrastructure planning, business development, skills training, and public sector partnerships.

## **Kenora, Ontario (Smart 21 Finalist, 2009)**

Like Grey County, Kenora is located in what many consider to be "cottage country," and seasonal residents double the population in the summer. However, for permanent residents in the community, the decline of the local forestry industry had hollowed-out the non-tourism economy – and without sustainable career options, Kenora's best and brightest young people were leaving town. In response, Kenora launched a strategy to leverage its 80% penetration rate for wired and wireless broadband in order to make the community even more attractive to seasonal residents and visitors by providing anytime-anywhere access to services, while also supporting local business and building a broadband culture of use. Through the portal, visitors and seasonal residents can reserve facilities, apply for permits and learn what's going on in town. Businesses and community groups can create and cross-post their own web sites with e-commerce capabilities and promote tourism through GIS-enabled interactive search functions. The result has been greater cross-sector collaboration and stronger leveraging of broadband-based economic and social development.

### ***Key Lesson***

Broadband penetration is critical to facilitating the next wave of community and economic development. In Grey County, our broadband (based on new US targets of 25MB down and 3MB up) penetration rate is low at approximately 50% - a long way off the ICF's recommended 70% and Kenora's 80% penetration rate. If our residents and visitors do not have access to adequate broadband service, we simply will not be able to leverage key current tools for supporting their needs and aspirations. Ensuring the right infrastructure is in place is an absolute must for ensuring that Grey County is attractive to residents, visitors and businesses alike – and a foundational element to establishing a healthy baseline of modern social and economic development for our region.

## **Windsor-Essex, Ontario (Top 7 Finalist, 2011)**

When General Motors and Chrysler were forced into bankruptcy in 2009, the City of Windsor and County of Essex were faced with serious questions about how to recover when the area's sole economic engine stopped working. For decades, the region had benefited from the strength of the automotive industry and a close relationship with Detroit. The collapse of the automotive industry decimated the area's economic stability and forced the cross-border relationships further apart – and it took concerted action and collaboration between government, businesses, and academic institutions to turn the situation around. The University of Windsor and St. Clair College became fully-integrated into community efforts to transform the local economy by developing centres of excellence for specialized next-generation research and development, developing a cutting edge digital media education curriculum, and hubs for coordinating and convening economic development initiatives for Windsor-Essex.

## ***Key Lesson***

Grey County cannot achieve its economic development visions on its own. We must build, maintain and leverage strong relationships with regional partners, especially educational institutions such as Georgian College. County Council has the unique opportunity to facilitate close collaboration between Grey County's member municipalities to promote a complementary and unified efforts that will help everyone reduce costs and achieve goals that benefit the entire County, recognizing that we can achieve far more together by leveraging our collective resources than any one of our communities can achieve on its own.

## **Fredericton, New Brunswick (Top 7 Finalist, 2009)**

Beginning with an intensive strategic planning process in 1992, Fredericton used a long term plan, called Vision 2000, to chart its path forward. The plan included significant consultation and co-creation and was updated in 2001 and then every three years after that, with increasing focus on supporting the development of the local knowledge economy. Similar to other Intelligent Communities, broadband infrastructure, the activation of local higher educational institutions, and business incubation and support were key elements to the plan. However, a differentiating part of Fredericton's efforts included internal business improvement programs within the city itself, which made municipal services more efficient. Fredericton entered the ISO-9001 quality management process, which required the city to understand, clarify, and document everything it did as a municipal government. In May, 2004, Fredericton passed its audit and became one of a small few ISO-9001 certified cities in North America. Taking this success even further, Fredericton has embraced Lean Six Sigma in its organizational management practices, which allows the city to do the right things, at the right time, for the right people, at the right cost by eliminating waste, reducing rework and errors in government processes, and eliminating work that does not add value to citizens. Fredericton has been so successful at implementing these processes that other, larger municipalities (including the City of London) are now learning from Fredericton's example.

## ***Key Lesson***

Facilitating the creation of a smart and connected community is just as much about what we do as a municipal government as it is about supporting the private sector and community organizations. A key component of pursuing the Connected County initiative will be ensuring we are "walking our talk" by adapting to and adopting ICT-based innovations as well as continuing to foster a culture of strategic management, lean and efficient policies and processes, and program measurement and evaluation.

## *Connecting Grey County*

Grey County has been laying the groundwork for becoming a smart and connected community since 2012. Under the banner of the Connected County project, Grey County has been a leader in regional initiatives such as the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus' Southwest Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) initiative and the Southwest Economic Alliance's Intelligent Region Initiative. Staff have been exploring local options for leveraging these initiatives here in Grey County and have been learning from the experiences of other communities locally, regionally, and globally.

### **Work to Date**

Grey County Council allocated \$100,000 from reserve to explore a Connected County initiative and supported the secondment of a dedicate staff resource to developing the Connected County initiative in 2014 and 2015.

To date the following activities have occurred:

1. Completed the I-Canada iCat assessment (details in [CAOR-PCD-14-12](#))
2. Completed Cisco's Smart and Connected Communities (S+CC) benchmarking in conjunction with the Southwest Economic Alliance (SWEA) Intelligent Region Project (details in [ITR-PCD-01-14](#))
3. Hosted a keynote talk featuring Robert Bell, one of the co-founders of the Intelligent Community Forum (ICF) in June, 2014
4. Hosted an ICF master class with Robert Bell of the ICF and 80 leaders from across the community (details in [ITR-PCD-01-14](#))
5. Seconded County staff to support SWEA's Intelligent Region Initiative, as the Community Engagement and Benchmarking Liaison (May 2014 – February 2015)
6. Hosted one of SWEA's Community Engagement Coordinators (CEC) to gather data for SWEA's regional benchmarking project (August 2014 – January 2015)
7. Seconded dedicated staff resources to research, develop and facilitate Connected County and broadband-based initiatives ([ITR-PCD-01-15 Intelligent County 2015 Work Plan Report](#))
8. Ongoing leadership and support for the Western Ontario Warden's Caucus' South West Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) project (IT Director is Staff Lead; Connected County seconded staff allocated at 1 day per week support)
9. Initiated an Open Data project to promote community engagement with County produced data, beginning with an Open Data Licence ([ITR-CS-05-15 Grey County Open Data Licence](#))
10. Addition/integration of Connected County staff support to Grey County Economic Development Working Group.

## *Alignment with Economic Development Strategy*

The Connected County initiative is closely aligned with the newly adopted [Economic Development Strategy](#), which focuses on seven key themes, five of which are directly supported by the Connected County Initiative:

- Becoming Investment Ready
- Creating a Business Friendly Environment
- Ensuring Key Infrastructure is in Place
- Developing Grey's Workforce
- Better Communication and Marketing Grey's Greatness

The two additional themes included in the Economic Development Strategy – Tourism and Agriculture, Farms and Local Food – may provide opportunities for indirect alignment through ensuring appropriate infrastructure development and seeking opportunities for leveraging broadband to support development in these areas.

Establishing and promoting the conditions for an intelligent and connected community dovetails neatly and completely with the goals of the Made in Grey strategy by ensuring the required broadband infrastructure is in place, creating conditions that may be favorable to youth retention as well as opportunities for “second careers” for retirees, and creating an environment that promotes skill development, public and private sector innovation, and opportunities for full economic and social participation from all members of our community.

## Financial / Staffing / Legal / Information Technology Considerations

### *Potential & Possibilities: Putting the Connected County to Work*

The ICF hosts an annual competition to recognize Intelligent Communities, which are evaluated based on the five key indicators identified in this report. Over 400 communities have competed to be named as Intelligent Community of the Year through the Intelligent Community Forum's formal recognition process, including several communities in Ontario: Waterloo, Stratford, Kingston, and Windsor-Essex, which were all recognized in the Top 7 during their participation in the competition. In 2007, Waterloo was named Intelligent Community of the Year and in 2014 Toronto was named Intelligent Community of the year.

While Grey County has been consistently acting as a regional leader in broadband-based economic development initiatives, Grey County must undertake a significant amount of local community capacity-building prior to being ready to participate and pursue recognition by the ICF. Staff dedicated to the Connected County initiative have been working collaboratively with Economic Development staff to develop a fully

integrated Connected County work-plan that reflects input from community stakeholders and aligns with and supports the Made in Grey Economic Development Strategy. Staff will be bringing forward a report on this work plan in the near future.

While there are several opportunities to create immediate momentum around the initiative, especially in conjunction with the Made in Grey Economic Development Strategy, the Connected County Initiative is, by nature, a long-term investment in building and leveraging relationships in order to realize the opportunities provided by the broadband economy. Currently the Connect County initiative and staffing complement is funded from One Time Funding reserve until the end of 2015.

## Link to Strategic Goals / Priorities

Goal Number One of the Corporate Strategic Plan is to expand the prosperity base of the County. This means enhancing and diversifying economic opportunities within the County, becoming “investment- ready” and ensuring the foundation is in place for sustained success. Our shared vision of sustained community and regional prosperity encompasses:

### *Economic Opportunity and Growth*

Wealth generation and the creation of work are the basic building blocks for livable, healthy communities where human initiative and stable families can flourish. Opportunities for entrepreneurial initiative, business expansion and training for jobs that offer upward mobility are critical to this success.

### *Community Sustainability*

Communities that are vibrant, strong and offer hope to their residents are communities in which neighbourhoods are safe, the environment is clean, housing is affordable, social support services and cultural/recreational opportunities are accessible, and civic spirit is nurtured by participatory decision-making, innovative design and celebration.

### *Community Partnerships*

Economic opportunity and social/cultural development rely on broad community participation, both at the individual level and at the institutional level. Engaged individuals, governments and the private and not-for-profit sectors working together to provide relevant, accessible and coordinated programs and services that build towards the community’s strategic direction.

The Connected County initiative is wholly consistent with this strategic direction.

## Attachments

[Made in Grey: Economic Development Strategy](#)

[ITR-PCD-01-15 Intelligent County 2015 Work Plan Report](#)

[ITR-PCD-05-14 Intelligent County and Broadband Initiative](#)

[CAOR-PCD-14-12 Towards an Intelligent Region](#)

[ITR-PCD-01-14 Intelligent County Initiative](#)

Respectfully submitted by,

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Director Signoff: *Geoff Hogan*