

Report ITR-PCD-02-15

To: Chair Arlene Wright and Members of Planning and Community Development Committee
From: Geoff Hogan, Information Technology (IT) Director
Meeting Date: February 17, 2015
Subject: **Connect it Your Way funding**
Status: Recommendations adopted by Committee as presented per Resolutions PCD26-15 and PCD27-15; Endorsed by County Council March 3, 2015 per Resolution CC45-15;

Recommendation(s)

WHEREAS the initial results of the County's Economic Development Action Plan indicate that the implementation of high quality broadband needs to be a priority of Grey County;

AND WHEREAS local projects to improve broadband in the County that align with the regional South West Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) project will speed up broadband improvements in the County;

AND WHEREAS the County does not yet have sufficient information on the specific status and location of broadband infrastructure in the county;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT report ITR-PCD-02-15 be received;

AND THAT \$50,000.00 be funded from the One-Time Funding Reserve to fund contract staff or consultants to gather and analyze information on provider infrastructure in Grey County.

~~~

**WHEREAS** the initial results of the County's Economic Development Action Plan indicate that the implementation of high quality broadband needs to be a priority of Grey County;

**AND WHEREAS local projects to improve broadband in the County that align with the regional South West Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) project will speed up broadband improvements in the County;**

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT report ITR-PCD-02-15 be received;**

**AND THAT \$1,000,000 be transferred from the One-Time Funding Reserve to a Broadband Infrastructure Reserve specifically earmarked for future fibre based broadband infrastructure in Grey County.**

## Background

Access to high quality broadband in Grey County varies based on the community, some have excellent access (Hanover) while most other urban areas are reasonable for today's needs but do not have the capacity or scalability for the near future. Rural areas typically lag far behind urban areas and only have access to relatively slow and less reliable wireless technologies or satellite. The need for better broadband is increasing rapidly and in order to be viable and prosper in today's global economy, communities and regions must have the tools to grow their economies from within so they can compete for investment on the global stage.

Grey County has taken a significant leadership role in the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) South West Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) project by allowing the County Information Technology (IT) Director to act as the SWIFT staff technical lead. SWIFT is a much needed long term, sustainable plan to improve broadband in south west Ontario but it is a long term solution and does not address the immediate local needs in Grey County. The recently released draft of the Economic Development Strategy indicates that developing shortened timelines and accelerating the implementation of Grey's Broadband Plan is an important part of ensuring key infrastructure is in place to make sure Grey is investment ready.

Two of the County's member municipalities (Southgate and West Grey) have applied for funding from the Small Communities Fund (SCF) for fibre based broadband projects (details in attached study). Some thought should go into the roles the County and the member municipalities play with respect to broadband development in the County. Mapping and analyzing provider infrastructure as well as establishing a county wide plan that is aligned with SWIFT is a task the county could take on. The next steps being proposed in this report will make recommendations on how the County and member municipalities should work together.

## *Connect it Your Way – Broadband Study*

In late 2014 staff commissioned a study by a consultant to help identify options for the County to facilitate broadband expansion in the County. The [Connect it your way broadband study](#) identifies public sector approaches from around Canada for improving broadband. The study also describes potential governance approaches that the County could use if the county chooses to proceed with local investments in broadband. The study does not recommend an approach at this time because there is more information required before a recommendation can be made. One of the primary unknowns that must be identified prior to a recommendation being made is the location of the fibre assets in the County. SWIFT has clearly articulated that fibre is the technology that should be funded in any government programs. Any investments made into broadband infrastructure must be done strategically with no duplication of existing provider infrastructure.

To collect meaningful data on the state of provider infrastructure the County will need to show a funding commitment to the vendor community. The vendors typically do not voluntarily provide infrastructure data when asked. Other jurisdictions have been successful in getting the infrastructure data from providers when they release a Request for Information (RFI) requesting data that stipulates that vendors can only bid on future Request for Proposals (RFP's) if they participate in the RFI. Without a budget for the RFP vendors do not participate in the RFI.

## Next Steps

1. Develop and adopt a set of guiding principles;
2. Complete Phase 2 of Broadband Study – identifying local provider infrastructure;
3. Solicit public and provider feedback
4. Adopt a deployment and governance
5. Establish a model of how the upper and lower tiers work together;
6. Design and estimate technologies, coverage and costs;
7. Make a funding application to the New Building Canada Fund (NBCF) Small Communities Fund (SCF) to augment county funding

The current project in Grey, and the SWIFT project, has shown that providers are reluctant to provide data about their infrastructure and will only do so if there is a strong likelihood that they can access future funding. It is not possible for county staff or consultants to provide accurate recommendations unless the provider data is available.

Funds are required to hire consultants and/or contract staff to map existing provider infrastructure in Grey County. Staff estimate that \$50,000 is required to collect and analyze the provider data. The other recommendation is that \$1,000,000 be placed in a reserve specifically for broadband improvements. This reserve will show council's

commitment to the project so that the providers will be more likely to cooperate with county staff and consultants.

## Financial / Staffing / Legal / Information Technology (IT)

### Considerations

Staff is recommending that \$50,000 be funded from the One-Time Funding Reserve to fund contract staff or consultants to gather and analyze information on provider infrastructure in Grey County, and that \$1,000,000 in reserve funding be transferred from the One-Time Funding Reserve to a Broadband Infrastructure Reserve specifically earmarked for future fibre based broadband infrastructure in Grey County. Until the provider data is analyzed and the plan developed and approved by Council, the \$1,000,000 will not be used.

Utilizing \$1,050,000 from the One-Time Funding Reserve could have future financial impacts, as this funding would not be available to assist with departmental operating and capital funding deficits and/or unbudgeted funding requests.

### 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:

### Attachments

Background Reports:

[Connect it your way broadband study](#)

Respectfully submitted by,

Geoff Hogan  
Director of Information Technology