

CITY OF HAMILTON

MOTION

Public Works Committee: September 30, 2024

MOVED BY COUNCILLOR M. TADESON.....

SECONDED BY COUNCILLOR.....

Rural Broadband

WHEREAS, reliable, high-speed internet access is essential for economic growth, educational opportunities, healthcare, and the overall well-being of residents in both urban and rural areas;

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the growing need for equitable access to high-speed internet for remote work, online education, telehealth, digital business operations and agriculture technologies;

WHEREAS, expanding broadband infrastructure is aligned with the City of Hamilton's long-term strategy for fostering economic development, enhancing quality of life, and ensuring that all residents benefit from connected communities' initiatives and digital transformation;

WHEREAS access to reliable internet service is critical to attracting new businesses, supporting innovation, and providing modern services in rural areas, contributing to sustainable economic development and workforce training opportunities;

WHEREAS improved broadband access in rural areas will support remote learning and work opportunities, increasing educational access and workforce flexibility for rural residents;

WHEREAS increasing broadband connectivity in the rural areas will enable the municipality to enhance digital public services, including emergency response, public health, and local government communications;

WHEREAS expanded broadband infrastructure will improve the efficiency and safety of rural roads by supporting smart transportation systems and providing internet-based GPS tools for drivers;

WHEREAS, the federal and provincial governments have recognized the importance of rural broadband expansion and have established programs, such as the Universal Broadband Fund and Ontario's Accelerated High-Speed Internet Program (AHSIP), which provide funding and support for local initiatives, offer cost-sharing partnerships with municipalities and internet service providers to close the digital divide and achieve the federal Basic Service Objective (BSO) of 50 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload speeds, making large-scale broadband and projects feasible and affordable;

WHEREAS, over 75% of the City of Hamilton is considered "rural" and many of these rural communities, including areas such as Flamborough, Glanbrook, Ancaster, Stoney Creek, and other rural zones, continue to face significant challenges in accessing reliable and affordable broadband services, are currently not serviced by fibre broadband infrastructure, creating a significant digital divide between urban and rural residents;

WHEREAS, the City of Hamilton's Rural Broadband Study, conducted by the University of Guelph in 2021, demonstrated that the median download internet speed for rural Hamilton to be 7 Mbps vs 49 Mbps for urban Hamilton, the median upload speed for rural Hamilton to be 1 Mbps vs 10 Mbps for urban Hamilton and median latency to be 33 ms for rural Hamilton vs 15 ms for urban Hamilton; only 9.4% of rural respondents achieved the federal BSO, compared to 40.57% in urban areas; 42.31% of rural respondents reported data caps compared to only 7.76% in urban areas; 0.6% of rural residents had access to fibre broadband connection vs 13.6% in urban areas; and 96% of farms and 84% of home-based businesses in rural areas were below the BSO, negatively impacting business opportunities;

WHEREAS, the City of Hamilton has actively supported via letter of reference any applications for funding programs when requested and has previously developed an innovative permitting approval process, funded by the Internet Service Provider;

WHEREAS, the City of Hamilton Engineering Services staff have a track record of issuing permits within ten business days from receipt of a complete and compliant application for fibre installation; and

WHEREAS the City of Hamilton Digital & Innovation Office staff has interviewed several rural Internet Service Providers, done an environmental scan of various installation techniques allowed in various municipalities, identified areas of opportunities for consideration including plough in fibre method of installation and shared the findings with relevant internal stakeholders.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Council of the City of Hamilton supports the establishment of

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partnerships with local internet service providers and regional stakeholders to plan, fund, and implement high-speed broadband expansion along rural roads and underserved areas;

- (b) That Council commits to working with relevant provincial and federal authorities to ensure that rural broadband expansion remains a priority for the long-term growth and prosperity of the City of Hamilton and advocate for continued and increased federal and provincial funding to support broadband infrastructure development in rural communities;
- (c) That Council directs staff to work with Internet Service Provider(s) to seek a rural broadband expansion plan, including identification of candidate rural roads in Hamilton where alternative installation techniques, such as plough-in (considering both Roadside and Property line), may be implemented for faster broadband deployment, taking into consideration costs vs risks vs benefits;
- (d) That the identification and investigation work to be led by Engineering Services and includes Transportation Services, Hamilton Water, and Internet Service Provider(s) and includes consultation with any other relevant City departments;
- (e) That Council directs Engineering Services staff to report back within 4 months on the progress of the rural broadband expansion plan, risks and mitigation plan, possible partnerships, costs and any potential funding sources if available and timelines for implementation; and
- (f) That Council directs Engineering Services staff to continue actioning upon the rural broadband expansion plan in consultation with other departments and Internet Service Provider on a regular basis and report back to Council every 6 months until the completion of the program in 2025.