



## The Corporation of the Town of Tecumseh

Information & Communication Services

**To:** Mayor and Members of Council

**From:** Shaun Fuerth, Director Information & Communication Services

**Date to Council:** April 27, 2021

**Report Number:** ICS- 2021-02

**Subject:** Rural Broadband Advisory Committee

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### Recommendations

It is recommended:

**That** ICS-2021-02 entitled “Rural Broadband Advisory Committee” **be received;**

**And that** the striking of a Rural Broadband Advisory Committee (Committee) as set out in this report and in accordance with the attached Terms of Reference, **be approved;**

**And further that** a Notice of Call **be issued** for Applications for the Committee;

**And furthermore that** the notice **be posted** on the Town’s website, Facebook and Twitter page, and advertised in the local media;

**And furthermore over that** consideration for applications **be reviewed** at the Council Meeting to be held on June 8, 2021.

### Background

Municipal governments have a high level of concern with respect to internet connectivity for their ratepayers, even though the sphere of influence over the regulatory and funding responsibilities for telecommunications is comparatively low. Local governments are closest to students, families, businesses, and seniors who are demanding solutions for improved connectivity.

For “Broadband Connectivity” (Broadband) the minimum accepted standard for transmission speeds is 50/10 or 50 megabits per second download and 10 megabits per second upload speed. There are areas in the urban sections of the Town of Tecumseh (Town) that meet or exceed these speeds with multiple ISP (Internet Service Provider) options compared to minimal or no reliable options in the rural areas.

The need for broadband connectivity has been increasing in the last 20 years and became more important than ever in 2020. This need has been magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic with Council and Administration receiving many inquiries from ratepayers. Whether students, teleworkers or businesses, the need for reliable internet connectivity is now considered an essential service that should be made available to all. In recent years, there have been some improvements to this service but there are still many areas of the Town that are underserved.

The ongoing challenge is seeking funding for projects for this service. This infrastructure is provided primarily by the private sector. Examples of technologies used for connecting to the internet include coaxial cable, fibre optic cable, wireless point to point, or satellite. Business cases and return on investment analysis by private ISP's and Telecommunication Service Providers (TSPs) usually fall short when planning infrastructure expansion leaving a divide between those who have access to broadband connectivity and those who do not. TSPs and ISPs respond to market signals to provide value to their shareholders and seek to achieve the highest return on investment as possible. These favourable market conditions are found in urban areas leaving rural residents and businesses frustrated with lack of service. An example of resident frustration is when they have broadband infrastructure close to their property but are unable to connect due to overlapping jurisdictions of utility companies and internet service providers. It is anticipated that the Rural Broadband Advisory Committee (Committee) will work with local ISPs and Utility companies to understand the challenges they face in an effort to foster affordable resolutions. Municipalities across the province have been examining short term and long term solutions to bridge the digital divide that exists within their communities and regions.

Some benefits of greater connectivity for residents and businesses include:

- Access to e-health services
- Access to government services provided electronically including virtual meetings
- Working from home
- Learning from home
- Commerce and Business
- Independence & Aging in Place
- Leisure and Entertainment

The Town's Strategic Plan includes an endorsement for the advocacy of broadband connectivity in areas of the municipality that are currently underserved. Through this advocacy by Council and Administration, there have been some successes and we are determined to assist in exploring more opportunities.

The Town is part of the Connecting Windsor-Essex consortium and, through the County of Essex, has assisted in identifying areas within our municipality that lack this essential service. While we recognize the efforts of Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT), the Western Warden's Caucus and Connecting Windsor-Essex we feel that establishing a Committee to work on connectivity solutions from the ground up will enhance and augment any studies or proposals now and in the future. This Committee, once organized, would complete a community assessment, build awareness in the community, explore service improvement strategies; review the digital divide experienced by our residents and businesses, and develop and implement a plan.

## Comments

The Rural Ontario Municipal Association has developed a document, “Broadband Connectivity – A Municipal Roadmap” that outlines how municipalities can create a roadmap that will assist in providing the Town’s residents and businesses with more opportunities for better connectivity and in turn a stronger and more viable community.

The key components in establishing this roadmap may include but not be limited to:

1. Identifying the state of connectivity in the municipality and understanding what assets exist within municipal boundaries
2. Understanding the true drivers and needs for connectivity and be open to creative solutions
3. Determining what role the municipality can play in connectivity
4. Using and leveraging potential tools municipal governments already have to manage connectivity needs
5. Champion the need for connectivity in your community as council to a variety of stakeholders
6. Investing strategically in ‘shovel-worthy’ projects
7. Partnering where practical

## Tecumseh Rural Broadband Advisory Committee

As in the past, Town Council and Administration will continue to advocate for underserved areas in the community. Administration is recommending the establishment of an advisory committee that will provide recommendations, advice and information to Council on matters related to broadband connectivity issues.

The mandate of this Committee will include the following:

- Identify broadband and internet initiatives;
- Champion high-speed connectivity across the Town;
- Interface and consult with stakeholders;
- Provide feedback and input into policy development, as required;
- Encourage private investment that will provide higher connectivity speeds within the Town;
- Create an environment that facilitates open, competitive and innovative services and applications;
- Maximize the efficient investment of both public and private sector funding to improve connectivity throughout the Town;
- Develop tools to assist with attraction of broadband infrastructure investments;
- Work with local municipal partners, schools and health sector throughout the Town to improve research, innovation and education capabilities in the Town;

- Advocate for ratepayers in underserved areas by engaging public and private sector stakeholders to investigate opportunities for partnerships that promote Broadband development and access for residents, businesses and institutions;
- Investigate and coordinate infrastructure investment priorities;
- Review and refine specific goals, outcomes and timelines for short-term and medium-term priorities.

The objectives of this committee would include and are not limited to:

- Develop a program to help solve the connectivity challenges of the Town's residents and businesses.
- Facilitate and enable stakeholder engagement and consultation sessions. Ensure the engagement and creation of opportunities for involvement of residents, stakeholders and businesses across the Town;
- Work in collaboration with members of Town Council and Administration in developing possible solutions and programs to support enhanced connectivity in the Town;
- Subject to Council approval, the development of a plan for implementing the goals and directions as recommended by the Committee, including metrics and deliverables.

The proposed membership/structure of the Committee would be as follows:

- Mayor
- Councillor (2) (representation for urban and rural areas)
- Four (4) members-at-large – resident / business / community appointees

Administrative Support:

- Chief Administrative Officer
- Director Information & Communication Services
- Corporate Services

The Town will advertise to the community for participation on this Committee for the four members-at large who will be appointed by Council at the Council Meeting on June 8, 2021.

Council member appointees will also be considered and appointed at the June 8, 2021 Council Meeting.

Term of the members' appointments are to coincide with the term of Council. Status of the Committee shall be reviewed at the outset of the next term of Council.

Terms of reference for the Committee can be found on Attachment 1.

It is proposed that the Committee meet quarterly and, where required, meetings will be conducted virtually.

## Consultations

Corporate Services & Clerk  
Manager Strategic Initiatives

## Financial Implications

The proposed committee of Council would be administered within the current approved budget. It is noteworthy that the Federal Budget released on April 20<sup>th</sup> included an additional \$1B for rural broadband. As part of the outreach of this Committee, connections will be made with the staff of the Department for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, whose mandate includes expansion of rural broadband service as well as their Provincial counterparts.

## Link to Strategic Priorities

Applicable	2019-22 Strategic Priorities
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Make the Town of Tecumseh an even better place to live, work and invest through a shared vision for our residents and newcomers.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ensure that Tecumseh's current and future growth is built upon the principles of sustainability and strategic decision-making.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Integrate the principles of health and wellness into all of Tecumseh's plans and priorities.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Steward the Town's "continuous improvement" approach to municipal service delivery to residents and businesses.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Demonstrate the Town's leadership role in the community by promoting good governance and community engagement, by bringing together organizations serving the Town and the region to pursue common goals.

## Communications

Not applicable ☐

Website ☒ Social Media ☒ News Release ☒ Local Newspaper ☐

This report has been reviewed by Senior Administration as indicated below and recommended for submission by the Chief Administrative Officer.

Prepared by:

Shaun Fuerth, BCS  
Director Information & Communication Services

Reviewed by:

Laura Moy, Dipl. M.M., CMMIII HR Professional  
Director Corporate Services & Clerk

Recommended by:

Margaret Misek-Evans, MCIP, RPP  
Chief Administrative Officer

<b>Attachment Number</b>	<b>Attachment Name</b>
1	Rural Broadband Advisory Committee Terms of Reference