

Funding brings internet to rural hamlets in King

By Mark PavilonsEditorLocal Journalism Initiative

Close to 500 homes in rural King will soon get access to high-speed internet, thanks to new federal funding. Through the Rapid Response Stream of the Universal Broadband Fund (UBF), the Government of Canada is taking immediate action to connect King residents to high-speed internet. King-Vaughan MP Deb Schulte, Minister of Seniors, on behalf of the Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, made the virtual announcement last week. Funding of \$2.27 million will bring high-speed internet to residents in the communities of Pottageville, Nobleton and Lloydtown. With an additional investment of nearly \$1.7 million from Vianet, this project will connect 485 underserved households. The \$1.75-billion Universal Broadband Fund was launched on Nov. 9, 2020. Projects funded under the UBF, as well as through other public and private investments, will help connect 98% of Canadians to high-speed Internet by 2026 and achieve the national target of 100% connectivity by 2030. To facilitate applications for projects like this one, the UBF provided additional pathfinder support for all applicants, and in particular small applicants, to build partnerships, find potential sources of funding and navigate the application process. The pandemic has reinforced residents' need for high-speed internet for work, school, etc. Being cut off, for many in King, has made life during the pandemic more difficult. Canadians' access to high-speed internet should not depend on their postal code, Schulte said. A critical part of the federal government's investment in this area is the Rapid Response Stream, which provides \$150 million to fund shovel-ready projects. Canadians' access to high-speed Internet should not depend on their postal code. Since 2015, the Government of Canada has made expanding Canadians' access to high-speed broadband a top priority. We're proud to work with Vianet to bring reliable, affordable high-speed Internet to hundreds of King families. Through these investments and partnerships, the government is bridging the connectivity gap, Schulte added. Vianet will oversee the rollout of the program in King, which will be completed by the end of the year. This local project, Schulte said, is what the Rapid Response Stream is all about - helping projects receive faster approval, ensuring construction can start early on, and connecting communities as quickly as possible. Vianet's application, she said, was approved in less than two months. Vianet is very pleased with this announcement under the federal government's Universal Broadband Fund to continue the expansion of our fibre-to-the-home network in rural King Township. In 2017, Vianet connected the first rural home to our FTTH network in King Township, and we have been making incremental investments to service additional rural homes each year since then. (This) announcement will accelerate that expansion, servicing more homes that are in desperate need of better, more reliable Internet. We would like to thank Minister Monsef and the federal government for their commitment to bring quality broadband to rural Canadians. We would also like to thank MP Deb Schulte along with King Township for working with us in furthering these builds, said Brian McCullagh, director of business development for Vianet. McCullagh noted when this project is completed, Vianet will have connected some 1,500 households to the fiber network. They have permits in hand and will be breaking ground in the very near future. He added Vianet tends to service areas that have access to existing cable, and they have to maximize their per-kilometre reach, given there's only so much funding to go around. Vianet is leveraging all available funding, including provincial programs. Access to reliable, affordable high-speed Internet is one of the largest issues we deal with in King Township, said Mayor Steve Pellegrini. Our residents need to be able to connect with family, friends and workplaces, while our business community needs it to remain competitive, especially during the current pandemic. On behalf of council, I'd like to thank the Government of Canada for the significant investment in King through the Universal Broadband Fund. I'd also like to thank Vianet for its additional investment. Vianet has been a tremendous partner in helping to connect King's residents to high-speed Internet over the last several years. I know the almost 500 households in Pottageville, Nobleton and Lloydtown will benefit greatly from this great news. The mayor noted the municipality first identified gaps in service with a survey back in 2017. While there is still a way to go, this newest project is a huge step towards the ultimate goal of connecting everyone. He lauded both the federal government and Vianet as valuable partners in making this a reality. The residents of Pottageville, Nobleton and Lloydtown will be ecstatic at the news, he said. It's also a great example of what a public/private partnerships can accomplish. The mayor added through the region's YorkNet, they are extending the reach and attacking this issue on many fronts. King, he pointed out, is the largest municipality in York in terms of geography so the rural distances are quite a challenge. Schulte will be hosting a virtual town hall March 25 at 7 p.m. to discuss the issue. To register for the event, email her team at deb.schulte@parl.gc.ca or call her riding office at 905-303-5000. The Government of Canada provided

nearly a million dollars for the King Township Fibre Optic Broadband Expansion project, which was completed in 2019 ??two years ahead of schedule ??and connected over a thousand homes and businesses. Canada's Connectivity Strategy aims to provide all Canadians with access to Internet speeds of at least 50 megabits per second (Mbps) download/10 Mbps upload. The Universal Broadband Fund is part of a suite of federal investments to improve high-speed Internet. The suite includes the Connect to Innovate program, which is expected to connect nearly 400,000 households by 2023, and the recently announced \$2-billion broadband initiative from the Canada Infrastructure Bank.