

King supports York's Internet funding initiative

By Mark Pavilons

Teaming up with York Region will help fill some gaps in Internet service across the region.

King Township officially voiced its support for York's move to seek millions in funding from the federal government's Connect to Innovate Program. The plan in York is to expand the broadband network in King, Georgina, East Gwillimbury and Whitchurch-Stouffville through a massive, 175-kilometre network.

Both York and its rural member municipalities have pegged broadband as a key priority. York wants to be a "Gigabit Region," where an innovative collaboration results in a connected lifestyle community. This means "raising the bar where there is underservice" and staying ahead of the curve.

In December of 2016, the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Economic Development announced the Connect to Innovate program, which plans to invest \$500 million by 2021, to bring high-speed Internet to rural and remote communities. The program anticipates direct public sector and municipal involvement.

A proposed fibre loop in King means connecting Nobleton and Schomberg to the existing telecom network in King City. The King portion is roughly 38 kilometres, with a cost of \$2.88 million.

The proposed route is designed to maximize internet access to Regional and municipal infrastructure and facilities.

The total estimated cost to build the three proposed routes (175 kilometres) in York is roughly \$14 million, and an estimated \$8 million can be recovered from Ottawa. That leaves York on the hook for the remaining \$5.6 million.

At this time, York has not earmarked the funds and will have to identify potential funding sources. Staff hopes to bring these details forward as part of the 2018 budget process.

"This is what we want," stressed King Mayor Steve Pellegrini at the March 20 council meeting. It's an opportunity for others to join in this "dark fibre" infrastructure project. "It's a great story for King."

While there may be other methods available to bring high speed Internet to homes, "this is vital."

Former councillor Peter Grandilli appeared before council, asking about the costs to homeowners, specifically the historically high hook-up charges. He said the municipality should explore different ways to deliver services, including wireless systems.

Councillor Avia Eek said providing these services "is all about collaboration, noting by supporting York's application, King has an 80% chance securing the needed federal funds.

York's application through Connect to Innovate a "fabulous stepping stone."

King CAO Susan Plamondon noted that King took on a leadership role to initiate the collaboration with York. "By getting the ball rolling, King has boosted the regional application.