

King offers in-kind support to internet providers

By Mark Pavilons

King is going all out in helping internet service providers reach every corner of the township. Council okayed staff recommendations to provide in-kind support to YorkNet and other providers who are applying for the Improving Connecting in Ontario (ICON) program. On June 3, the Ontario government announced the new ICON program, providing \$150 million in a two-stage program. Funds will be used to expand access to broadband and cellular connectivity in identified areas of need. This need is defined as areas that don't have connection speeds of at least 50 Mbps download, and 10 Mbps upload. The government will evaluate applications based on their ability to effectively deliver program objectives. One criteria is that providers and municipalities be partners in the process and the support can be financial or in-kind. The stage one application deadline was Aug. 21 and successful applicants will be notified by Sept. 25. Applicants have until Nov. 28 to apply for stage 2 funding. If all goes well, work can start in April 2021. YorkNet submitted an application and was looking for collaboration from Vianet, Bell and Rogers. Vianet, staff noted, has developed their King plan, which includes roughly 25 kilometres of new fibre, providing internet connectivity to roughly 300 homes and businesses. Staff pointed out the ICON funding is for a maximum of 25 cent of project costs. Staff are also waiting on word about the Universal Broadband Fund (UBF) to support ICON projects in King. In-kind support includes use of municipal right-of-ways to build new telecommunication infrastructure; accelerated municipal permitting and support with the permit process. Staff will continue being actively engaged and proactive in supporting improved internet service in King through the ICON program and other potential future funding programs.