

To: CAO for the Fraser Valley Regional District Board
From: Milly Marshall, Director of EA Special Projects

Date: 2019-11-14
File No: 5500-01

Subject: Electoral Area Connectivity – Connected Communities Initiative

RECOMMENDATION

THAT in view of the information surrounding the Ministry of Citizens' Services Connected Communities initiative made available through the 2019 UBCM Convention, the FVRD Board authorize up to \$50,000 for a cellular and internet connectivity assessment for Electoral Areas A, B, C, D, E, G and H;

AND THAT staff be directed to work with each individual Electoral Area Director to determine the funding model for their individual Electoral Areas.

STRATEGIC AREA(S) OF FOCUS

Provide Responsive & Effective Public Services
Foster a Strong & Diverse Economy

BACKGROUND

At the EASC meeting held September 10, 2019, a motion was presented to authorize up to \$50,000 for a connectivity and infrastructure assessment, electoral area-wide. This report was to be used for grant funding opportunities for improved connectivity throughout the FVRD electoral areas.

The motion was defeated and a new motion was put forward and passed, to have the study undertaken in and paid for, by Area F only.

During the UBCM Convention, held September 21-24, 2019, the Minister of Citizens' Services met with representatives from the FVRD (staff and elected) and stated that she was working to support connectivity planning initiatives and that there were significant funding opportunities coming forward in this regard.

It was also noted, that the FVRD would be in a better position to receive funding if they embarked on creating one plan for the Region. Additionally, the then Minister of Citizens' Services and representatives of Connected Communities noted, that after identifying the technical gaps, it would be prudent to identify how the requested connectivity services will improve and/or better facilitate or intertwine with community or region -wide initiatives, strategic plans or OCPs etc.

DISCUSSION

The existing difficulty in applying for funding for improved connectivity is that there is no identified focus or direction provided for the internet service provider (ISP), therefore, the ISP will move along with connectivity (broadband, cell, etc..) at their will. Typically, their response is driven by an established customer based and at times, even then, there is not the implementation of immediate connection or acceptable levels of service from the customers' perspective.

If it is not identified within each electoral area where the gaps in service are, what service is required and why, what is there and what are the priority communities are based on the needs identified, etc.. it will be very difficult to move forward and work with an ISP to verify the level and type of service and priority needed. Without an FVRD Electoral Area Plan, service will continue to happen along as the major providers ie. Telus, Shaw, etc.. deem necessary.

Like an OCP or Strategic Plan, immediate results may not occur, however, a plan will provide the external connectivity backbone for the FVRD that would be used for purposes of building paths forward to influence future connectivity development and planning. It would also provide a level of credibility to when working with the ISPs rather than contacting them in response to complaint driven service requests.

As noted previously, there are significant funding initiatives that are and will be available. The FVRD has not been successful in attempting to have an ISP apply for funding for improved connectivity. Without the external expertise of a consultant and an ISP provider, it is unlikely we will have any significant influence with respect to improving services within the electoral areas. The information received through UBCM was intended to advise the best path to a successful grant application and identifying the need for developing an external connectivity plans for rural areas and the importance of a region-wide approach.

COST

Connectivity assessment and report - up to \$50,000.

There has not been a service areas identified for this initiative and this also be something the Committee may wish to consider if proceeding with further development of a connectivity plan for the electoral areas.

CONCLUSION

It is staffs' recommendation that an region-wide electoral area connectivity assessment and report be undertaken in order to work with ISPs for the purposes of grant funding and connectivity planning throughout the electoral areas.

Consideration must also be given to scope of the connectivity initiative. A connectivity report would only be a tool to assist with the grant applications at this stage, but could also be used to further create a plan for upcoming grant funding and for planning purposes with respect to future community development or strategic planning initiatives.

COMMENTS BY:

Mike Veenbaas, Director of Financial Services

Reviewed and supported.

Jennifer Kinneman, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

Reviewed and supported.