Fraser Valley Regional District

CORPORATE REPORT

To: CAO for the Electoral Area Services Committee Date: 2018-12-11

From: Barry Penner, Electoral Area Special Projects

Subject: Grant Application to Northern Development Initiative Trust

---

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Fraser Valley Regional District Board authorize an application to Northern Development Initiative Trust for a grant of up to $15,000 (75%) and up to $5,000 (25%) from the Electoral Area Services toward the cost of completing a Connectivity Infrastructure Strategy for improving internet and cell phone service in the Electoral Areas of the FVRD;

AND THAT the Fraser Valley Regional District Board authorize staff to engage Research ICT Solutions to assist in seeking the grant.

STRATEGIC AREA(S) OF FOCUS

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

BACKGROUND

Not all areas within the Fraser Valley Regional District are well served by high-speed internet and reliable cell phone coverage. The FVRD has repeatedly brought this to the attention of major service providers. Modest improvements have been made in the past 18 months, with Telus adding micro cell phone sites with very limited range in parts of Sunshine Valley, Lindell Beach & Columbia Valley.

There is still much room for improvement.

Major providers like Telus, Rogers and Freedom Mobile do not require external funding to justify an expansion of service where anticipated market demand indicates a likely rate of return on invested capital that meets internal corporate objectives. However, less populated and more remote areas often cannot meet this requirement.

For this reason, the BC Government (with financial support from the Federal Government) has established the $16 million *Connecting British Columbia Program*. The funding is administered by Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT) on behalf of the BC Government. Its purpose is to help underserved communities identify service gaps and practical solutions, and then provide financial contributions toward the capital cost of infrastructure improvements to improve the projected rate of return on infrastructure additions.

NDIT requires that applications for capital contributions be supported by a "Connectivity Infrastructure Study". Like other local governments, the FVRD does not possess the technological capacity to prepare such a study on our own. NDIT understands this and has funding available to pay up to 75% (maximum contribution of $15,000) of the cost of hiring a telecommunications consulting agency (pre-screened and pre-approved by NDIT) for this work. It is expected that the FVRD will provide the balance of the amount required by the consulting agency (eg. up to $5,000 from the FVRD, if the total cost of preparing the Connectivity Infrastructure Study is $20,000).

I have been in contact with Research ICT Solutions (who was referred to us by NDIT) and have received the attached proposal. They are willing to assist us in preparing both the application for the grant to pay for the Connectivity Infrastructure Study, as well as the application for the capital contribution for the desired infrastructure improvements.

DISCUSSION

At this time, the focus of the *Connecting British Columbia Program* is to expend high-speed internet service. I have made it clear to both NDIT and Research ICT Solutions that the FVRD is also keenly interested in improved cell phone service. It is possible both high speed internet and cell phone service will be addressed by an eventual grant for a capital contribution, but that remains to be seen.

Applications for the capital contribution must indicate that the requested projects will be completed by March 31, 2020.

COST

The FVRD's portion of the Connectivity Infrastructure Study is estimated to be not more than $5,000.

CONCLUSION

This is a two-step process. The FVRD needs to complete a Connectivity Infrastructure Study before we can apply for the more significant funding to help pay for infrastructure upgrades and expansion.

COMMENTS BY:

Mike Veenbaas, Director of Financial Services

Reviewed and supported. There is sufficient funding with Budget 102 Electoral Area Administration to fund FVRD's 25% of the proposed study.

Paul Gipps, Chief Administrative Officer

Reviewed and supported