



REGIONAL DISTRICT OF BULKLEY-NECHAKO

**BROADBAND COMMITTEE
AGENDA
Thursday, July 16, 2020**

<u>PAGE NO.</u>		<u>ACTION</u>
	<u>AGENDA- July 16, 2020</u>	Approve
	<u>Supplementary Agenda</u>	Receive
	<u>MINUTES</u>	
2-4	Broadband Committee Meeting Minutes - May 7, 2020	Approve
	<u>REPORT</u>	
5-6	John Illes, Chief Financial Officer – Funding and Partnership Agreements	Receive
	<u>CORRESPONDENCE</u>	
7-10	Todd Doherty - MP Cariboo - Prince George - Broadband/Rural Connectivity Letter to the Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister of Rural Economic Development	Receive
	<u>SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA</u>	
	<u>NEW BUSINESS</u>	
	<u>IN-CAMERA MOTION</u>	
	In accordance with Section 90 of the <i>Community Charter</i> , it is the opinion of the Board of Directors that matters pertaining to Section 90(2)(b) – the consideration of information received and held in confidence relating to negotiations between the municipality and a provincial government or the federal government or both, or between a provincial government or the federal government or both and a third party (Connectivity), must/may be closed to the public, therefore exercise their option of excluding the public for this meeting.	
	<u>ADJOURNMENT</u>	

REGIONAL DISTRICT OF BULKLEY-NECHAKO**BROADBAND COMMITTEE MEETING****Thursday, May 7, 2020****Via Video/Teleconference**

PRESENT: Chair Michael Riis-Christianson

Directors Mark Fisher
Clint Lambert
Chris Newell
Mark Parker
Gerry Thiessen – left at 9:58 a.m.

Director Absent Tom Greenaway, Electoral Area “C” (Fort St. James Rural)

Staff Curtis Helgesen, Chief Administrative Officer
Cheryl Anderson, Manager of Administrative Services
Nellie Davis, Regional Economic Development Coordinator
Debbie Evans – arrived at 9:59 a.m.
John Illes, Chief Financial Officer
Deborah Jones-Middleton, Director of Protective Services
Jason Llewellyn, Director of Planning – arrived at 10:10 a.m.
Wendy Wainwright, Executive Assistant

Others Taylor Turkington, Manager, Assurance, Beswick Hildebrandt Lund
Shane Brienen, District of Houston
Jerry Petersen, Electoral Area “F” (Vanderhoof Rural)

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Riis-Christianson called the meeting to order 9:31 a.m.

AGENDAMoved by Director Lambert
Seconded by Director Parker**BBC.2020-2-1**

“That the Broadband Committee Agenda for May 7, 2020 be approved.”

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**MINUTES****Broadband Committee
Meeting Minutes
–January 9, 2020**Moved by Director Parker
Seconded by Director Lambert**BBC.2020-2-2**

“That the Broadband Committee Meeting Minutes of January 9, 2020 be approved.”

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

REPORT

Connecting British Columbia
 Funding Program: COVID-19
 Response Moved by Director Thiessen
 Seconded by Director Lambert

BBC.2020-2-3

“That the Broadband Committee receive the Regional Economic Development Coordinator’s May 7, 2020 memo titled Connecting British Columbia Funding Program: COVID-19 Response.”

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Discussion took place in regard to funding criteria concerning download and upload speeds. Chair Riis-Christianson commented that a meeting is scheduled May 8, 2020 with Telus. Telus’ purchase of ABC Communications was discussed.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. How does the RDBN advance its 3 projects?

The following was discussed:

- Frustrations in regard to working with Telco’s to move projects forward
- Staff are scheduling meetings with Telco’s in the region working to advance projects
- Finding alternate solutions to move forward
 - Continue lobbying and advocate for adequate service levels
 - RDBN Board write a letter to Federal and Provincial Government Authorities
 - Request Letters of Support from the municipalities and First Nations communities in the region
 - Highlighting the importance of improving internet service
 - COVID-19 Pandemic impact
 - Lack of internet creates
 - Public safety and health issues
- Lack of educational opportunities for rural B.C. youth due to lack of internet service levels.

Report to RDBN Board
 Meeting

Moved by Director Parker
 Seconded by Director Lambert

BBC.2020-2-4

“That the Broadband Committee direct staff to bring forward a comprehensive lobbying and strategy report to the May 21, 2020 Board Meeting including requests for letters of support from local governments and First Nations Governments in the region.”

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

2. Provincial \$50 million fund for small connectivity projects

- Contacting all Internet Service Provider’s (ISP’s) in the region
 - i. Asking if there is an opportunity to utilize fund

DISCUSSION ITEMS (CONT'D)

3. Provincial model for advancing connectivity in rural and remote areas

- Province and Federal approval of connectivity in rural and remote areas requires local governments or ISP's to be in business for three years; and/or local governments to partner with ISP's that are in business for three years
- Request that the Province and Federal governments consider connectivity as an essential service
- Suggest backbone and fibre optic infrastructure be owned by Provincial/Federal Government.

Provincial Ownership of
 Digital Infrastructure

Moved by Director Newell
 Seconded by Director Parker

BBC.2020-2-5

"That the Broadband Committee recommend that the Board write a letter to the Ministry of Citizens' Services suggesting that the Provincial Government consider that internet service be an essential service; and further, that the Provincial Government consider owning digital infrastructure similar to transportation infrastructure."

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

NEW BUSINESS

RigStar Discussion

- Chair Riis-Christianson met with RigStar May 6, 2020
- RigStar working with TC Energy to provide wireless connectivity along pipeline route
- Potential opportunity to create synergies in the region
 - Reviewed map of areas for potential opportunities
- RDBN will share Broadband Study and priority projects
- Staff will follow up with RigStar in regard to the method used to access internet infrastructure and the cellular user system.

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Director Lambert
 Seconded by Director Newell

BBC.2020-2-6

"That the meeting be adjourned 10:12 a.m."

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Michael Riis-Christianson, Chair

Wendy Wainwright, Executive Assistant



Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako BROADBAND COMMITTEE

To: Broadband Committee
From: John Illes, Chief Financial Officer
Date: July 16, 2020
Re: Funding and Partnership Agreements

Recommendation (All/Directors/Majority):

Receipt

Background:

There are many different options to funding broadband or internet infrastructure projects. This memo outlines some of the possible funding models.

Unlike a municipality, before the Regional District can provide a service, either directly or indirectly through some type of contract or grant, a service must be created by bylaw. Generally, the area that receives the service must match the area included in the bylaw. The Province states that “the actual benefiting area for any service, can be whatever the member jurisdictions wish it to be. What is key to understand is that the service’s benefiting area determines both who receives the service and who pays for it.”

To provide broadband service, a service establishment bylaw must be first adopted. If a third party is to provide the service, a partnering agreement must be written, and sufficient formal notice must be given if the third party is not the successful proponent of a public tender. Service establishment for a portion of an electoral area will require consent from the electorate. Costs associated with a referendum are approximately \$8,000 but depend on the number of polling stations and may take up to six months to plan and implement.

A similar service was initiated over forty years ago by the Regional District to provide television to both the municipalities and rural areas. TV Rebroadcasting services provide TV to Smithers, Houston, Telkwa, Burns Lake, Fraser Lake and Fort St. James and to all electoral areas except Area “F”. A total yearly cost to the Regional District of providing television is currently \$356,165.

Gas Tax and Northern Capital and Planning Grant are options only if the internet infrastructure is owned by the Regional District and is not otherwise immediately sold or leased to another organization. It is important to note that there are prohibitions on purchasing infrastructure through Gas Tax or the NCPG and then immediately selling the infrastructure or entering into a capital lease arrangement with another party for the infrastructure.



If the internet infrastructure will be owned by a third party, such as a major telecom, then the Regional District can provide funding through a “partnering agreement” under section 274 of the ***Local Government Act***.

Partnering agreements specify that a third party will provide a certain service to the specified service area for a defined length of time. NCPG and Gas Tax are not available to be utilized for partnering agreements as the funds are not to be utilized for the provision of the service.

There are limitations on the utilization of Gas Tax funds as they must be for infrastructure projects only (not a service), ownership must remain in place for five years, and the project must be for the provision of high speed internet that is described in regulation as 50 mbps down and 10 mbps up. Fibre to the home is currently the only option to meet these requirements and cell towers have been determined to be ineligible. Unless the Regional District owns the broadband infrastructure, UBCM has the interpretation that the utilization of Gas Tax for a partnering agreement would not be appropriate.

The best method to fund a partnering agreement is through taxation spread through the number of years the service is to be provided. Grant applications specific to internet or broadband applied for on behalf of an established service area is another possibility.

If the Board is comfortable with establishing the entire Regional District as the service area for a Broadband Service bylaw, the Board may then be able to offset taxation. That is the Board may tax the newly established service an amount and then reduce taxation by a similar amount in another service where restricted grants can be utilized (for example Environmental Services). It is important to note that in reports to the public that it will be clear that the Board is taxing for Broadband even when taxes are similarly decreased for the other service.

From: [Wendy Wainwright](mailto:Wendy.Wainwright)
To: [Wendy Wainwright](mailto:Wendy.Wainwright)
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL]: Rural Connectivity
Date: Thursday, July 9, 2020 10:37:46 AM
Attachments: [Broadband-Cellular-MinMonsef.pdf](#)

From: Todd.Doherty.C1A@parl.gc.ca <Todd.Doherty.C1A@parl.gc.ca>
Sent: Tuesday, July 7, 2020 3:06 PM
To: Michael Riis-Christianson <michael.riischristianson@rdbn.bc.ca>
Cc: Todd.Doherty.C1@parl.gc.ca
Subject: [EXTERNAL]: Rural Connectivity

Hello Michael,

I hope you are well.

We recently received a letter from yourself, in your role as the RDBN Broadband Committee Chair, requesting written support for the RDBN's efforts to advance rural connectivity. MP Doherty certainly supports these efforts and rural connectivity is a file we are actively working on with our regional stakeholders.

Please find attached a recent letter written to the minister responsible for this portfolio and her offices response below.

Good morning,

My name is Joanna and I'm the Western regional advisor for Minister Monsef.

I hope that you and all of MP Doherty's team are doing well in these challenging times. I'm reaching out today to confirm that we received the piece of correspondence from MP Doherty regarding rural broadband connectivity in Northern-Central BC.

Our team is working hard on the rural broadband file and we are excited to launch the Universal Broadband Fund soon.

As you might know, the UBF was slated to launch in Spring 2020 but given the current circumstances, the launch had to be delayed slightly.

However, the current pandemic situation has only heightened the urgency of connectivity for all Canadians and has also given us the opportunity to ensure that our roll-out is fine-tuned to meet the critical needs of rural communities.

The feedback and input in MP Doherty's letter is extremely appreciated and helpful in this sense to make sure this Fund will help those who need it the most, such as communities in remote BC.

A formal response will follow from our Department but I wanted to ensure that MP Doherty and your team hears from us prior to then and know that we are listening and actively consulting rural

MPs, municipalities, and other stakeholders.

If you have any questions or concerns at all, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Warm regards,

Joanna

Regional Advisor, Western Canada and the Territories

Office of the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development

If you feel an additional letter specific to the RDBN region would be of assistance we can certainly begin drafting that item.

When you are able please reply here or give me a call at the office to discuss how we can best support your efforts.

Thanks and I look forward to your reply.

Respectfully,

Eric Depenau

Regional Executive Assistant to

Todd Doherty, MP

Cariboo-Prince George

Shadow Minister for Transport

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Follow Todd on :





HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Todd Doherty

Member of Parliament
Cariboo—Prince George

June 22, 2020

Hon. Maryam Monsef
Minister of Rural Economic Development
House of Commons
Ottawa

Dear Minister,

Since the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown began in March, I have heard from many people in my riding of Cariboo—Prince George and civic leaders representing northern BC communities, about the woeful state of digital connectivity in our region.

As you are no doubt aware, rural and remote communities in British Columbia are highly impacted by a lack of connectivity both from a broadband and a cellular perspective. The Union of BC Municipalities reports that nearly 40 per cent of rural residents in North-Central BC do not have access to broadband internet service. Cellular services do not exist in most rural and remote areas costing British Columbians to face unique challenges and unequitable costs.

I would like to emphasise that the lack of connectivity disproportionately impacts on rural and remote indigenous communities, creating a barrier to their economic growth and self-determination .

Adding to these woes, the pandemic has shed new light on how much more important good connectivity is to the health and safety of our citizens and also the pivotal role it will play in the economic reopening and redevelopment efforts.

Much work has been done by organizations such as the Northern Development Initiative Trust, the Northern Chambers of Commerce and our regional municipalities just to name a few, who continue to advocate with federal and provincial bodies to speed up the process of better connecting the people, institutions and businesses of our region through broadband and cellular services.

Without going into detail, I am sharing with you here a recent policy paper submitted by the Northern Chambers of Commerce of BC and correspondence I have received from the Northern Development Initiative Trust, which would provide you with ample evidence of what has to be done at this time.

Continued.....

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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Todd Doherty

Member of Parliament
Cariboo—Prince George

Minister, I urge you to immediately work with your provincial counterparts to secure the necessary funds and ensure the physical infrastructure needed is ready to go in the ground at the earliest possible time and enable equitable access to broadband and cellular services to those Canadians in rural and northern BC.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you require my assistance on any aspect of this most important issue. I thank you for your consideration and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Todd Doherty, M.P.

CC. Hon. Joyce Murray, Minister of Digital Government

Attachments

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