

**REPORT TO ELECTORAL AREAS COMMITTEE  
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 08, 2020**

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**SUBJECT**     **Update on Connectivity Planning for the Southern Gulf Islands**

**ISSUE SUMMARY**

The Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area has undertaken a connectivity planning process involving community engagement on Pender, Mayne, Galiano, and Saturna Islands. The Southern Gulf Islands Connectivity Plan is currently being finalized. The next phase involves establishing partnerships with Internet Service Providers to advance design and phasing for implementation of the plan throughout the Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area.

**BACKGROUND**

Within the Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area, the Community Economic Sustainability Commission is pursuing connectivity planning as a top priority for its work program. Improving broadband connection in the Southern Gulf Islands as a way to stimulate sustainable economic growth has been a long standing goal of the Electoral Area Director for the Southern Gulf Islands.

This project was initiated in spring of 2019 to consider how greater connectivity can advance common goals of sustainable economic development and community health and resilience in the Southern Gulf Islands. The project used the *Connected Communities BC Digital Development Roadmap* as a framework tool to advance a holistic approach to connectivity planning for the islands. The project's aim is to establish a strong business case for integrating private and public sector investment opportunities that can be supported for advancing the community's own connectivity goals.

Throughout the fall and winter of 2019, the Southern Gulf Islands team engaged island residents, community groups, businesses, non-profits, and government agencies to discuss the limitations of the current lack of connectivity and the potential for better, faster, more reliable internet to support the social, economic, and sustainability goals of the Southern Gulf Islands. Conversations focused on how better connectivity can help the Southern Gulf Islands meet its community needs and objectives, as well as the impacts and opportunities associated with increased connectivity. Phase 1 of this project is now complete, and the final report is currently in the last stages of editing. Preliminary results are emphasizing how improved connectivity is a fundamental need for Southern Gulf Islands communities to attract and retain young families, support low carbon economic development, and to improve access to social, educational, government, and health services. Please see Appendix A for a summary of the consultation program.

Phase 2 of the project was proposed to advance a design plan that addressed the community goals identified in Phase 1. Recently, there have been funding announcements by the Provincial and Federal governments that support infrastructure design and implementation. The Canadian Radio-television Commission (CRTC) Broadband fund and the Province's Connecting British Columbia fund (administered by the Northern Development Initiative Trust) have announced new intakes with deadlines pending in spring 2020. Staff have reviewed the application criteria of both funds and believe the Southern Gulf Islands region would be eligible. Applicants must have three years' experience deploying and operating broadband infrastructure in Canada. However, the programs are both open for partnerships and consortiums; CRD could partner with one or more Internet Service Providers (ISP) to obtain the funding for implementation and infrastructure

development. Staff are exploring an expanded scope for Phase 2 in order to take advantage of such funding opportunities for investment and development.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

#### *Alternative 1*

The Electoral Areas Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board: That staff be directed to seek partnerships with one or more Internet Service Providers and pursue funding for the design and implementation of the Southern Gulf Islands Connectivity Plan.

#### *Alternative 2*

The Electoral Areas Committee receive this report for information.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

This project supports CRD Board priorities and the corporate plan priorities for Economic Development of Rural Areas (4b-2): “to advance economic development and plans through commissions;” and (4a-1): “support CRD Board on building an advocacy strategy to ensure all occupied properties have the opportunity to access high-speed internet services.”

Provincial and Federal granting agencies that support infrastructure investment, including last mile connectivity, indicate community connectivity plans support the success of applications for investment funding. Connectivity planning is considered essential because it requires the community to do the groundwork in identifying its actual needs for improved service. The Southern Gulf Islands Connectivity Plan has integrated the voices of a range of different sectors on each island and throughout the Electoral Area. This has contributed to a sense of regional commonality and demonstrated the breadth of community support for better, faster, more reliable internet in the islands.

The Southern Gulf Islands Connectivity Plan is in the final stages of drafting and will be ready for distribution by January 14, 2020. It involved a broad based engagement process, as set out in Appendix A, and can now be used to engage with the private sector for implementation.

An expression of interest is proposed by CRD staff to seek partnerships with one or more Internet Service Providers to conduct an infrastructure design plan, and advance applications to the Federal and Provincial government funding programs to support implementation. Staff will be further investigating what level of matching funds would be required from CRD and options for funding through service establishment and requisition and/or stacking grants and accessing external funding sources. A resolution of the CRD Board will be required prior to submission of funding applications.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area is finalizing a connectivity plan for the Southern Gulf Islands that involved broad community engagement throughout the region. Results of the process indicate that connectivity is a fundamental necessity to enable the Southern Gulf Islands communities to diversify the demographic profile of the islands and achieve economic, social, and environmental sustainability into the future. The next phase involves establishing partnerships with Internet Service Providers to advance design and phasing for implementation of the plan throughout the Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Electoral Areas Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:  
That staff be directed to seek partnerships with one or more Internet Service Providers and pursue funding for the design and implementation of the Southern Gulf Islands Connectivity Plan.

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**ATTACHMENT(S)**

Appendix A: Summary of Southern Gulf Islands Connectivity Engagement Process  
Appendix B: Project Charter: Connectivity Planning in the Southern Gulf Islands