



AGENDA ITEM

Fibre Optic Internet Project(s)

Grant Support and Partnership Request

April 9, 2020

BACKGROUND

Missing Link Internet, which is an internet service company based out of Rimbey and a provider of internet services in Central Alberta, including Lacombe County, for the past many years, has inquired of our interest in partnering on a fibre optic project or projects.

You may recall that previously Lacombe County provided Missing Link with a letter of support for its federal government grant application to complete a fibre optic project on the west side of Sylvan Lake. This grant application was approved, and fibre optic internet service will now be provided to several residences in the Summer Villages and the County in this area. The County also collaborated with Missing Link on this project by allowing them to place fibre in some of our road allowances and reserves.

Missing Link is wishing to apply for a Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) grant to install fibre optic cable in an area(s) of the County as determined by us. Based on their prior involvement with other CRTC grant applications they are of the view that having Lacombe County participate as a funding partner on this project would improve the chances of the grant application being approved.

Currently Missing Link is seeking an indication of Lacombe County Council's interest in this arrangement. If Council is open to considering it, Missing Link would like the County to identify a project or projects. With this information Missing Link will put together a formal proposal for Council's consideration and if Council is supportive of it a grant application will be submitted. The application deadline is April 30, 2020. The project(s) would only proceed if the grant application was successful.

Attached is Missing Link's email regarding this matter.

ANALYSIS

Missing Link is asking that Lacombe County consider becoming a 25% funding partner in this initiative with the understanding (through a formal agreement) that our share would be paid back over a predetermined length of time. They have



entered into a similar arrangement with Ponoka County and are currently in discussions with the County of Wetaskiwin and several other municipalities regarding projects in their communities.

The amount of funding required from Lacombe County would depend on the scope of the project(s), which again would be determined by us.

The County has repeatedly heard from our residents and businesses about the lack of good internet service. It is an inconvenience at best and a deterrent to economic growth at worst. The County's position in the past has been that the level and cost of internet services should be determined by the market rather than by County taxpayer support. As such, we have turned down requests from other internet service providers to partner in projects, and likewise, returned a \$750,000 grant from the province obtained for the purpose of partnering with the private sector on internet projects.

Notwithstanding, there may be merit in further exploring this issue by having Missing Link develop a formal proposal for Council's consideration before making a final decision whether to proceed or not.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Council agree to have Administration work with Missing Link to develop a proposal for a fibre optic project(s) in the County. (Administration's recommendation)
2. Council decline Missing Link's request.
3. Council direct Administration on a different course of action.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

At this time there are no budget implications associated with this matter. If Council did agree to involve the County as a funding partner with Missing Link in a project(s), budget provisions would then have to be made.

LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Section 3 of the Municipal Government Act (MGA) states the purposes of a municipality are: 1) to provide good government, 2) to provide services, facilities or other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the municipality, and 3) to develop and maintain safe and viable communities.



STRATEGIC PLAN

The following elements of the County's Strategic Plan are relevant to this issue:

Our Vision: "An attractive, balanced and progressive community".

Our Mission: "To build a safe and vibrant community through leadership, innovation and healthy relationships".

Key Principles: "Recognizing our history and solid foundation, we approach the role of providing the best possible level of municipal services for our citizens through a base of collaborative and supportive teamwork".

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Lacombe County sees the value in engaging and informing the public/stakeholders through a variety of mediums as outlined in the *Policy AD(40): Public Participation Policy*. The appropriate level of engagement for each public participation opportunity is selected on a project-to-project basis. For this item the following engagement will take place:

- *Inform*: To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions

Highlights of all County Council meetings are published on the County Website and in the County News.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council pass the following resolution:

That the County Manager be directed to collaborate with Missing Link Internet in the development of a fibre optic project(s) proposal for the purpose of applying for a CRTC Broadband Fund grant, and further, that such proposal be considered by Lacombe County Council at its April 23, 2020 meeting.

PREPARED BY: Tim Timmons, County Manager

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REVIEWED BY: Tim Timmons, County Manager

A blue ink signature of Tim Timmons inside a square box.