

Broadband to be improved with small cell partnership

By Brock Weir

Canadian mobile data traffic is expected to increase by more than 500 per cent by 2021, so it is all hands on deck to make sure Canadians have the access they need.

Aurora this week is expected to enter into a partnership with Rogers Communications to install small-cell technology on municipal infrastructure such as light posts, and at municipal facilities ranging from recreation facilities to the Aurora Public Library, to increase cellular reception across Aurora.

Similar to an earlier agreement with Bell, this will not only improve access to broadband and other mobile services, but will also be a revenue generator for the Town.

The initiative would allow Rogers to utilize town-owned infrastructure to address the increasing demand for improved data coverage and customer connectivity, said Michael Logue, Program Manager for the Town of Aurora, in a report to Council. The small cell technology is small in footprint and provides a solution that is low-powered and aesthetically designed. It would be installed on infrastructure such as street lights, traffic lights and buildings.

The proposed installations, both outdoors and indoors would, he stressed, follow Safety Code 6 guidelines and are hundreds of times below the safe limits for public exposure.

Once approved, this particular pilot project will see indoor small cell installations at Aurora Town Hall, the Joint Operations Centre, the Aurora Public Library, and the Aurora Family Leisure Complex.

There will be additional outdoor installations, most likely on light standards, to service cell service in the Henderson Drive area.

For Aurora, this is an opportunity to further establish the Town as technology-advanced; as we were one of the first municipalities in Ontario with such an agreement with Bell Canada, we would very likely one of the first very first to put agreements in place for small cell with both major telecommunications carriers, said Mr. Logue. Such a pilot would also facilitate wireless data improvements for residents, secure investment in municipal facilities, and make progress towards strategic plan and business retention and expansion goals for broadband connectivity.

Broadband and wireless connectivity are key drivers for economic development, as internet and data needs becoming a pre-requisite service for business, like roads, water, and electricity.

It would also, he added, be a step towards Aurora realising the Smart Cities concept.

The smart cities concept is predominantly technology-focused, highlighting connectivity of communities (government and citizens) to information and technology networks. The Intelligent Communities Foundation describes broadband connectivity as one pillar of an intelligent community with the further goal of using that technology as a basis for community building and developing smart solutions.

There are many examples of communities that have experienced major economic benefits from being early adopters of smart technology, such as Waterloo, Stratford, and Tilsonburg, Ontario. As York Region pursues smart city and intelligent community initiatives, another project of this nature in Aurora can only help better position the Town as a leader within the Region.

The proposal received the broad support of Council last week, with questions ranging from how this deal compares with Bell and whether Rogers and Bell plan to co-locate in any locations.

There is some co-location, but in other cases it depends where each provider's signal is weak and they want to enhance the service, said CAO Doug Nadorozny. They don't necessarily have to be in the same places, but there will be some overlap into some major areas.

For Councillor Wendy Gaertner, both safety and communication is key to this project going forward.

The locations are to include indoor installation at municipal facilities as well as outdoor installations, so in case there is any member of the public concerned about the effect that might have, everything that will be installed will follow Safety Code 6 guidelines [and] these are very low in generating radiation.