Karen

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**HICEEC’s Work on Improving Local Internet Service**

Starting in 2016, with the help of then Board member, Darren Bond, a former Telus employee, HICEEC initiated lobbying Telus for improved internet service to Hornby Island. The result of this work was a $118,000. Investment in installing a new “hub” to service the S.E. corner of the Island, work completed in March, 2018. The major area benefited was Sandpiper Subdivision, as the new fibre hub was located at Sandpiper and Central. However, the existing antiquated copper wiring still provided the “last mile” service to homes. The further from the hub, the slower the service becomes. (the state for all the “last mile” infrastructure on the Island.) Telus informed HICEEC that no other areas could be upgraded with this type of system.

In Jan/18, the Federal Ministry of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada announced the Coastal Connection program, delivering high speed internet to coastal B.C. communities. The only Gulf Island included in the program was Lasqueti.

HICEEC:

* Confirmed zoning with Hornby Island Trust: O.C.P. policy: 5.5.8 The provision of high-speed internet access to facilitate educational and commercial opportunities for residents is supported.​
* Started lobbying our Federal MP, Gord John, about getting Hornby included in the Westcoast program.
* Worked with Telus:
  + to prove that Hornby was designated as “an underserved area” on the Federal mapping, proving potential eligibility for programs
  + for estimates on what local contributions would be needed for funding subsidies
* Started sharing contact information with the newly formed Denman Island Ratepayer’s Association Internet Working Group

In its 2019 budget, the Federal Government made the commitment that access to services providing internet at speeds of 50 Mbps for downloads and 10 Mbps for uploads would be available to 95% of Canada’s homes and businesses by 2026, and to 100% by 2030. The investment will be $5-6 billion over the next decade.  
In 2019,

May/2019 HICEEC and the DIRRA committee joined forces as the “Hornby Denman Internet Committee”. With advice from the Provincial Ministry of Citizens’ Services a Digital Roadmap and Implementation Plan.

HICEEC and the Denman Island Ratepayer’s Association formed an Internet Working Group to connect with the government programs providing grants for internet improvement. To qualify for funding, communities must take the initiative and show strong support for improved internet service and have plans to implement it. Here’s what we’ve done:

* Obtained grants, of $15,000 from Northern Development Initiative Trust, and $20,000 from the Island Coastal Economic Trust to fund the joint-Island Digital Roadmap & Implementation Plan, that the Provincial Ministry of Citizens’ Services deemed necessary.
* Contracted with Baylink Networks, an internet technology design company, to develop these plans for providing 100% fibreoptic connections to every household on Denman and Hornby within 2 years of receipt of funding from governments.
* This work included local consultations that confirmed the growing importance of online activity; the negative impact of slow, unreliable service; the failure of local internet service to come close to meeting the 50/10 Mbps standard; and preference for fiber-optic cable over wireless, coaxial cable, DSL, satellite and cellular.
* The reports were completed in early 2020 and were widely distributed to all layers of government involved with internet infrastructure funding.
* Information from that time-period is posted on www.HornbyDenmanInternet.com

With reports in hand, the joint-island committee started shopping for funding, looking for both a willing Internet Service Provider and government funding. With lots of lobbying, and community support, in 2020, our Islands were accepted into the Connected Coast project. .M.P. Gord John, M.L.A. Josie Osborne, CVRD Area A rep. Daniel Arbour, local Trustees and Ratepayers groups, have all been very supportive.

For funding at this level, a Regional District is the smallest body that can receive funds. In the Fall of 2020, HICEEC successfully lobbied them for sponsoring Connected Coast internet fiber-optic cable landing sites on Hornby and Denman.

In January 2021 the CVRD Board approved a resolution to support CityWest, a corporation owned by the City of Prince Rupert, to apply for senior government grants for up to 90% funding to provide “last mile” infrastructure (i.e., fiber-optic lines from the trunk cable landing site to local households). The board also provisionally supported investigating options around contributing to the 10% of the funding.

On February 17, 2021 HICEEC hosted a public Zoom call for the Connected Coast consortium to share information about the program, and the proposal for moving forward. That interview is on the website: www.hornbydenmaninternet.com

Subject to government funding being announced for the project, a July 2021 CVRD staff report recommends that the CVRD establish a new broadband connectivity service in partnership with CityWest (citing the business case presented by HICEEC/DIRA which includes partnership profit sharing), and borrow the 10% ($760,000) to pay for last mile infrastructure. The loan would be repaid by increasing local property taxes; for the average house, the annual cost would range from about $23 to $67. The amount will partly depend on the profit sharing arrangement. Elector approval would be required.