

2026 SAUGEEN SHORES MUNICIPAL CANDIDATE SURVEY

Section 3: Safe, Healthy & Welcoming Business Districts

QUESTION 15

Do you support municipal investment or partnerships that improve high-speed fibre internet connectivity within the BIAs and/or provide free public Wi-Fi in key public spaces? Why or why not?

Brian Putman (Not Putnam)

Mayor

Yes. High speed internet is essential in our world today. Commerce, marketing and communication are all built upon reliable, high speed connectivity.

Jeffrey J James

Mayor

Yes, I support municipal investment and partnerships to expand high-speed fibre and free public Wi-Fi in the BIAs and key public spaces. Reliable connectivity is essential for businesses, visitors, and residents to thrive.

Luke Charbonneau

Mayor

I am a Director on South Western Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) and have advocated strongly to extend fibre to all parts of Saugeen Shores and Bruce County. I would very much like to see all properties (including business districts) serviced with high-speed fibre technology. We are making progress on this front through the province's Accelerated High Speed Internet Program but gaps remain. If I am elected, I intend to continue to work with SWIFT to ensure that those gaps are filled in our community and across our County.

We have introduced free public wifi in some public spaces and municipal facilities. I am eager to work with local internet service providers to extend those services where possible.

Diane Huber

Deputy Mayor

Yes. Connectivity is vital and necessary.

Odette Bartnicki

Deputy Mayor

Yes. Designated free public Wi-Fi areas could attract people to our downtowns and encourage them to stay longer, benefiting local businesses and visitors. This service is increasingly common in many municipalities, and may be relatively inexpensive to provide through appropriate partnerships. Any proposal should include clear costs, reliable service and suitable privacy and security protections.

Don Matheson

Vice Deputy Mayor

I think this might be something worth looking at again.

When I was on the BIA, we talked about creating a Wi-Fi "bubble" over the main business area. At the time, it really wasn't practical.

But technology has changed. We also see people sitting outside places like the Library and the Walker House because they can access Wi-Fi there, so we know people use it.

I think it's worth sitting down with the BIAs, looking at what's possible today and what it would cost.

It may not be the answer, but I think it's worth having the conversation again.

Jordan MacKinnon

Port Elgin

Yes, high-speed internet is an expected part of infrastructure, alongside other utilities. Public Wi-Fi is something that should be targeted to specific areas where events and high foot traffic are expected, rather than blanketing the downtown with Wi-Fi.

Any municipal investment in broadband needs to have a clear business case, as telecom companies shouldn't be relying on grants to complete their infrastructure unless there's an obvious public benefit.

Patricia Corrigan-Frank

Councillor Port Elgin Ward

YES, broadband connectivity is essential for all retailers, restaurants, and businesses. High-speed fibre internet provides twenty times better download speed. Coulter's Parkette offers free Wi-Fi. Carrier partnerships and partnering with the BIA members is the way to go.

Rachel Stack

Port Elgin Ward Councillor

Public wifi in key public spaces is a definite opportunity in our community. While I support reasonable initiatives to increase access to wifi and encourage traffic in our downtowns, I would like to see the cost of such initiatives on a go forward basis before making a final decision; however, in principle this idea makes good sense and should be studied.

Tamara McDonald

Councilor- Port Elgin Ward

I strongly support expanding high-speed fibre and public Wi-Fi because modern digital connectivity is the backbone of a thriving local economy. High speed internet attracts new businesses, drives foot traffic into our local businesses, supports remote workers, and keeps our downtowns vibrant and competitive. It ensures our community remains a modern, desirable place to live and invest.

To achieve this without burdening property owners, we must aggressively target federal and provincial grants specifically earmarked for digital infrastructure and rural connectivity. Senior levels of government have millions set aside for local broadband expansion, and our job is to actively hunt down every available dollar. By securing these dedicated grants, we can fund digital upgrades, grow our local economy and deliver high speed connectivity to our public spaces without raising taxes.

Eric Tolton

Saugeen Ward Councillor

Yes, where there is a demonstrated need and sound business case. Reliable high-speed connectivity is important economic infrastructure. I would consider public Wi-Fi in selected high-use areas where it provides clear benefits to residents, businesses and visitors.

Neil Sarginson

Saugeen Ward Councillor

Yes, technology can help business improve. For investment from the town I would request the BIA provide a business plan with payback timelines and guarantees.

Brenda Reeves

Southampton Ward councillor

Yes, where there is a clear need and a sound business case. Reliable high-speed fibre helps businesses compete and attracts investments, while free Wi-Fi in selected public spaces can support visitors and community events. I would first identify service gaps and pursue grants and private sector partnerships with clear standards for cost, performance, security and privacy.

Cathe McIntosh

Councillor, Southampton Ward

Yes. If there is a realistic need and a sound business case, then yes.

Cheryl Grace

Southampton ward councillor

Our 2026 ten-year capital plan shows expansion of Wi-Fi to key existing public locations to 2034 at an expense of almost \$100,000. We should be consulting with BIAs to ensure that those locations can benefit nearby businesses, and yes, having free public Wi-Fi availability is an important feature to draw and retain visitors and make our downtowns more attractive. In addition, our Council and staff, as well as the County, lobby with provincial and federal governments to encourage investment in reliable high-speed internet infrastructure to families, farms and businesses in the township.

Harry Mazmanian

Southampton Ward

Of course. Speaking as a 72 year old, electronic communication is a necessary tool to communicate today. Without it, people are ostracized, deliberately or not.

John Divinski

Councillor, Southampton Ward

Absolutely support free public Wi-Fi in key public space and high speed fibre internet connectivity. Like it or not, the technical age is here to stay and in order for commerce to survive, it needs the technological tools of today to maintain its business locally and throughout the world.

Public Wi-Fi isn't a nice service anymore, but one that is expected by shoppers who are constantly checking the websites of local businesses for their next purchase.

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