

October 13, 2017

MP Dan Ruimy, Chair, Standing Committee  
on Industry, Science and Technology  
House of Commons  
Room 565, 180 Wellington  
Ottawa, Ontario  
Canada K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Ruimy,

Subject: Broadband Connectivity in Rural Canada

---

On behalf of Parkland County, Alberta, I am pleased to present you with our submission to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology's call for briefs of broadband connectivity in rural Canada.

Parkland County started to address connectivity issues within its rural community in 2009 through an investment in telecommunication towers and wireless infrastructure. We now have completed a network core of 20 communication towers, with fibre connections to six towers. Work is now underway on the development of a long term strategy using a holistic model of a fibre and tower combination.

Capitalized by grants, the municipally-owned towers are powered and open to operators of first-responder networks, mobile and Wireless Internet Service Providers (WISPs), through terrestrial connectivity. Tenants rent space on a tower, installing their own equipment to deliver service(s). Our open access network model provides support to wireless providers, and to date we have achieved a high level of connectivity throughout our County.

We have now come to the realization as this project has moved forward that while connectivity is an issue, the larger issue is capacity.

Wireless solutions alone do not advance us in capacity and the landscape of broadband usage is ever changing. Our residents, businesses and producers are at a disadvantage from their urban counterparts. Our youth cannot compete on a level playing field with their urban peers when the simplest functions of education are not fully supported by broadband. The effects of this on our youth is both their global readiness as well as a youth exodus to urban centres. Rural residents don't have equitable access to social services, the efficient delivery of health services and everyday applications of the internet that urbanites take for granted.

Our local economy and the business community is in competitive disadvantage; they are left behind, unable to compete for contracts and are often unable to attract or retain the calibre of employees that our urban counterparts can. Facing immeasurable challenges on the global operational side, without

.../2

the essential service of broadband, the fourth and arguably most important utility, our businesses may be forced to relocate out of our municipality. This will have a significant impact on our tax base, resulting in disproportionately higher taxes, lower services and increased user-fees compared to urban centres.

Parkland County recognizes the importance of supporting and building our knowledge-based workforce as the path to rural resilience - high speed, high capacity broadband is the enabler that will catapult us forward in the new global economy.

Uninhibited access to affordable, high-speed, high- capacity broadband comparable to urban standards is vital to the community economic and social development of rural communities. Parkland County is committed to leveraging technology and broadband to improve the lives, careers, businesses and overall well-being of our communities.

Specifically to your questions:

*a) What constitutes acceptable high-speed service?*

Parkland County agrees with the CRTC ruling of download speeds of at least 50 megabits per second (Mbps) and upload speeds of at least 10 Mbps. While this is a great start, we must comment that it fails to provide long-term solutions. The ever-increasing demands of broadband will quickly make the aforementioned targets ineffective within the next couple of years. We need to be competitive with other jurisdictions who recognize and have invested in the pursuit and implementation speeds of one gigabyte both up and down. This would position our rural businesses, residents and producers as competitive in the global markets. The matter pertains more to the availability and implementation of technology in a wireless setting. With support to rural providers we can facilitate the introduction of 150 megabytes up and 50 megabytes down. This, combined with unlimited data will facilitate more opportunities for rural communities.

*b) The financial challenges of implementing high-speed service?*

There are a variety of financial challenges when it comes to rural broadband. Parkland County has chosen to invest and create a municipally owned network of telecommunication towers and fibre. It was thought that "if we build it, they will come". This has not been the case. Due to the high cost of wireless equipment service, weighed against the return on investment for the provider, we were required to incentivise collocation opportunities. In rural remote areas, municipalities had to pay the providers to enable the provision of broadband service. For many municipalities, they face a business decision, invest scarce tax dollars to support broadband or forgo the long-term social and economic gains that would be derived. Without broadband investment rural communities cannot be sustainable long term.



*c) Regulatory changes to encourage the implementation of high-speed service?*

There needs to be a broadband strategy at each level of government to make an informed decision on how to further support municipalities and incentivise telecom providers to invest in rural communities. Without a national broadband strategy and its recognition as an essential service, rural communities continue to have barriers for access, capacity and investment.

Further, regulatory consideration must be given to the allocation of broadband frequency spectrum and ensuring smaller telecommunication companies have equal opportunity to acquire licensing. Currently, a large portion of spectrum has been purchased and held by the large telecommunication providers; sitting unused. If the smaller telecommunication companies that service rural communities had access to the unused spectrum they could expand and enhance services.

I appreciate your consideration of Parkland County's submission. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and technology to find solutions for this important issue.

Yours truly,



Rod Shaigec  
Mayor

Phone: 780-968-8410

Email: [rshaigec@parklandcounty.com](mailto:rshaigec@parklandcounty.com)

Copy: Parkland County Council  
CAO, Parkland County