



Public input sought for fibre project

Paul Frey, Olds Albertan, July 6, 2010

The public should have another opportunity to discuss the merits of the Fibre to the Premise project when second reading of the borrowing and loan bylaws take place at town council sometime near the end of the month.

First reading of the borrowing bylaw and loan bylaw were passed on June 28 at council's regular meeting. The intent of the bylaws is to borrow \$6 million to finance the remainder of the estimated \$12 million cost of the project from the Alberta Municipal Finance Authority, and in turn, loan that money to the Olds Institute For Community and Regional Development, which is spearheading the project.

Both bylaws must now be advertised for a minimum of two weeks. Norm McInnis, the town's chief administrative officer, said specific instructions will be laid out in the notices telling people how they can participate if they have any concerns about the bylaws.

"I'm hoping we can generate some discussion with the reading of the bylaws. There's still a fair amount of due diligence to be done. It is a fair amount of money," he said.

A survey will be conducted throughout the community later this summer asking people if they would support the project and use the service once the network is completed. McInnis said the results of the survey would be crucial in determining how residents view this project — and if they would use the service. The borrowing bylaw could hinge on the results of the survey, McInnis said.

"I think the important thing is that the revenues from the network will support both the interest and principal ... payments. If it doesn't, this project will not go forward," McInnis said.

Joe Gustafson, chairman of the technology committee of the OICRD, said while the initial plan was to provide the network backbone and then get existing service providers to provide services over the network, commercial service providers weren't interested in providing it on a private network.

"Those attempts have failed. So now we must also, not only build the dark fibre but we must also offer the content on the fibre," he said, explaining that having to go that extra step on the committee's own that existing service providers did not provide has cost the project extra dollars.

Gustafson said the committee believes that by offering every home and business in Olds a high-speed connection, it will allow businesses that don't currently operate in Olds the chance to stay here in the community rather than moving those businesses to larger centres.

"We believe that adding connectivity is going to future-proof the community (and) that businesses ... will start to come here because of that availability (of connectivity). They'll be able to do anything that they dream about from a technology standpoint and connectivity-wise so we believe that over time ... that it will change the face of the community and help people do business here," he said.

"The whole thing is predicated on economic development and growth in the community," he said. The survey is expected to take about a month to complete. It hasn't yet been determined how many surveys will be going out, but Gustafson said the hope is that as many people as possible will take the survey. The survey will include a representative cross-section of community members to gauge the support for the network.

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