Cumberland-Colchester Connected Communities Initiative

Cumberland Colchester Connected Communities Vision:
The Municipalities of Cumberland and Colchester's shared vision, as articulated in a Cumberland-Colchester Memorandum of Understanding, is that our entire geographic area will be served by a state-of-the-art continuously upgraded communications network that includes capacity for reliable, affordable, highest-speeds internet access, as well as mobile telephone, community Wi-Fi, and internet-of-things uses such as 'smart agriculture', 5G and other future applications.

The Municipalities of Cumberland and Colchester consider high-quality, cost-effective internet services to each home in our communities to be an "essential service" – a service no less important than electricity or services like water or sewer. To reach our Connected Communities Vision, the Municipalities of Cumberland and Colchester identified our first step as increasing access to highspeed internet with the goal of reaching 100% of our households with actual highspeed internet.

To reach our first goal, the Municipalities of Cumberland and Colchester have partnered with an industry leader and leveraged other government funding for the Cumberland-Colchester Highspeed Internet Project. More details about this project can be found in the links below. We will continue to add information about this project as it becomes available.

Why is the Municipality Funding an Internet Project?

People living and working in rural areas of Cumberland and Colchester face a connectivity gap – they have a daily challenge of slower, less reliable internet access. Small businesses, parents, teachers, doctors, nurses, community organizations, and others recognize that highspeed internet is key to living and thriving in their communities.

People in communities across the Municipalities of Cumberland and Colchester need access to reliable highspeed internet to grow business opportunities, to innovate, to apply for jobs, to do homework, and to access many government services. Internet is no longer a luxury or just 'nice to have' – it's *a necessity* for our residents.

Highly populated areas have an easier time gaining access to the highspeed internet because the industry builds networks first where it is most profitable for them. Rural communities can obtain similar results but must be much more proactive to assure success. Considering the rapid pace of technological evolution, it is increasingly vital that we do so in our region

Under our *Connected Communities Vision*, we will close the connectivity gap.

This means more people can decide to stay and work in their own communities, lower rates of poverty and related social issues, and businesses that are better able to compete and grow.

This means our communities can expect higher small business values and new business formation rates, higher property values, higher quality of employment, and generally more economic opportunity for the entire community.

The Municipalities of Cumberland and Colchester share many similarities and it makes sense to come together to make our project more appealing to internet service providers so that our residents in every community are among the first to benefit from the latest technology. In order to secure private investment in our project, as well as funding from other levels of government, Councils of both Municipalities have chosen to partner with an internet service provider with expertise in rural broadband.

The Municipalities identified immediate opportunities to attract industry projects funded by the Nova Scotia Internet Funding Trust in our region. By each Council formally committing funds, we made a project in Cumberland and Colchester more attractive to the Nova Scotia Internet Funding Trust and increased the likelihood of being among the first municipalities to have highspeed internet fully accessible.

Without the funding provided by the Nova Scotia Internet Funding Trust, the cost of covering all of Cumberland, or all of Colchester, would be difficult for either Municipality to fund.

How we got here

To reach our Connected Communities Vision, the Municipalities of Cumberland and Colchester identified our first step as increasing access to highspeed internet with the goal of reaching 100% of our households with actual highspeed internet. To make this happen, the Municipalities formed a Joint Internet Committee to oversee the achievement of our first goal. The Joint Internet Committee members are as follows:

- Alison Gillis, Warden, Municipality of Cumberland
- Tom Taggart, Councilor, Municipality of Colchester
- Michael Gregory, Councilor, Municipality of Colchester
- Joe van Vulpen, Councilor, Municipality of Cumberland
- Rob Simonds, CAO, Municipality of Colchester
- Rennie Bugley, CAO, Municipality of Cumberland
- Mark Austin, Economic Development Officer, Municipality of Colchester
- Michelle Byers, Manager of Community Economic Development, Municipality of Cumberland

The Municipalities recognized that to bring reliable highspeed internet to the Cumberland-Colchester region, we need experts. Designing, installing, and maintaining a major network of fibre-optic and wireless connectivity involves services not normally found within municipal staffing compliments.

Develop Nova Scotia released a *Request for Proposals for the Internet for Nova Scotia Initiative*. Working within the Develop Nova Scotia process offered the best opportunity to create our core network as quickly and reliably as possible.

The Municipalities of Cumberland and Colchester jointly issued a Request for Expression of Interest (RFEI) that aligned with the timing of Develop Nova Scotia's Request for Proposals for the Internet for Nova Scotia Initiative, issued on behalf of the Nova Scotia Internet Funding Trust. The purpose of the RFEI was to assist the two Municipalities in selecting which proposal to Develop Nova Scotia from an internet service company to officially endorse for our zones. The RFEI gave the Municipalities the opportunity to evaluate what the internet service providers were willing to give the Municipalities as well as what they expected to receive in return.

As a result of the RFEI process, the Municipalities of Cumberland and Colchester agreed to exclusively endorse and participate in a proposal for the entirety of their region submitted by Xplornet Communications Inc. The Municipalities jointly signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Xplornet and will soon formalize our commitment to contribute financially to their project. The basic terms of the Municipalities project with Xplornet are:

- Municipal commitment of $6 million (split between both Cumberland and Colchester) in exchange for a 20-year lease for irrefutable rights of use of two pairs of dark fibre strands included in Xplornet's fibre-build in Cumberland and Colchester.
- Xplornet will aim to reach 100% of households in Cumberland and Colchester with highspeed internet.

Xplornet's proposal covering the Municipalities of Cumberland and Colchester was selected by Develop Nova Scotia and an agreement was reached for a project contribution from the Nova Scotia Internet Funding Trust.

The Project Details

Xplornet Communications Inc. will build a fibre optic network to connect approximately 22,000 rural homes and businesses in the Municipalities of Cumberland and Colchester, which currently have limited access to the latest Internet speeds and unlimited data typically offered in the cities. To deliver this service, Xplornet will deploy fibre optic cable, as well as 5G-ready broadband infrastructure to its existing network, delivering fibre-to-the-home and wireless services to approximately 22,000 homes in the two Counties. This includes 16,000 homes as part of the Nova Scotia Internet Funding Trust (NSIFT), and an additional 6,000 homes outside of the scope of the program.

The result will be access to affordable Internet packages, unlimited data, and speeds up to 100 Megabits per second (Mbps) and beyond, exceeding targets established by the CRTC.

This project was made possible because of major investments by Xplornet, the Province of Nova Scotia, and the Municipalities of Cumberland and Colchester. Project funding and investment includes the following:

Xplornet Communications Inc.	$ 34.3 Million
Nova Scotia Internet Funding Trust	$ 19.9 Million
Municipality of Cumberland	$ 3.21 Million
Municipality of Colchester	$ 2.79 Million
Total	**$ 60.2 Million**

To learn more about the specific options that will available to you, you can reach out directly to Xplornet by calling 1-877-969-3152 or visiting www.xplornet.com

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Will this reach me?**
   This project aims to have highspeed internet access available to every address in Cumberland and Colchester. To learn more about the specific options that will available to you, you can reach out directly to Xplornet by calling 1-877-969-3152 or visiting www.xplornet.com

2. **When will this reach me?**
   The entire project is scheduled to be completed in a three-year time frame. Individuals and businesses will be able to connect as the service becomes available once constructed. For more information, please contact Xplornet by calling 1-877-969-3152 or visiting www.xplornet.com

3. **Will this be true highspeed internet?**
   Yes, this will be true highspeed internet. The project aims to reach 100% of households with up to 100mbps download speeds. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) wants "…all Canadian homes and businesses to have access to broadband Internet speeds of at least 50 Mbps for downloads and 10 Mbps for uploads."

4. **Is this "fibre-op"?**
   Yes. The network will have optic fibre as its 'backbone.'

5. **How much will the new service cost me?**
   To learn more about the specific options that will available to you, you can reach out directly to Xplornet by calling 1-877-969-3152 or visiting www.xplornet.com

6. **Will there still be people who depend on satellite?**
   Yes, there will be a limited number of households that will depend on satellite. This service is expected to have a minimum of 50mbps download speeds.

7. **Why Xplornet? How were they chosen?**
   Xplornet was chosen by both the Municipality of Cumberland and the Municipality of Colchester through a formal procurement process.

8. **What about my current company?**
   As always, you can choose to purchase your internet service from any company you wish.

9. **Will there be data caps?**
   Packages without data caps will be available. To learn more about the specific options that will available to you, you can reach out directly to Xplornet by calling 1-877-969-3152 or visiting www.xplornet.com

10. **Why is my municipality spending money on this?**
    Highspeed internet is key to our quality of life and economic future. Access to highspeed internet is about building better communities. Municipal spending has enabled $60 million of new investment in our region.

11. **Will my municipality own this?**
    The municipality will not own the network. Xplornet will own the network and will be responsible for repairs and maintenance to the network as well as all aspects of providing residential highspeed internet.

12. **What's the Municipality getting for this money?**
    The Municipalities of Cumberland and Colchester each gain an Indefeasible Rights of Use (IRU) for two pairs of maintained dark fibre on all Xplornet-owned fibre throughout Cumberland and Colchester built as part of this project for use of the Municipalities on a twenty-year IRU.

13. **What is dark fibre?**

Dark fibre or unlit fibre is an unused optical fibre, available for use in fibre-optic communication. It can be used to create a privately-operated optical fibre network that is run directly by its operator over dark fibre leased or purchased from another supplier. This is opposed to purchasing bandwidth or leased line capacity on an existing network. Dark fibre networks may be used for private networking, or as internet access or internet infrastructure networking.

14. **How will the Municipalities use the dark fibre?**

Purchasing dark fibre rights allows the Municipalities to create and offer fully private networks. As such, we hope to be able to work with other levels of government and industry to pilot health care solutions, do agriculture testing, run educational programs, offer community hot spots, etc. As the project progresses, we will have more details of the use of the dark fibre, which will be shared as it becomes available.

15. **Will the Municipality favour Xplornet over others?**

No, the Municipality will not favour Xplornet over other internet service providers or telecommunications companies. This agreement does not provide a monopoly to Xplornet as a provider of internet services.

16. **Who can I speak to about this?**

Mark Austin and Michelle Byers have been the staff leads on this project. You can connect with them at maustin@colchester.ca and mbyers@cumberlandcounty.ns.ca

CONTACT

Further Questions can be directed to:

info@cumberlandcounty.ns.ca

OR

maustin@colchester.ca