



Q & A with the CAO

Broadband Expansion

Q: We often hear that we need broadband expansion for business and agriculture to thrive in Southern Alberta- what does this actually mean?

A: Lethbridge County has heard loud and clear that we need to increase broadband services in order to remain viable and to retain and attract businesses. Over the past two and a half years, the County has been exploring options that will best serve the needs of residents, businesses, and the agricultural sector.

Q: Why is the solution taking so long to address?

A: The challenge with bringing broadband into rural areas is the lack of a substantial urban core. Lethbridge County consists of several hamlets and country residential subdivisions that are low in population, as well as individual farms that are considerably spread out. Companies that provide mobility and broadband are reluctant to invest in areas where they will not see a return on their investment. Additionally, the technology surrounding broadband is changing so rapidly that we need to ensure we are addressing the most up-to-date technology.

Q: We continually hear in the news that government will be investing in rural broadband- what does this mean and are we in line for funding?

A: Both the federal and provincial levels of government have been stressing the importance of rural broadband. The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the need for stronger Wi-Fi so that people can work from home, as well as attend school and medical appointments virtually. Further, our strong agricultural sector needs improved broadband to keep up with innovations and new technology. Several funding mechanisms have been put in place and the County is actively exploring these options. Under Canada's federal connectivity strategy, there are three pillars: high speed access for all, investing for impact and partnering for progress.

Q: What are some of the new innovations that will help address the challenges with rural broadband?

A: Companies are continually launching satellites (low Earth orbiters or LEOs) that will ensure strong rural broadband connectivity. Additionally, the three largest telecommunications companies are investing heavily in rural fiber upgrades. 5G wireless technology (new in 2021) will absolutely change the landscape once it is introduced.

Q: What are the County's plans to address this issue?

A: The County is working on a broadband strategy. This will ensure that we are putting forward the best possible solutions for the county. We continue to work with the province and federal government on mapping and funding. This will continue until an adequate solution has been reached and our stakeholders' issues have been addressed satisfactorily. We will be engaging all of you to ask what your specific needs are so that we can implement this into our strategy. Watch for upcoming correspondence from the County.

Sincerely,

Ann Mitchell

Chief Administrative Officer, Lethbridge County

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