



Subject: Cellular Coverage Concerns

Report Number: EDM 24-029

Department: Economic Development Department

Submitted by: Laura Pickersgill, Executive Assistant

Meeting Type: Council Meeting

Meeting Date: Monday, September 9, 2024

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT report EDM 24-029 titled “Cellular Coverage Concerns” be received;
- B. THAT Council of the Town of Tillsonburg endorses the following:
- C.
 - a. Whereas the residents of our community are not able to have reliability and confidence in our telecommunications infrastructure for our commercial establishments and economic growth, employment, school, virtual medical appointments, mental health, welfare and emergency services;
 - b. Whereas many areas in and around the Town of Tillsonburg are considered “Dead Zones” causing rural and urban communities to incur prohibitive costs which include roaming and overage fees and/or alternative resources in order to gain basic and limited communication functionality;
 - c. Whereas the Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) has committed to have a reliable Network and states that, *“Reliable telecommunications networks have never been more crucial. They support not only a wide range of economic and social activities but also other critical infrastructure sectors and government services, and they are crucial for emergency services and public safety. They are fundamental to the safety, prosperity and well-being of Canadians.”*
 - d. THAT the top priority of the ISED as stated in the Telecommunications Reliability Agenda is, *“Robust Networks and Systems – This means there is robust architecture for telecommunications networks with appropriate redundancy, diversity, and hardening against hazards, with particular care for emergency services. There are systems with controls and monitoring and the telecommunications supply chain including supplier equipment is trusted and secure. Investments are made to support these activities including in rural and remote areas or to address coverage gaps.”*
- D. THAT the Council of the Town of Tillsonburg requests that the Federal Government and ISED make it their priority to push forward with their

EDM 24-029 Cellular Coverage Concerns

commitment to provide this crucial infrastructure in a meaningful and time manner and provide action and enforcement on the regulations that mandate timely installation of approved cell tower installations.

- E. THAT a copy of this resolution be also sent to all Ontario municipalities, SWIFT, local telecommunications providers, the local MP and MPP.

BACKGROUND

The Economic Development Advisory Committee passed a resolution regarding concerns with poor cellular coverage at their August 8, 2023 meeting. This resolution resulted in Report CAO 23-11 being brought forward at the August 14, 2023 meeting of Council, who subsequently passed the following resolution:

A. THAT report titled CAO 23-11 Cellular Coverage Concerns be received as information; and

B. THAT Council approve the recommendation of the Economic Development Advisory Committee as follows:

THAT the Economic Development Advisory Committee recommends to Council that a letter be sent to local telecommunications providers, SWIFT and local municipalities regarding poor cellular coverage in the Tillsonburg and surrounding area in support of economic development and our growing community.

DISCUSSION

Subsequent to the above, staff circulated a letter to contacts through Bell Canada, Oxford County Mayors and to SWIFT. No response was received so staff reached out to Bell Canada again. Once contact was initially made from Bell Canada, staff were asked to compile a list of specific locations where coverage is lacking and/or intermittent. The Senior Leadership along with the Economic Development Advisory Committee compiled a list and this was sent to Bell Canada in December. Staff followed up again with Bell Canada to see if any resolution or comments came back from the last update with the specific locations. No response has been received to-date.

Staff also reached out to SWIFT again to provide any insight on the issue. A response was finally received from SWIFT which noted,

“SWIFT’s main area of focus/expertise is terrestrial broadband networks. While we have looked into cellular coverage in the past, we are not actively involved in expanding cellular services in Southwestern Ontario. As such, our knowledge of any carrier plans to expand services is limited.

EDM 24-029 Cellular Coverage Concerns

Having said that, I've reached out to my contacts at Bell and Rogers (note they are not in the cellular divisions) to ask if they can provide any insight or future plans for the town. I'll let you know when I hear back from them."

Staff sent a follow-up email to SWIFT to see if any plans were noted and no response has been received to-date.

Following this, the Town of Plympton-Wyoming passed a resolution, as attached in Appendix A, regarding underserved cellular communication services in rural and urban centres. This was brought to the Economic Development Advisory Committee for their review at their August 13, 2024 meeting. The following resolution was passed at that meeting:

THAT the Economic Development Advisory Committee is in support of the resolution from the Town of Plympton-Wyoming regarding underserved cellular communication services in rural and urban centres and recommends that Council pass a supporting resolution.

The Economic Development Advisory Committee is urging Council to pass a resolution similar to the Town of Plympton-Wyoming as shown above in efforts to enhance cellular service in and around the Town of Tillsonburg.

Additionally, staff have been in contact with the CRTC as it was discovered CRTC was speaking at the CRRBC Eastern Canada conference regarding the "Commission's efforts to fund improvements to internet and cellphone service in Indigenous, rural and remote communities in Canada through the Broadband Fund." Staff asked if they could come present to the Economic Development Advisory Committee on this topic, however, there was some reluctance and suggestion was given to reach out to SWIFT. Nonetheless, if desired, it is believed that the CRTC could be asked to present this information if requested by Council.

As the Town continues to grow the strain on existing cellular service infrastructure continues to get larger and the existing infrastructure is having difficulty keeping up with the higher volume of local users.

The health and well-being of our community is a priority for the Town of Tillsonburg. Unfortunately, our community is experiencing poor cellular service, which is affecting our resident's well-being and impact business operations in the area. Supporting the above resolution will ensure that senior levels of government, external agencies and telecommunications companies are aware of our concerns.

CONSULTATION

This request for action has come from the Economic Development Advisory Committee and with input from the Town’s Senior Leadership Team.

FINANCIAL IMPACT/FUNDING SOURCE

None

CORPORATE GOALS

How does this report support the corporate goals identified in the Community Strategic Plan?

- Lifestyle and amenities
- Customer service, communication and engagement
- Business attraction, retention and expansion
- Community growth
- Connectivity and transportation
- Not Applicable

Does this report relate to a specific strategic direction or project identified in the Community Strategic Plan? Please indicate section number and/or any priority projects identified in the plan.

Goal – The Town of Tillsonburg will accommodate and support sustainable growth.

Strategic Direction – N/A

Priority Project – Enhanced development standards that benefit the community (including tree planting, affordable housing, walkability, livability, connectivity)

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A – Town of Plympton-Wyoming Resolution – Underserviced Cellular Communication Services in Rural and Urban Centres