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DATE 13 May 1997

TO/DEST. Co-ordinator
 Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee

FROM/EXP. Councillor Wendy Stewart

SUBJECT/OBJET **OTTAWA COMMUNITY NETWORK**

REPORT RECOMMENDATION

That the Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee and Council receive this report for information.

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this report is to provide the Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee and Council with information regarding both technology related initiatives that are underway in other regions in Canada and the status of related initiatives in Ottawa-Carleton.

Ottawa-Carleton is not alone in exploiting the idea of communication infrastructure and its applications to the community at large. In other parts of Ontario and Canada, municipalities have moved ahead of Ottawa-Carleton in integrating communication infrastructure with their respective planning functions:

Ontario

- “Smart Toronto” - Annual Report 1996
 “Creating a Knowledge Capital in the Information Age” *
- Intercom Ontario. New residential - Community Commercial *
- London - Interactive & Multi-media + Medical (Victoria Hospital) *
- Orangeville - Montgomery Village - New residential/Neighborhood commercial
- Oakville - New residential community.
- Mississauga - New residential community.
- Lanark County - Multi-use network to all aspects of the community (Ontario TAP)

* Documentation issued separately and available through the Regional Clerk’s Department

- North Bay - Integrated Community Network.
- Ottawa Heart Institute - Medical (Ontario TAP) *
- Kanata - WestPark. Proposed new fully integrated community *

British Columbia

- Vancouver - False Creek - New high density residential - community commercial

Alberta

- City of Calgary - Telus Integrated Network. Medical & Education +

New Brunswick

- Province wide integrated network infrastructure.

Quebec

- Montreal - Medical trial *
- Repentigny - Interactive & Multi-media *

Nova Scotia

- TARA - Halifax to Cape Breton network infrastructure.

In the past decade, governments and the IT sector are seizing on the notion of the “Information Highway” as the means to improve and diversify Canada’s economic base and for it to remain competitive in a global economy that is characterized by the “Information Age”. The above list demonstrates that governments, in collaboration with the IT sector, have brought about policies and initiatives that promote and advance the implementation of technology infrastructure to communities in Canada.

In Ottawa-Carleton, visionaries and business leaders inspired this community to bring about economic renewal and especially so in a time of federal government downsizing in an economy dependent upon government. Reports were commissioned which suggested that this region must support and further its technology-based industries (most of which are home grown) and must look to several strategic initiatives, including a region-wide communication infrastructure and advance the means to establish a semiconductor microchip fabrication plant.

Despite the more recent recommendations for economic renewal and diversification, papers have been written as early as 1971 suggesting that Ottawa-Carleton become “The Wired Scientific City”. (*Dept. of Communications Canada - - The Wired Scientific City - 1971, Bowen, Coll & George, Carleton University*). The presupposition, at that time, acknowledged that this community had several unique characteristics and in particular, a high concentration of IT related industries that spawned from government research facilities and post-secondary institutions in the region.

* Documentation issued separately and available through the Regional Clerk’s Department

Information technology is now the greatest economic engine Ontario has for growth. In the last 5 years it has had the largest increase of any sector in terms of jobs, exports, and tax revenue. Information technology could become, at its current rate of growth, the major economic engine of the Ontario economy for producing wealth, surpassing the auto sector in the next century. Creation of wealth is fundamental to sustaining our quality of life; competition for wealth creation is now truly global. However, there remain key issues that can impact on the outgrowth of the Information Technology industry in Ontario.

- The growth of the Information Technology sector in Ontario is in danger of collapsing because of the lack of focused resources and effort, and the lack of stronger leadership by government - at all levels, and institutions.
- The post-secondary institutions are not producing enough graduates to meet requirements of the Information Technology sector (2000 openings are required in Ottawa alone). We do not have “industrial facing” educational institutions in terms of research & testing with the exception of the University of Waterloo.
- Ontario does not have a critical mass on a global scale in any area of the “Knowledge Industries”. Ontario must have a focused vision and leadership to lead the world in the coming economic opportunities like the US, Singapore, Japan, Taiwan & Korea.
- So far, we have not secured the core infrastructure/capabilities needed to sustain continued growth. Ontario did this in the 60’s for the auto sector which has driven our economy for the last 40 years. In the 60’s, we ensured market access; ensured a strong research, assembly, and parts sectors; and ensured the education system taught the right skills for the times. The auto sector formed the core of the wealth that has sustained Ontario’s quality of life. In Ottawa, in particular, the Federal Government was the economic engine. As we look to the year 2000, this region must ensure that it has the engine to drive our knowledge based industries as the new economy into the next century.

We need to do this in a deliberate manner investing and focusing our collective resources. Ottawa has the potential to compete globally, as do clusters of competence in Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo and elsewhere in Canada. However, the largest of these centres is 26th in size in North America (after Austin, Texas). The critical mass still needs to be built in this region.

There is no doubt that resources found in this region have made substantial contributions to the notion of Canada’s Information Highway as we enter the Information Age. Moreover, given the high concentration of technology related companies, the community is touting itself as “Silicon Valley North” and as the nerve centre for research in Canada.

Government, industry, and the educational institutions must now pull together the resources so we can compete in the next century. Government must do more than to merely establish economic development and planning policies which pander to the process. They must facilitate and expedite the process to meet the requirements of the business community, as well as ensuring that government policies evolve in a manner that are more responsive to change, for them to remain relevant with the times.

In the case of the Ottawa Carleton Research Institute, initiatives have begun to advance the use of information technology in the region, making Ottawa a world class place to live and work and a means to attract industry to the region. This will involve connecting educational and medical institutions, companies, government offices and households together over high speed communication networks to access and share information.

To accomplish this OCRI and OCRI-net have embarked on a long range project called "Ottawa Community Network" (OCN). This project is the next phase of the OVITA/OCRI initiative which was established in January 1996 to enlist the support from a wide range of companies, institutions and organizations in the community and beyond. The OCN project also builds on work done over the past two years by OCRI-net and RMOC's Infrastructure Program to test and use broadband services in the region.

The "Ottawa Community Network" is more important to this region than for most communities in Canada. A community undergoing the challenges of transition from government to the IT sector as its new economic base, needs a catalyst to ensure sustainability in all areas of the economy and that of its core activity - The Information Industry.

WestPark is an essential element of OCN in developing the regions' information technology infrastructure by providing a living and working environment for demonstration and testing of new access technologies, multimedia and information services. The proposal is a showcase to the outside world - to the global economy and the first of what should be many future initiatives in this region. The lessons learned by having a community IT "Live Laboratory" such as WestPark will be of real value when planning IT requirements for future communities. It will also provide a competitive advantage to our many local IT industries to design, test and evaluate new IT applications and services.

*Approved by
Councillor Wendy Stewart*