City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To:	Public Works and Transportation Committee	**Date:**	October 31, 2006
From:	Alan Cameron Director of Information Technology	**File:**	10-6000-01/2006-Vol 01
Re:	**Telecommunication Strategy**		

Staff Recommendation

1. That staff be directed to develop an integrated telecommunication strategy for the City of Richmond.

2. That upon completion of the telecommunication strategy, a public request for expressions of interest be issued for interested proponents.

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Director, Engineering
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CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER		
REVIEWED BY TAG	YES ☑	NO ☐
REVIEWED BY CAO (ACTING)	YES ☑	NO ☐

Staff Report

Origin

At the Public Works and Transportation Committee Meeting September 20, 2006 staff received the following referral: "that staff investigate and report on various City-wide internet and/or communication networks".

This report provides a response to the referral together with an associated work program.

Background

The City currently has an extensive fibre network that is partly city-owned and partly leased from Telus, the telecommunication industry incumbent. This fibre network currently supports only the City and affiliated facilities. The City's services do not currently extend to telecommunications to citizens, businesses, or other public bodies.

Over the last few years several wireless vendors have approached the City requesting to partner in public wireless network deployments. Wireless currently receives more publicity than other technologies due to its comparatively low cost of deployment and the ease with which it can help connect workers with their office systems and consumers with the Internet. The publicity around wireless deployment in various cities has also highlighted the potential benefits of increased telecommunications provision to a community. The City has not yet engaged a partner to deploy significant wireless services.

Wireless is an attractive technology to implement in haste because it can be deployed easily. However, it should be noted that wireless is simply part of a bigger telecommunications picture and cannot be viewed as a solution in itself. Wireless, like any other telecommunications technology, should be deployed to support specific mobile computing needs or as part of an integrated telecommunications strategy.

Analysis

Wireless Partnership in the City

Vendors have approached the City with offers to support City mobile computing needs at a reduced cost in return for the City permitting the vendor to use City infrastructure; for example, attaching wireless access points to street lamps. The vendors want to use City infrastructure as it would dramatically reduce the cost of their system deployments. While this partnership proposition seems good value for the City it must be understood that the vendors have a wider agenda than simply servicing the City's mobile computing needs. Once a wireless network is deployed the City will be permitted to use the system at a reduced rate while the vendor focuses on generating revenue with the community by delivering other telecommunications services; for example, low-cost telephone services.

The potential to change the provision of telecommunications services with this technology is great. The potential impact on the community is also great, albeit currently unknown. Therefore, planning is vital and an integrated telecommunications strategy is required to ensure that the needs of the community are met by any subsequent changes and that the City chooses the best partner with the best solution.

If the City simply required a wireless system to meet its mobile computing needs then it could deploy such a network itself with little challenge and moderate cost.

Integrated Telecommunications Strategy

An integrated telecommunications strategy could help transform the current provision of telecom services in Richmond. Such a strategy could result in:

- Increased home-based businesses
- Municipal telephone and television services
- Increased businesses involved with emerging technologies
- Increased access to long-distance learning
- Real-time connectivity for municipal staff and operations
- Automatic meter reading for the electric and water utilities
- Telemedicine
- Innovations we cannot yet imagine

Currently, several incumbents control the telecommunications market and deciding to deliver alternative services to the community is a significant decision. However, this decision is becoming a popular one for municipalities, despite considerable challenges from the telecommunications industry, including legal action.

Developing and implementing an integrated telecommunications strategy that supports an open, market-driven, competitive environment would likely result in the delivery of a broad variety of telecommunications-based services available to all of the community. Such a strategy would be transformative and could result in Richmond becoming:

- a more competitive location for business
- a world-class centre for education
- more attractive for visitors
- more able to support the delivery of excellent public services
- more of an investor in the City's human capital – its residents, children, and workers

Financial Impact

None

Conclusion

An integrated telecommunication strategy can serve many purposes and can take many forms depending on our needs and technology. Understanding the City's needs and the opportunities in the community first and foremost will enable staff to obtain expressions of interest from proponents to provide a value added package of services.

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