



NEWS FROM COUNCIL

MAY 2016

This May edition is dedicated to addressing a number of questions and concerns regarding Council's recent decision to install free wifi in the village core.

The areas being covered include the municipal dock, the centre of the village and both Dreamland and River Parks. Wifi will NOT be available at Pleasant View Beach.

The cost to the municipality of this service is \$4,825.00 plus tax and after a comparison with other services and suppliers, a partnership was established with one of our local businesses, (InfoEstrie). InfoEstrie has proposed to furnish equipment at cost, and to install it at no charge.

Questions and concerns have since been raised about the cost and necessity of this free service in light of North Hatley's financial situation, and about negative effects on health and well being.

Council would first like to address the concern regarding the cost and necessity of free wifi during these difficult times.

North Hatley has been in an economic decline for quite some time and this has been a major contributor to our difficult financial situation. Fixed costs for infrastructure (water, sewage, roads) and the servicing of debt must be shared by a small number of residences and businesses. In addition, North Hatley's global evaluation has been in decline for a number of years, forcing an increase in the tax rate just to meet costs that are equivalent to previous years, let alone current and future rising costs. This spiralling situation must be reversed if financial health is to be restored.

Implementing austerity measures is one approach to reduce spending but, taken to extremes, this can be a double edged sword as a reduction in spending also means a reduction in investment and economic stimulus. Investment in our local economy is necessary in order to attract new residents and new businesses who will, in turn, also invest in North Hatley's future, help shoulder the cost burden, and increase the global evaluation of our village thereby enabling a reduction in tax rates. Potential new residents seek local conveniences and potential new businesses seek a sound economic climate.

Council has therefore taken a three pronged approach to this problem :

- 1. To reduce the costs of providing services to the population while at the same time continuing to provide those services at the same high standard.**
- 2. To diversify revenues by taking advantage of funding programs from other levels of government (regional, provincial and federal) helping to ease the burden on the taxpayer.**
- 3. To invest in our local economy and to support our local businesses, thereby creating a positive economic climate within which current and future businesses can thrive.**

So how does providing free wifi in the downtown core fit into all of this? The attraction of new residents and businesses must first begin with a friendly invitation to come to North Hatley for a visit. Our decorative flower boxes, our charming farmers' market, our entertaining outdoor concerts, our magical Christmas lights, our annual special events and our free parking already serve to attract new visitors to our small village. Public wifi is another such incentive. These offerings show newcomers that North Hatley is a place like no other and that in addition to our lake, river, public parks and scenic vistas, they can expect to enjoy local cultural events, modern conveniences and charming hospitality.

Council also wants to address concerns regarding exposure to public wifi and not being able to « disconnect » from our hectic schedules.

As some have already stated, many residents are already able to access the internet on their electronic devices through data packages from their service provider. Radiofrequency exposure is therefore already present in our public places and this is a sign of our modern times. The convenience of public wifi will be made available but it is solely up to the individual to decide whether or not they wish to avail themselves of this convenience. Visitors may check up on the latest news, send photos, search for local resources or places to visit, or they may remain « disconnected » for the entirety of their stay.

The choice belongs to each individual.

This completes the May edition of "News from Council". Council hopes that this edition has served to clarify how this most recent decision fits into its broader strategy for revitalization, financial health and long term sustainability.