

ADDRESSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN QATHET REGIONAL DISTRICT

Last Mile Connectivity Strategy to support connectivity planning in ten communities

COURTENAY, 3 November 2020 – The qathet Regional District (qRD) will soon embark on a collaborative planning process to address the area’s connectivity challenges, thanks to funding support through the Island Coastal Economic Trust’s (ICET) Economic Development Readiness Program (EDRP).

Varying levels of broadband service across the province mean many rural communities are looking for ways to overcome the digital divide. This project will include an engagement process with ten communities across the Regional District. A collaborative, community-based approach will be used to define connectivity gaps, digital aspirations and determine the optimal infrastructure required.

“This connectivity strategy offers substantial potential long-term benefits for the region and is well aligned to the Province’s Connected Communities initiative,” says ICET Board Chair Aaron Stone. “High-speed internet is crucial to supporting social, community development and economic development objectives. It helps attract new residents, investment, and improves access to distance education, emergency and medical care.”

Addressing the gap in internet service delivery, particularly in light of COVID, has become a priority concern. Proper connectivity enables residents in rural and remote location to access remote medical advice, educational opportunities, employment, tourism, emergency preparedness and a universe of goods and services. Strong connectivity also levels the playing field for businesses and industries located in rural and remote areas, enabling them to scale up their services. This project will help determine access gaps and opportunities for improved connectivity by developing a short, medium and long-term set of strategies.

“Some residents and businesses in our communities are at a severe disadvantage because of their lack of access to high-speed internet,” says Patrick Brabazon, Board Chair of qathet Regional District. “This project will facilitate a united approach to support a thriving, inclusive and sustainable community. It will allow the region to fully develop its potential by enabling our local businesses to attract new investment and mobile workers.”

This process will engage with the respective communities in the various Electoral Areas and use the qRD’s Public Engagement Framework to identify and confirm where the gaps in reliable internet access are. Taking a ‘gather information’ and ‘discuss’ approach to public engagement will allow each community to assess their digital aspirations, opportunities and needs. The project will position communities to support funding requests for last mile infrastructure or partnerships with existing connectivity service providers.

The project is supported through ICET’s Economic Development Readiness Program, Connectivity Funding Planning stream, which provides up to \$10,000 in matching funding per eligible community engaging in proactive planning to improve connectivity.



Building a diverse and sustainable economy.

The project is expected to get underway shortly.

For more information about the Economic Development Readiness Program, please see our guidelines and application form: www.islandcoastaltrust.ca/economic-development-readiness

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About the Island Coastal Economic Trust

Created and capitalized by the Province of BC in 2006, the Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET) mission is to create a more diverse and globally competitive Island and Coastal economy. In partnership with local and regional government, non-profits and indigenous communities, ICET serves nearly half a million residents. Funding and support for economic infrastructure and other economic diversification initiatives is delivered through a unique community centered decision-making process. Since inception, ICET has approved more than \$53.8 million in funding for over 230 initiatives. These investments have leveraged over \$270 million in new investment into the region creating more than 2550 construction phase jobs and 2700 long term permanent jobs. To learn more, visit www.islandcoastaltrust.ca

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