

Broadband Initiative - Update for SGI Economic Development Commission
Broadband Working Group (Mike Hoebel, Brian Crumblehulme, Peter Midgley)
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Beacon Wireless

- Beacon Wireless is an Internet Service Provider (ISP) based on Salt Spring Island. Beacon provides high-speed wireless service to approximately 200 customers on Salt Spring, Galiano and Mayne.
- In January, Beacon Wireless submitted an application to the federal Connecting Canadians program, requesting \$170,000 in capital funding, to be matched by Beacon for a total project cost of \$340,000.
- VanCity is interested in Internet access as a community economic development driver, as well as in Beacon's service delivery model. VanCity assisted Beacon with its application.
- The application was accompanied by letters of support from the CRD board chair, and the BC Minister of Technology, Innovation and Citizen's Services. Beacon expects to hear the outcome of the application in June.
- If capital funding is received, Beacon plans to install another repeater on Salt Spring, three repeaters on Galiano, and one repeater on Mayne, and to carry out other equipment upgrades that will expand the reach and capacity of its service.
- In a separate initiative, Beacon will also be hiring a manager to deal with customer service and day to day operations.

SaturnaNet

- On Saturna, Internet service is provided primarily by SaturnaNet, a community co-operative. The Broadband Working Group has met with SaturnaNet representatives several times over the past two years to see whether there are aspects of SaturnaNet's network technology and/or co-op model that might be replicated on Mayne and Galiano.
- SaturnaNet is currently in the process of significantly expanding the capacity of its link to the Internet with a new feed via a microwave shoot from Vancouver's Harbour Centre to be supplied by Skyway West (<http://www.skywaywest.com>). SaturnaNet has been quoted a price of only \$400 per month for a 1 Gbps connection.
- As a result of this upgrade SaturnaNet expects to have excess bandwidth that potentially could be made available to another ISP such as Beacon Wireless at reasonable rates. This could involve a direct microwave shoot from Vancouver to Galiano or Mayne, rather than a relay through Saturna.
- Beacon's current link to the Internet is via a high capacity fiber connection, and it remains to be seen whether a long-distance microwave shoot from Vancouver would make technical or business sense for Beacon.

Rogers Communications cell tower proposal - Galiano

- In January, Rogers Communications Inc. informed the Islands Trust and the public that it proposed to replace an existing 29 meter communications tower on private land on Stockade Hill with a 34 meter tower and to install cell base station equipment and antennas on the tower. (The current tower doesn't have any cellular equipment.)
- In its proposal, Rogers stated that its objectives were to:
 - Provide the best possible voice transmission and high speed wireless Internet to those living and working on parts of Gailano, Mayne and Saltspring Islands.
 - Provide LTE (Long Term Evolution) wireless Internet access and services to those communities and along the BC Ferries routes.
 - Improve the level and quality of Rogers' cellular signal and network and as a whole, ensure the transition and continuous coverage between existing sites.
- As required by Industry Canada and by the Islands Trust, both Rogers and the Local Trust Committee have conducted a community consultation process regarding the Rogers proposal. There has been both strong opposition and strong support expressed for the Rogers proposal. Some opponents have health concerns related to electromagnetic "radiation", and others doubt there would be any real benefit to Galiano, and worry about the precedent. Supporters cite the need to improve connectivity for both residents and visitors, for safety and economic reasons.
- The Local Trust Committee will decide at its May meeting whether to recommend to Industry Canada that the Rogers proposal be approved, approved with conditions, or not approved. Regardless of the LTC decision, the final decision is up to Industry Canada.
- If the Rogers proposed project is approved, cell coverage for a portion of south Galiano will be improved. However, despite Rogers' statement about Internet access via the cellular network, this is not a practical solution for routine residential or commercial service, due to cost and limited throughput.
- The controversy stirred up on Galiano about the Rogers cell phone tower proposal is a negative factor as we work to bring true broadband service to Galiano via a wireless network.