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COVID-19

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The Haliburton County Public Library is planning for reopening but will not yet offer curbside pickup services. *File photo.*

Libraries plan for reopening No curbside pickup yet

By Joseph Quigley

The Haliburton County Public Library (HCPL) is planning for reopening but staff are uncertain how it will unfold.

The province has declared that libraries could begin offering curbside pickup May 19 as part of the first phase of its reopening plan. However, HCPL announced it is still developing the service and it is not yet ready to launch.

“Developing a curbside pickup service that is safe for staff and patrons is a large endeavour and we are working on a way to safely provide this service. However, there are many unknowns, and we will provide this service only once we can do it safely,” HCPL said in a Facebook post. “We miss all of you. But we also want to make sure that when we can increase our services, we are keeping our patrons, our staff, and our communities safe.”

The library board discussed the reopening process during its May 13 meeting and what will eventually be required, such as personal protective equipment, additional cleaning supplies and plexiglass shields.

Library CEO Bessie Sullivan also said protocols will be needed for maintaining distance, computer usage, and possibly locking down books for some time after use.

However, she said there is not yet much provincial guidance on what libraries will have to do and uncertainty around what

additional funding there might be due to the situation. She also said there is uncertainty about how much decontamination books will require due to COVID-19.

“I still feel like we’re in a great abyss of non-information,” Sullivan said during the meeting.

Councillors on the board spoke to municipal willingness to help. Since local library buildings are owned by municipalities, capital expenses would have to go through them.

“What we are basically prepared to do is take our guidance from the library board and the County,” board member and Highlands East Coun. Cec Ryall said. “It’s going to take all of us to make this work.”

Warden Liz Danielsen said municipal CAOs are working on the issue and the municipalities would need to figure out if they would bear individual costs or if it would be shared with the County.

Board member and Algonquin Highlands Mayor Carol Moffatt said it is important to collaborate and ensure costs can be accommodated in municipal budgets.

“We want to be careful that we don’t have a splintered approach,” Moffatt said.

Vice-chair Andrea Roberts thanked staff for their efforts in keeping libraries going with online services.

“Thank you for adapting, to try to keep the library services going in these strange and unusual times,” Roberts said.

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A rocket launches into the sky as part of the Starlink project. Photo by Marek Cyzio.

Wishing upon a Starlink

By Joseph Quigley

As Starlink launched 58 satellites into the sky Aug. 18, many watched, hoping the project could soon bring better internet service to remote communities.

Haliburtonians too are following Starlink, a project under SpaceX launching hundreds of satellites to bring high-speed internet to locations difficult to reach by conventional means. The U.S.-based company said it is targeting service in the northern U.S. and Canada by the end of this year, with public beta-testing to launch this fall.

Eagle Lake resident Ioana Zemi said local internet services cannot provide her with standard service. She said she sees Starlink as a solution for people such as her in remote residences.

"It's really beneficial in situations like mine, where we live, where people are spaced so far apart," Zemi said. "The infrastructure requirements are far less than if they were to put in fibre."

Starlink is applying for a basic international telecommunications service licence with the CRTC, which is still ongoing. The application received more than 2,000 responses.

"Many of the comments noted the urgency of additional broadband options for consumers and locations that either have limited broadband choice now or no connectivity whatsoever," wrote SpaceX satellite government affairs vice-president Patricia Cooper in a reply to the CRTC July 17. "This outpouring of support is particularly gratifying."

The County of Haliburton and Eastern Ontario Regional Network (EORN) are also eyeing large-scale internet improvements through public-private partnerships. The County is applying for a grant with Bell and Xplornet to deliver more broadband to

areas of need, while EORN is proposing a \$1.6 billion project to bring gigabyte-speed service.

But Haliburton Lake resident Joe Mukherjee said he is more optimistic about Starlink and its timeframe to be running by the end of the year. A former telecommunications worker, he said he needs internet for work and has struggled with slow internet speeds under Bell. He said that is caused by their refusal to spend the \$500,000 necessary to upgrade the area pedestal congested with too many customers.

"My confidence is, shall we say shaky, that Bell is going to take this and treat it with the urgency I feel it deserves," Mukherjee said. "Conversely, Starlink has already launched a substantial amount of satellites ... I will happily move my services to them."

Bell said it is expanding its fibre network in Haliburton but Fort Irwin is not in its immediate roll-out. They said they would work with Mukherjee on solutions in the meantime.

Starlink is not without detractors. Cooper wrote seven commentators on their application expressed concern about the impact the low-orbit satellites could have on astronomy. She said they take the problem seriously and have worked to reduce satellite visibility.

Phil Zube said he hopes Starlink could be a better option than his slow service north of Kushog Lake. He said as a photographer, the astronomy issue is a concern, though it does not outweigh the possible benefit in his mind.

"That bothers me," Zube said. "But I see no opportunity for us whatsoever to have high-speed cable down County roads in Haliburton."

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Lisa MacLeod, minister of heritage, sport, tourism and culture industries, and Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock MPP Laurie Scott speak with kayakers at the Minden Whitewater Preserve July 9 during a tour of the facility. Photo by Lisa Gervais.

Minister tours, but no funding announcement

By Lisa Gervais

Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, Lisa MacLeod, toured the Haliburton Sculpture Forest and the Minden Whitewater Preserve July 9 but an anticipated funding announcement for the tourism region was postponed to a later date.

The Ontario's Highlands Tourism Organization (OHTO) Region 11, of which Haliburton County is part, was passed over this time around with Region 8 getting \$1.4 million, in an announcement in Bobcaygeon later in the day.

Nicole Whiting, executive director of OHTO, said they were disappointed Region 11 will have to wait "but at the same time, we're so excited and honoured that she [MacLeod] actually made a trip to the area."

Whiting added they knew going in that MacLeod's schedule was going to be fluid, and the change of funding regions was "no reflection of her support of the area and her commitment to funding."

Whiting said it was logistical and "she has agreed to come back to our region ... I think it's great. I'm very happy."

MacLeod said "the funding announcement will happen at a later date."

She said her ministry is travelling the province, and investing \$13 million in hyper-local marketing.

"So that communities such as the Haliburton Highlands will be able to start getting their neighbours to start reconnecting in their own community."

"We recognize international travels will not return for another couple of years, and as inter-provincial borders are still restricted in some cases, we don't expect a lot of domestic staycations, so this year we're going to be rediscovering and reconnecting in our own communities, which is why I'm here today to demonstrate that you can safely take in a tourist attraction in phase 2 of COVID-19s economic recovery and support the local community."

MacLeod went on to say the marketing campaign is geared at, "you do not have to leave your community to have an impeccable summer vacation. And it's safe to do so right in this community. Why wouldn't you want to? If I could stay for a week, why wouldn't I?"

Director of County tourism, Amanda Virtanen, said she is hearing from operators that the industry has improved in stage 2. However, she said there remain a lot of challenges.

"We're looking forward to the RTO 11 announcement. It's been great having the minister here and being able to feature some of the best stuff in our region, having seen the sculpture forest and the whitewater preserve. The fact she is coming back will be great for us."



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