

WiFi eyed for Aurora light posts

By Brock Weir

WiFi could be coming to an Aurora light post near you ? that is if Aurora partners with Bell Canada to make it happen.

Bell has approached several York Region municipalities, including Aurora, on possible partnerships to bring ?small cell? technology to help relieve the pressure on their wireless networks. Since Aurora converted its street lights to an energy saving LED system last year, the new fixtures are essentially WiFi ready, now it is just a matter of turning them on.

?This is something we're quite excited about,? said Anthony Ierullo, Aurora's Manager of Strategic Planning. ?The Town has made an investment in LED infrastructure?and an ancillary benefit of that is these poles have WiFi capabilities that can be enabled with some hardware and software. The technology is enabled in the LED heads, but the infrastructure hasn't been put in place.

?Bell Canada has really shown an interest in partnering with the municipalities and have launched a pilot project to leverage those potential WiFi networks to take some pressure off their existing wireless networks. There is a significant concern with the wireless network providers about the amount of traffic with smart phones running through their networks and the need to ramp up those networks. This type of partnership could potentially give them an opportunity to take some of that traffic off their main network and onto this ancillary network, and potentially assist in not requiring as much infrastructure in the future.?

Infrastructure which may not be needed as frequently in the future include additional cell towers.

While many points of a potential partnership need to be ?clarified? before moving forward, Mr. Ierullo added the telecom company is ?definitely interested? in carrying out talks and looking at benefits.

?There are potential options around public WiFi that could potentially come out of it,? he added. ?It's an initiative we're excited about and are chasing down.?

The potential program was recently brought to Aurora's Economic Development Advisory Committee. There, Council members and citizen members offered their enthusiasm. Councillor John Abel, for instance, said such a partnership could address cell ?shortcomings? along the Yonge Street component.

Citizen member Marilee Harris, on the other hand, said she looked forward to seeing whether the Town of Aurora could get a revenue stake in such an endeavour.

?We're talking about partnering with Bell to have them use this network to sell their services,? said Mr. Ierullo. ?There may be a municipal component to it, but that is not what their interest is.?