

HORNBY & DENMAN PURSUING FIBRE-OPTIC NETWORKS

By William Thomas

Prepared to fight off 5G at [yesterday](#)'s historic meeting to decide on improved internet delivery, the standing-room gathering on Hornby was stunned and delighted to learn that based on survey results, a consultant has been hired and the hunt is on to find hard-wired internet solutions for both sister islands.

"It is apparent that the community only wants to look at fibre," says HICEEC Economic Enhancement Officer, Karen Ross, after three-quarters of respondents to a Hornby Island Community Economic Enhancement Corp. survey called for a fibre-optic-only solution to Hornby's dismal internet service.

Currently, 95% of Hornby islanders – including most businesses conducted online – are hobbled by internet "speeds" at *less than half* federally-mandated standards.

"I was thrilled" with [yesterday](#)'s meeting on Hornby, the connectivity-facilitator told the Grapevine. "The questions were intelligent. Doubters were reassured."

After the lengthy Hornby session, a similar meeting followed on Denman. "Fibre-optic is all that's being considered," Ross confirmed.

Also presenting was Darren Dohfer, the telecom specialist with Baylinks Networks retained by HICEEC to devise specific implementation strategies.

With costs almost "equally split" between both islands, total project price will range from \$10- to \$12 million for full fibre-optic connection – including phone, internet, email and TV – to every residence on Denman and Hornby, Ross said.

Initial hookup, which is expected to boost real estate values, will be free. Service subscriptions will be optional.

Provincial and federal funding is available to qualifying communities for 75% of total costs. Besides demonstrating need, "an enthusiastic, forward-thinking community" is vital for funding approval, Ross said.

Regarding network service providers, "We are staying open to all options," she added.

Though Telus could provide a complete fibre-optic financing, installation and service package, that New York City-based corporation's initial numbers are much higher than preliminary estimates from Baylinks. Five BC-based Internet Service Providers could be approached for initial funding and day-to-day operations, Dohfer suggested.

With an estimated \$80/month household subscription fee, back-of-the-envelope calculations show that the \$2.5 million to \$3 million loan needed to top-up government funding could be returned within three years.

Hornby Island's earlier fierce resistance to the forced imposition of smart meters, and our community's more recent defeat of Telus' proposed millimetre-frequency tower, have made it clear that wireless networks are not the way to go here.

But the real motivator is fibre-optic's considerable advantages, not wireless opposition. This radiation-and-interference-free, all-in-one, phone and digital delivery network is clearly superior to 5G, which is running into increasing worldwide pushback against its zero health studies and anti-community policies.

"You will receive a continent's worth of data over a fibre smaller than a human hair," Dohfer promised attendees – with very much cleaner and faster download and upload speeds than any next-Gen wireless network can dream of delivering.

Offering unlimited bandwidth, the new fibre network will require little maintenance and no upgrades over the next 50 years.

Dohfer's show-and-tell included spools of armoured fibre-optic cable. With BC's ancient copper-wired grid disintegrating, water ingress and deterioration of buried glass cables will not be a factor. And we're not talking wine glasses. "You could drop a tank on it and not break it," this veteran fibre-optic installer asserted.

If a falling *tree* severs an overhead fibre-optic line, a short video showed how it can be quickly "welded" back together, with no splicing necessary. Alternately, a small wheeled machine buries cable 2-foot under compatible soils as fast as it can be directed by hand.

So far, fibre-savvy Telus is pricing itself out of the running. The meeting was told that Kaslo's community-owned fibre network has been operating for two years in the Kootenays with no glitches.

"Audiences on both islands were very warm to doing it ourselves," Karen Ross observed. But she warned it could be "an uphill battle" to capitalize an island-owned network.

"There's also a risk factor if people won't switch over," from their current lousy service, she added. Hard to believe, since every residence on both islands would be *hard-wired directly to the devices inside*, with no sign-up charge. And phone numbers will remain the same.

But email addresses *will* change with a new ISP, and some people may not want to do this, Ross noted.

Once funding is in place, it will take two years to completely tie both islands to the existing fibre-optic "backbone" on Vancouver Island. Fibre hubs are already in place on both islands, and each home will go "live" as soon as its connection is completed.

"It will be an economic decision in the end how to proceed, who to go with," Ross concluded. The next community connectivity meetings on Denman and Hornby will present detailed business options in two- to three-months.

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