

NEWS RELEASE

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For more information contact:
colleen@wmregion.ca

HIGH-SPEED INTERNET SERVICE BREAKS GROUND IN THE METRO REGION

HEADINGLEY, MANITOBA - High-speed fibre optic Internet is coming to communities in the Winnipeg Metro Region. Phase One of Connecting to Opportunity kicked off today at an official launch with the mayors and Reeves of the Winnipeg Metropolitan Region (WMR) and the founders of JohnQ Public Impact Inc.

"As we continue to deal with COVID-19 and increasingly work and learn from home, the necessity for dependable and future-ready high-speed Internet service for residents and business in our region has never been more pressing," said Colleen Sklar, WMR Executive Director. "Access to high-speed Internet is critical if we are to maintain and attract business and industry to our region. High-speed Internet infrastructure is no longer just nice to have—it is an essential service."

The project is a partnership of JohnQ Public Inc. (JohnQ), the economic development arm owned by the WMR, and RFNOW Inc., a Manitoba-based Internet Service Provider (ISP). The first six communities who are part of Phase One will be connected over the next 12 months, with other Winnipeg Metro Region—JohnQ communities expected to be connected as the project pushes forward.

"High-speed fibre optics, the gold standard in Internet service, will be provided by RFNOW and powered by JohnQ," says Brad Erb, Reeve of Macdonald and Chair of JohnQ. "On behalf of the municipalities, JohnQ shares 50/50 ownership with RFNOW, which is the management partner selling, installing, and providing all the support services. As partners, we can ensure no one is left behind and that residents of the Metro Region get the service they require."

Chris Kennedy, COO of RFNOW, said he believes that the JohnQ model and innovative partnership can enhance access across the region.

"RFNOW will be offering residential, farm, and business packages with reasonable rates and hook-up fees, and unlimited data," said Kennedy. "By hooking up more businesses and residents in each community, we can ensure access to RFNOW's superior service for those who live in less densely populated areas. This addresses one of the main concerns for the leaders of JohnQ - equitable service delivery."

The six Phase One communities including RM of Portage la Prairie, Headingley, Macdonald, Ritchot, Rockwood, and Stonewall were identified by a business case that ensures the sustainability and profitability of the project, allowing the network to then connect all communities across the Metro Region and beyond.

The WMR/JohnQ also received generous support from the Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA).

"The Internet is a connector, literally through its pipes, but, more importantly, by connecting people with opportunities," said David Fowler, CIRA Vice-President of Marketing and Communications. "Connecting to Opportunity is exactly the type of project we had in mind when we developed our Community Investment Program. As part of CIRA's commitment to build a trusted Internet for Canadians, we're proud to see the Winnipeg Metropolitan Region working to bring broadband to all Manitobans."

"This is a great day for our municipalities," added Erb. "As leaders, we could no longer wait for our communities to have this essential service. Through JohnQ, our communities can now get the service they've been waiting for and, in keeping with the foundational principal of JohnQ, we are making the best use of taxpayers' dollars, investing strategically in our communities, and using existing infrastructure whenever possible."

More information will be shared by the Phase One communities on where to sign up through their municipal websites, newsletters, and social channels.

The Winnipeg Metropolitan Region (WMR) is comprised of 18 municipalities that include and surround Winnipeg. It provides the platform for municipalities to work on projects that cross boundaries in support of good growth, good stewardship, and good governance.

JohnQ Public Inc., operating as JohnQ Public Impact Inc., (JohnQ) is a co-operatively owned economic development corporation formed in 2018 by 12 members of the WMR with a goal to capitalize on our collective strengths to enhance development opportunities that benefit the entire province.

RFNOW Inc. is a leading-edge communications company based in Virden, Manitoba. RFNOW Inc. is a company that has a depth of knowledge and experience working with communities across the province to ensure they have access to the digital economy. They currently have a large infrastructure network and training program in practice in Manitoba.

CIRA's Community Investment Program is building a better online Canada through the Community Investment Program by funding charities, not-for-profits and members of the academic community who are making the Internet better for all Canadians. CIRA is best known for its role managing the .CA domain on behalf of all Canadians. While this remains its primary mandate, as a member-based not-for-profit itself, the CIRA has a much broader goal to strengthen Canada's Internet. To date CIRA has contributed \$6.7 million in Community Investment Program grants.