

REES' Pieces

I am Disgusted and Disappointed

Two things have upset me to no end and I'm not sure what I can do, or what should be done.

First, I have been following with great interest the province's initiative to develop a \$500-Million program dealing with Electronic Health Records (EHR).

The second is the recent approach develop Nova Scotia has recently announced to bring High Speed Internet service to rural and under serviced areas of the province.

In both cases its my opinion recent approaches have not been grassroots oriented, and may not be in the best interests of rural Nova Scotians needed improved internet service. With regard to EHR desires, which is a good idea, but I'm fearful there will be significant cost overruns, or the technology might not be advanced enough to permit Doctors to use with ease and efficiency.

I've been following several media reports, which on the face of them, indicate there has been favouritism in choosing potential suppliers / develops, along with other situations, which question the competence to manage and see the \$500-Million project to a successful conclusion. In one report, a similar system in British Columbia has suggested there are failures and major cost overruns, not to mention what has happened in the United Kingdom.

I don't feel I am alone in my thoughts. Taxpayers who want and require the utmost efficient use of taxpayer dollars, should do their own investigations. From what I have been able to determine, the best bet for Nova Scotia would be to find a way to have a "court ordered" stoppage on the project until the outstanding or questionable aspects surrounding the project are substantiated.

If you have been following the editions of the Shoreline Journal for the past two years you are well aware of my pleading for high speed internet service to rural areas of Colchester and Cumberland Counties, which are currently underserved.

I thought we were on the road to successful implementation across the province when the ruling Liberals announced they had put \$193-Million into an Internet Trust Fund. I started to worry when it was announced, the Waterfront Development Corporation (Halifax, Dartmouth and Lunenburg) was being rebranded as Develop Nova Scotia.

My immediate concern was all members of the Board of Directors were from Metro, with the exception of one member from Lunenburg. I was waiting for an announcement to announce a realignment of the board, or at least an advisory council for the Internet segments, with all members after the shake-up would be rural based. Christmas has arrived and Santa-Stephen hasn't taken care of the rural areas.

Instead Develop Nova Scotia announced last week, it is implementing a plan to pre-qualify service providers. The result is "metro" interests are going to tell rural area what is going to happen in their area. I wonder if people based in Halifax are the proper choices to make decisions for rural Nova Scotia.

Indications Develop Nova Scotia is proceeding to be POWER HOUSE, by controlling the agenda and issuing and managing RFP's for around the province. Are they on a power trip and against community-based or municipal initiatives, which could have evolved through consultation? Government has spent \$-millions, and issued contracts to large internet providers yet they have failed to service rural Nova Scotia.

Many business and some municipal leaders are developing the feeling those in charge don't recognize anything outside HRM. Look at the amount of money invested in cultural centres; large concessions to multi-nationals. How many payrolls rebates have been issued to companies more than an hour outside Halifax? Sure larger companies are located in Metro, but rather than looking a larger job creation projects, perhaps there should be a focus on smaller, yet successful rural companies, who through persistence have carved out a niche.

If you wish to get a sense of the feelings in rural areas, just ask farmers. At the recent meeting of Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture member farmers expressed their concern and even make a direct approach to Keith Colwell, Minister of Agriculture.

Time will tell what happens. When will we develop some backbone as say, "Enough is Enough?" Comments welcome.

Have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Maurice

Letters to the editor

This is an open forum for your opinions and comments.

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Dear Editor,

Nova Scotia's doctors work hard to care for their patients, provide them with appropriate advice and advocate on their behalf.

In 2005, the federal government expanded the disability tax credit. This non-refundable tax credit helps disabled people (or those who support them) reduce the amount of income tax they may have to pay. As a result of the expansion, individuals may now backfile for up to 10 years. While this has been very welcome for many Canadians, the expansion has resulted in several unintended consequences that are of concern to Doctors Nova Scotia.

Chief among these has

been the proliferation of third-party companies aggressively marketing to Canadians with the message that disabled people may be eligible for tens of thousands of dollars in tax refunds - and that all it takes is to have their physician complete the disability tax form. However, these for-profit companies don't have the complete health profile of the patients they are dealing with, and they are not positioned to suggest medical diagnoses. In addition, these third-party companies often take a percentage of any refund in return for their services.

The challenge is that these companies often create great expectations of financial windfall for individuals, but in some

cases, physicians are not able to confirm the patient's disability to the degree needed to qualify for the tax benefit. This then strains the physician-patient relationship. If a physician determines they cannot ethically support a determination of disability, these companies will implore the patient to ask the doctor to change the diagnosis to support a claim.

Nova Scotia's physicians will always provide the best medical care, support and advice for their patients. They will always try to do what is best for their patients' health and wellbeing. Physicians are regulated by authorities such as the Nova Scotia College of Physicians and Surgeons, and they are bound by their code

of ethics. Physicians cannot - and should not - be pressured to make diagnoses on the basis of aggressive marketing tactics used by companies that want to make a profit from patients.

If you believe you have a disability that would entitle you to claim the disability tax credit, speak to your family physician. Trust that your physician will, as they always do, treat you with your best interest at heart. You don't need to be seduced by the self-interested marketing of for-profit businesses.

Sincerely,
Dr. Tim Holland, MD, CCFP (EM)
President
Doctors Nova Scotia

Farmers Demand Faster Internet

Maurice Rees

At the Annual Meeting of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, held in Truro at the end of November, farmers expressed their concern with the recently negotiated USMCA, which replaced NAFTA. However, they were more vocal on the lack of internet and cell phone accessibility in rural areas.

On more than one occasion they questioned the appropriateness of the government turning over the internet file to Develop Nova Scotia, formerly the Waterfront Develop Corporation, when all board members, except one, are located in metro HRM areas.

During a question period with Agriculture Minister, Keith Colwell, they asked why there wasn't more geographical representation on the board. Colwell replied he was unaware of one lone board member from Lunenburg area sitting on the board with HRM members. He promised to look into the matter.

It will probably further upset farmers and rural municipalities and community groups when a December 13th press release stated Develop Nova Scotia has launched the first phase of the process to find qualified service providers to enhance and extend reliable, high-speed internet across the province in rural areas.

In addition to farmers interested groups had hoped there would be a grass roots philosophy to providing faster internet services since for more than a decade, government's



expenditure of \$-Millions of dollars had failed to solve the problem in rural areas.

Earlier this year the government placed \$193 million in an internet funding trust to help connect more communities, homes and businesses across the province. As part of the Internet for Nova Scotia Initiative, the Crown corporation is inviting organizations interested in building, managing, and maintaining high-speed internet networks to become pre-qualified to bid on network solutions.

Instead of being inclusive, some view the crown corporation's plan is to protect existing large providers and keep Halifax in control of internet implementation, instead of reaching out to work with NSFA, and municipalities to find acceptable solutions.

The December 13th release stated, potential providers who can demonstrate they have the financial capacity, human resources and experience to build, maintain, grow and evolve the networks will be invited to bid on implementing internet in specified zones.

Projects must meet or exceed provincial speed targets of 50 megabits per second for wired connections and 25 megabits per second for wireless and must evolve with changing technology. Develop Nova Scotia estimates the pre-

qualification stage will be complete by the end of March with the invitation to bid released in the summer. Project starts will depend on market response, but it is estimated they could begin in early 2020.

The Municipalities of Cumberland and Colchester have recently been working on an internet plan and had hoped they could have the plan completed by late 2020.

All federal Connect to Innovate projects that identified provincial contributions have been invited to complete a simplified application process so that funds may flow and projects can begin as early as possible next year.

During the NSFA AGM farmers expressed concern that high speed internet service is required if they are to remain competitive and that competitiveness is necessary for other rural businesses to succeed. Farmers were adamant things must change and they will keep pressuring for an implementation plan that includes the rural area.

Develop Nova Scotia is leading the implementation strategy to improve high-speed Internet service in underserved areas through the Internet for Nova Scotia Initiative. The Nova Scotia Internet Funding Trust has final decision-making authority on funding network solutions based on recommendations from Develop Nova Scotia.

For more information or to view the pre-qualification documents, visit the Develop Nova Scotia website at www.developns.ca.

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The Shoreline Journal (circ. 1650) is a monthly community newspaper serving communities along the Glooscap Trail from Truro to Parrsboro, Nova Scotia serving the communities of Belmont/Debert, Wentworth/Londonderry, Onslow/Masstown along the shore to Great Village, Bass River, Economy, Five Islands and Lower Five Islands. It is published on the last Wednesday of each month (earlier in December) with a deadline of the 20th of the month.

MAILING ADDRESS: The Shoreline Journal, P.O. Box 41, Bass River, Nova Scotia, B0M 1B0.

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EDITOR PUBLISHER: Maurice Rees • ADVERTISING: Maurice Rees • CIRCULATION: Dorothy Rees

Canadian Publications Mail Products Agreement #40048924, ISSN #1209-9198



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HST: #890564404RT001. Printed by Advocate Printing & Publishing Ltd, Pictou, Nova Scotia

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