

Miramichi contemplating Red Ball deal

City council passed motion to pursue mobile broadband service; negotiate with Moncton-based company

Everything from ordering a pizza, taking a cab or riding the bus in the City of Miramichi could become more efficient if city officials move ahead with their plan to pursue state-of-the-art mobile broadband technology.

During a council meeting earlier this week a motion was passed which would set aside a \$65,000 contribution on behalf of the city to acquire a wireless internet system that would operate throughout the city.

City director of economic development Jeff MacTavish said council had been poring over the benefits of integrating Moncton-based Red Ball Internet's unique iBurst technology into day-to-day municipal services for months.

Red Ball already provides its service to several clients in Moncton and Fredericton, and last month extended into northern New Brunswick after signing an agreement with the City of Bathurst.

The Moncton-based firm's iBurst technology provides a customized secure mobile broadband network which goes well beyond basic WiFi internet services.

The system provides real time tracking devices for vehicle fleets, including municipal bus and snowplow fleets, allows for taxi companies and delivery services to utilize wireless debit terminals, live streaming mobile video surveillance and wireless internet services for the public, among many other applications.

MacTavish said the city has a grasp on what the monthly operating costs for the service would be, along with any up-front capital costs and an estimate on what kind of savings Miramichi could benefit from if they pursue Red Ball's services.

"We intend to hook our municipal vehicles up to it to track mileage, fuel consumption and we're hoping that with our liability insurance, because of the way the streets are maintained here, we would have very detailed records to show what times streets were sanded or salted," he said.

The motion passed at council Monday night will allow city manager Jim Lamkey to negotiate an agreement with Red Ball, MacTavish said.

He said the city has sent an application to the provincial government requesting assistance with up-front capital costs and is awaiting a response.

The City of Saint John and the Town of Sussex are among some other municipalities considering agreements with the rapidly-growing technology company.

"We won't be the first but we certainly won't be left behind either," he said.

MacTavish estimates that with the integrated technology the city could save as much as 20 per cent on fuel costs.

A team of representatives from Red Ball made their initial pitch to Miramichi city council last March.