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**Deputation to City of Toronto, Executive Committee – March 30, 2022**

**Re: EX31.8 –ConnectTO Program Update**

**From: Larry Whatmore, President, Scarborough Community Renewal Organization**

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Good morning councillors. My name is Larry Whatmore. I am the president of the Scarborough Community Renewal Organization. SCRO is an organization of engaged volunteers that works to connect, promote and renew Scarborough, so Scarborough can be strong and prosperous.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the staff report. SCRO agrees with the themes of this report and the direction being proposed by staff. We would also offer the following comments.

1. Broadband internet service has become a baseline requirement for operating in today's world and it is appropriate for the City to participate in enabling this, by filling gaps not being served by the private sector.
2. The earlier RFP was an important first step to take, even though it didn't elicit any responses. The City can now move forward, knowing that it is not replicating services and infrastructure that could instead be provided by others.
3. The creation of Toronto's Municipal Broadband Network should be considered critical infrastructure that is essential for economic development, to ensure Toronto's competitive advantage for the attraction and retention of businesses and for advancing the skill development of our work force.
4. There is some urgency to this. The implementation timelines being proposed by staff are 2024 – 2030. While we recognize that building capacity takes time, the earlier the better, for our disadvantaged residential communities and for our employment areas in Scarborough.
5. We agree with staff that including broadband access in the City of Toronto Official Plan and in land use planning and development processes will help to advance the City's objectives.

In 2020, SCRO conducted an informal canvass of businesses in Scarborough, together with the Scarborough Business Association. This survey provided anecdotal evidence of poor internet connectivity in some of Scarborough's employment areas, notably in and around Malvern. It's important that we overcome this. Scarborough needs jobs. We need to keep the jobs we have and we need to establish the infrastructure needed to create new jobs, as Scarborough's population continues to grow. We want Scarborough ... and Toronto ... to have a competitive advantage by ensuring that our broadband is capable of supporting the robust e-commerce requirements of our businesses.

We are pleased that staff targeted two Scarborough communities in the ConnectTO pilot: the Golden Mile and Malvern. We would encourage staff to continue to prioritize these communities as implementation of the Municipal Broadband Network unfolds.

Finally, we agree with staff regarding the need for provincial and federal government involvement. Both governments have shown interest in improving broadband service in rural communities, which we understand. However, the "last mile" challenges that we're dealing with in urban Canada are important too, as they affect many residents and business. We need to overcome this limitation as well.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to take any questions.

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