



# Councillor Josh Matlow

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Executive Committee  
Toronto City Hall  
100 Queen Street West  
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## **RE: EX31.8 ConnectTO Program Update**

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

In the recent years, it has become apparent that access to high-speed internet is necessary for residents to equitably participate in day to day life. Geographically, almost all of Toronto can connect to home internet, but not everyone has sufficient service. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted gaps, vulnerabilities and the need for internet services to be more accessible and affordable for everyone.

Some Torontonians are being left behind in the digital divide because there are gaps to high-speed internet, leaving some areas underserved. Even in areas where there is high-speed connectivity, high prices effectively result in vulnerable Torontonians being left without adequate access. The City needs to advance socio-economic opportunities for vulnerable populations, which is essential to ensuring greater prosperity for all.

Digital equity and bridging the digital divide is a key principle of the City's Poverty Reduction Strategy. Access to affordable high-speed internet will address barriers faced by residents participating in the labour force by improving access to economic opportunities. Lower internet prices will decrease barriers, aid financial stability, and improve access to City services for equity-seeking groups. A digitally connected Toronto means people can prosper and enjoy a better quality of life.

That is why I'm thrilled to support the City's ConnectTO program which aims to centralize stewardship of municipal resources and assets to deliver the City's goals on equity and connectivity, including creation of a City of Toronto broadband network.

Since 2013, I've been advocating at Council to create a strategy that provides free public Wi-Fi in City parks and squares. I'm excited to review from this report that City Staff are currently piloting Wi-Fi in parks adjacent to community centres and are planning to leverage experience from this approach to implement Wi-Fi in free-standing parks.

As Toronto's Seniors Advocate, I moved additional amendments at last year's City Council meeting to request an expansion of the City's Digital Canopy program by extending free Wi-Fi to 25 retirement communities located in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas, accelerate the current Wi-Fi pilot that Toronto Community Housing Corporation is exploring in select seniors-designated buildings, and to request the Federal and Provincial Governments to provide funding to support the extension of Toronto Public Library's Seniors Tech Help program. I'm pleased to hear from City Staff and through this report that progress has been made on each amendment.

I appreciate City Staff's efforts on this and look forward to continuing to work with them to see these initiatives through to fruition.

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