



PRESS RELEASE

High-speed Internet: The MRC d'Argenteuil's positioning pertaining to the implementation and the deployment of a high-speed Internet service, in order to serve as many citizens as possible on the MRC d'Argenteuil's territory

Lachute, April 8, 2009 – The MRC d'Argenteuil's council is pleased to announce its positioning to the population of Argenteuil with reference to the important file that is the implementation of a high-speed Internet service on its territory.

File History and Background

To this day, we estimate that between 15 000 and 17 000 citizens of the MRC d'Argenteuil have access to high-speed Internet, which represents a little over 50% of the entire MRC's population.

The areas serviced are mainly located in the city cores, and also in high density sectors. The more remote rural areas are only partially serviced, and if so, through the private sector.

Application by the MRC d'Argenteuil to the Villages branchés du Québec [Connecting Quebec's Villages] Program

Launched officially on September 18, 2002, the Villages branchés du Québec program's mission was to support the school boards, the local municipalities, the regional county municipalities of all regions of Quebec in the construction of a high bandwidth telecommunications (fibreoptic) network between the buildings of a region.

The targeted buildings were the main municipal buildings (city halls and public libraries), elementary and high schools, adult education centres, professional development centres and school board administrative centres.

The eligible organizations had until November 30, 2003 to present their project. The financial conditions of this program forecasted a financial assistance covering 66 2/3% of eligible expenses.

The MRC d'Argenteuil had to take a quick decision in order to benefit from this advantageous financial assistance plan, and it is in November 2003 that the MRC d'Argenteuil expressed, unanimously, the desire to seize this opportunity to have access to these fibreoptic cutting edge technology infrastructures. Consequently, during its regular meeting held on November 26, 2003, the council of the MRC d'Argenteuil has adopted unanimously resolution number 03-11-286, in order to formalize their decision to embark, in partnership with the Rivière-du-Nord school board, in the Villages Branchés du Québec program.

In 2009, we can easily measure the positive impact that the participation to the *Villages branchés du Québec* program represents for the MRC d'Argenteuil and its 9 local municipalities. Here is a list of some of the actions initiated by the MRC and many tangible applications and realizations emanating from our application to the program and our connection to the fibreoptic technology:

- 1- November 2003: The MRC d'Argenteuil submits an application to the *Villages Branchés du Québec* program (resolution number 03-11-286).
- 2- 2004: Construction of the fibreoptic network.
- 3- Fibreoptic connection to the city hall of the 9 local municipalities of the MRC d'Argenteuil;
- 4- Connection to primary and high schools on the MRC territory, giving access to high-speed Internet to several thousand students and teachers.
- 5- Hiring, in January 2005, of a computer technician / network administrator, in a full-time position at the MRC, and also working for the local municipalities.
- 6- November 2006: Adoption of the loan by-law number 58-1-06, to the amount of \$907 747.
- 7- December 2006: Conclusion with Bell Canada of a 20-year service agreement, pertaining to the fibreoptic network maintenance.
- 8- Reception of a \$729 670 financial assistance (grant), established over a 10-year period and representing 2/3 of the fibreoptic connection costs.
- 9- The reception of this grant was made possible through an MRC basic investment of \$1,118 million, which was divided between the 9 local municipalities based on the standardized real estate value (SREV);
- 10- Implementation of various services, such as mapping, Internet messaging, assessment services, fire safety services, etc. were installed on the MRC computer network and are available to the local municipalities.
- 11- The municipalities now benefit from enhanced and more efficient services like messaging and multi-users calendars, backup copies on a central server, an online mapping service, telework, the scanning of graphic registers, fire safety information management on a regional scale, pooling of more expensive equipments, etc.

History and Background

High-speed Internet Program Chapter

Here is a reminder of the actions undertaken by the MRC d'Argenteuil, in the development of the Internet service access for businesses and citizens:

- 1- May 2005: Unsuccessful results regarding proceedings initiated with Bell Canada, with the intention to deploy the high-speed Internet service on the MRC d'Argenteuil's territory.
- 2- September 25, 2007: First request submitted to Bell Canada to offer the service in the areas of the MRC not served, in the municipalities of Mille-Isles and Gore (resolution number 07-09-265), according to the terms of the agreement concluded in December 2006.
- 3- January 2008: Bell does not demonstrate any interests in serving these areas, and does not oppose if the MRC undertakes the development with a non-profit organization.
- 4- January 22, 2008: Second request submitted to Bell Canada to offer the service in the areas of the MRC not served, in the 7 other local municipalities (resolution number 08-01-027), according to the terms of the agreement concluded in December 2006.
- 5- May 2008: Bell does not demonstrate any interests in serving these areas, and does not oppose if the MRC undertakes the development with a non-profit organization.
- 6- February 2008: Mandate, giving by the MRC, to the Génicom groupe conseil firm for the realization of a study on the deployment of high-speed Internet on the MRC d'Argenteuil's territory.
- 7- June 2008: Presentation of the study by Génicom groupe conseil.
- 8- January 27, 2009: Meeting between MRC and CLD d'Argenteuil representatives and the ministère du Conseil exécutif, in Quebec city, with the purpose of discussing the method of deployment, at the best cost possible, of the high-speed Internet service in Argenteuil.
- 9- March 11, 2009: Filing, at the MRC council, of a proposition in order to facilitate the high-speed Internet service to as many citizens as possible, with regards to the socio-economic reality of the MRC and the geomorphology of its vast territory.

High-speed Internet

"The technological challenge that we gave ourselves in 2003, which was to equip the MRC with fibreoptic technology, was achieved. The new challenge facing us in 2009, is to start the proceedings intended to optimize the investment, and maximize the use of the existing infrastructures on the territory, with the intention of extending the high-speed Internet service to as many citizens as possible, throughout the MRC's territory", explains the warden of the MRC d'Argenteuil, Mr. Daniel Beaulieu.

Stakes Related to the Digital Economy Development

- i) Economic growth and competitiveness
- ii) Generalization of knowledge access
- iii) Creation and broadcast of new services concerning training, education, social service and culture
- iv) Internet economy and employment

Examples and Applications

Why connect to high-speed

1. Encourage the conservation of existing jobs by preserving and consolidating them.
2. Increase employment by attracting businesses and independent workers (e.g.: consultants, translators, trainers, graphic designers, computer specialists, etc.) established elsewhere.
3. Allow the businesses located in the rural areas to be more productive (e.g.: recruit labour, collaborate with partners, organize virtual conferences, encourage telework or conceive new sales approaches)
4. Improve the farming business operations
5. Promote an equal education for all
6. A government on-line: allows access to information and to municipal, provincial and federal on-line services
7. Mobilize the communities: a tool that allows residents of different regions of Quebec to regroup, to communicate with one another and to start collective projects.

The numerous high-speed Internet applications resonate on the MRC d'Argenteuil's territory, which has been experiencing, over the last few years, an important real-estate expansion in the resort areas, located in rural environment. Many vacationers, new industries, and an ever growing number of citizens and independent workers truly need this technology.

Possible Sources of Financing

- Government of Quebec - ministère des Affaires municipales, des Régions et de l'Occupation du territoire (MAMROT), through its new Communautés rurales branchées [Connected rural communities program] program, made public on March 9, 2009.
- Government of Canada through its Équipements fédéraux et d'infrastructures du savoir program.
- Conférence régionale des élus (CRE) des Laurentides
- CLD d'Argenteuil, through the Fonds d'économie sociale [Social Economy Fund] – creation of a non-profit organization
- Private suppliers
- Local municipalities (according the general concept user-pay)

A new provincial program was officially announced on March 9, 2009, by the ministre des Affaires municipales, des Régions et de l'Occupation du territoire, Ms. Nathalie Normandeau: the Communautés rurales branchées program that aims to support collective projects proposing, to individuals, organizations and businesses in rural areas, a high-speed Internet service, at a comparable cost and equal quality, to the service offered in urban areas. Provided with a \$24 million budget allowance over a 5-year period, the program started on April 1st, 2009. The MAMROT's financial contribution may amount to \$1,5M per project.

The eligible promoters are, among others: a local municipality, a regrouping of local municipalities, an MRC, a non-profit organization whose mission is focused on the high-speed Internet service offer.

The Government of Canada, for its part, has introduced in January 2009, a financial assistance program, Équipements fédéraux et infrastructures du savoir, provided with a \$225M budget allowance over 3 years, in order to conceive and implement a strategy with the intent to broaden the access to high bandwidth services in the institutions not served. We are still waiting on detailed information, more specifically regarding the eligibility criteria.

Organizational Structure

Considering what has been said, and in order to implement a structure that would allow to efficiently accomplish the targeted objectives which is to reach as many citizens who still do not have access to an high-speed Internet service, while benefiting from available governmental financial assistance, the MRC d'Argenteuil, expressed its intent during its regular meeting held on March 11, 2009, by adopting a series of 4 resolutions:

- Resolution 09-03-102, expressing the MRC's official positioning and defining the action plan on short and medium terms, in order to facilitate the high-speed Internet access to as many MRC d'Argenteuil's citizens.
- Resolution 09-03-103, asking Bell Canada and the Rivière-du-Nord school board, to complete the registration procedures concerning the MRC d'Argenteuil fiberoptic ownership rights.
- Resolution 09-03-104, proposing to form a working committee for the implementation of an action plan.
- Resolution 09-03-105, intent resolution with the objective to submit, to federal and provincial government authorities and to the CRÉ des Laurentides, financial assistance requests to support the project to serve the MRC d'Argenteuil's territory.

In practical terms, the following phases are to come:

1. Constitution of a non-profit organization, under the *Loi sur les companies* [*Companies Act*], and with respect to the December 2006 agreement demands involving the MRC d'Argenteuil and Bell Canada
2. This non-profit organization will act as a promoter and its temporary name is CADRIA (Corporation d'accès et de développement au réseau Internet d'Argenteuil)
3. The mission of this non-profit organization will be to facilitate the high-speed Internet access to as many MRC d'Argenteuil citizens and incidentally, the corporation could, under its conditions, facilitate the high-speed Internet access to citizens from MRC bordering territories (if this allows, among other things, to improve the project profitability).

Accomplishment Schedule and Phases to Come:

- March 11, 2009: Positioning of the MRC d'Argenteuil's council concerning the selection of the operating mode in order to broaden the availability of high-speed Internet to the entire territory.
- March 11, 2009: Creation of a working committee for the implementation of the project. This committee is formed of 2 municipal elected officials (Brownsburg-Chatham mayor, Ms. Lise Bourgault, and Mille-Isles mayor, Mr. Carson Collins), the CLD d'Argenteuil director general, Ms. Lise Desrochers, the MRC d'Argenteuil director general, Mr. Marc Carrière, the MRC clerk, Ms. Renée-Claude L'Allier and the network administrator, Mr. Stéphane Jourdain, in addition to the future project manager, to be hired by the MRC.
- March/April 2009: Beginning of the recruiting process in order to hire a project manager, on a contractual basis, whose mandate will be to supervise the high-speed Internet project realisation phases (job offer published on April 3, 2009).
- April 2009: Submission of a request for the constitution of a non-profit organization, to the ministère du Revenu du Québec, Registre des entreprises.
- April 8, 2009: Press briefing and press release to expose the MRC's positioning.
- May 2009: Hiring of the project manager.
- Spring 2009: Creation of the non-profit organization's board of directors by the MRC d'Argenteuil's council.
- Spring 2009: Registration of the fiberoptic ownership rights.
- Summer 2009: Drawing of the business plan

- Summer 2009: Obtaining licences from the CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission)
- Fall 2009: Public call for tenders to private suppliers for the construction of the network and for providing services to the citizens.
- Fall 2009: Submitting financial assistance requests, within the available government programs.

Summary

Conscious about the importance of this issue, the MRC d'Argenteuil is undertaking, as soon as this spring, the proceedings to facilitate the Internet access to as many citizens as possible.

The first phase consists in the creation of a non-profit organization which mission is to facilitate the high-speed Internet access to as many MRC d'Argenteuil's citizens and under some conditions, facilitate the high-speed Internet access to citizens from MRC bordering territories (if this allows, among other things, to improve the project profitability).

In a second phase, during fall 2009, this non-profit organization will issue a public call for tenders in order to receive tenders from private suppliers wishing to develop the high-speed Internet service on the Argenteuil's territory.

In a third phase, during fall 2009, the MRC will submit various financial assistance requests to the proper government authorities.

After that and once the tenders are analyzed and the responses are obtained from the government concerning the financial assistance requests, the non-profit organization will then be able to evaluate with more precision, the costs related to the deployment of the high-speed Internet infrastructures on the territory.

Subsequently, an implementation plan will be drawn up by the non-profit organization.

For further information on this subject, you are invited to communicate with the MRC d'Argenteuil at 450-562-2474, extension 234 and leave a detailed message.

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Source: Marc Carrière, director general, MRC d'Argenteuil
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