HAMILTON-WENTWORTH SMART COMMUNITIES PROJECT
PIC HAMILTON

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June, 1999

What is PIC?

   PIC Hamilton stands for Public Information Centre Hamilton. It is a web site. During
the construction stage (Summer, 1999) you can watch the site grow (HYPERLINK
http://www.hpl.hamilton.on.ca/smartcom/hw/default.htm)
  www.hpl.hamilton.on.ca/smartcom/hw/default.ht .

   The site will act as a subject-oriented menu to the services offered by the seven
separate municipal governments within Hamilton-Wentworth plus almost 8,000 programs
offered by local not-for-profit organizations. Basically, the site recognizes that most
people don't care that the Regional Municipality is responsible for recycling and their local
municipality is responsible for garbage. The site accepts that health services might be
offered by the regional Public Health Department, by Meals-on-wheels, or by the Victorian
Order of Nurses and it acknowledges that the public really doesn't care. People just want
to know what services exist to deal with a specific issue. The site unifies all such
services in one menu.

   Where appropriate, PIC Hamilton will offer program descriptions, maps, and links to
agency web sites. Where appropriate, PIC Hamilton staff are helping agencies to move
relevant full-text information onto their own linkable web sites. Where appropriate, PIC
Staff will also work with agency staff to provide an e-commerce solution within a single
interface for all agencies.

   PIC Hamilton also provides an easy entry point for visitors to the region, to people
seeking information on local businesses and local business opportunities.

   The site is built on a solid local infrastructure and on partnership arrangements. The
site is sustainable.

Who are PIC Hamilton participants?
City of Hamilton
Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth
Town of Dundas
Town of Stoney Creek
Town of Ancaster
Town of Flamborough
Town of Glanbrook
Community Information Services
United Way
Hamilton Public Library
Human Resource Development Canada
Hamilton-Wentworth CommunityNet
Wentworth Libraries
Dundas Public Library
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
Hamilton-Wentworth District Separate School Board

McMaster University

What is the local Infrastructure?
    The Hamilton-Wentworth region has one of the simplest and most sophisticated public telecommunications networks of any urban centre in Canada. Many of the PIC partners are also partners in the Hamilton-Wentworth Information Network (HWIN).

    Hamilton-Wentworth Information Network (HWIN) partners have been using fibre links between the City of Hamilton, the Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth, the Hamilton-Wentworth Board of Education, the Hamilton-Wentworth Roman Catholic Separate School Board, the Hamilton Public Library, and McMaster University since September, 1997.   Narrower connections bring Mohawk College, Wentworth Libraries, and the Dundas Public Library onto the network. Surrounding municipalities such as Ancaster, Dundas, Flamborough, and Glanbrook are all connected behind the municipal firewall in "trusted partner" relationships. Many of the connections are being upgraded to ATM.

    Most partners have internal star networks, gathering electronic traffic at their own headquarters. They send this traffic to the downtown Central Library. Partners then share an OC3 connection to McMaster University. From McMaster, we all share a 6Meg ONet Internet connection. This connection is scheduled for upgrade.

    Hamilton-Wentworth partners have worked to ensure that internal networks are compatible. Almost all partners use Cisco routers. All partners support TCP/IP protocols and run ISDN lines as the minimum connection to satellite locations, where available.

    Working as a unit, we have created a local IP cloud, allowing local ISPs to point to local resources and allowing the public to flip between agencies without having their messages and requests travel beyond the region. The theoretical possibility of moving all local agencies onto the common network backbone is coming closer to reality. This is of obvious benefit to the private sector (eliminating long distance bandwidth for local requests) and to local government and non-profit agencies (high speed Internet connections make us seem part of a single unit).

    Essentially, we have physically created a high speed electronic "mall" with partners located throughout the main corridor of this mall. At the beginning of the process in 1995, we decided that it was best to build a strong, solid foundation based on partnerships and community-access before we started to introduce a wide range of public services.

    We have looked at communities where electronic services were introduced before the infrastructure could support demand. We opted to build a solid network foundation as our first priority. Our infrastructure already caps costs by allowing us jointly to purchase Internet connectivity. The network is capable of doing much more, however. Last Spring the HWIN partners adopted a new mandate, "to exploit the infrastructure we have created." We have been planning for a "Smart Community" initiative since the Fall of 1997.

    As an urban area, Hamilton-Wentworth has not been eligible for CAP funding until recently. The three regional library systems, however, have excellent Internet

connectivity and the City of Hamilton has one of the best rations of public access points to population (1:6,000) of any urban centre.

Menus/Maps/Full-Text/Links/Interactive

PIC Hamilton provides a menu for local services, a menu for tourists and visitors, a menu for those seeking business information, and a menu for those who don't want a unified menu but would like to see the vertically oriented sites of individual organizations. It also provides a single search engine and several indices.

The PIC Hamilton site unitizes a lot of maps in order to keep the user focused.

Where appropriate, PIC Hamilton will provide users will full-text information (e.g. the fire department safety brochures are on-line. Council minutes, agendas will be on-line).

While we hope to introduce interactive elements this Fall, the Interactive elements of the project are moving slowly. Region/City IT staff are concentrating on Y2K issues, notably major client/server replacements for the current mainframe. We will not introduce interactive elements unless equity of access issues can be resolved. For example, swimming registration will not be done on-line at present. Building permit submission may be done on-line since the ability of one person or company to file does not create an equity issue for anyone else.

The introduction of the PIC Hamilton site should mean that the City of Hamilton and other organizations could concentrate on their core businesses and not create links to the Tiger Cats football clubs or other local activities. It will eliminate a great deal of duplication.

Staffing Levels

PIC employed one grant-funded student from the Fall, 1998 to April, 1999. PIC now employs a librarian and a library technician, working under the supervision of the Service Development Co-ordinator, Partnerships, Information Services, and Planning for the Hamilton Public Library. Three summer students will be hired in 1999. CIS and the local Business Information Network employ their own staff and will be developing their portions of the site.

Intended Audience

The PIC site is designed for the general public. It is also designed for public sector staff within the region. One of the principles of the site is that public interactive elements will not be introduced until the appropriate staff have access to the same components. The site will replace the existing Community Information Services "Red Book," putting it on line. Public sector staff who once purchased the red book will need a connection. We have been working with United Way agencies.

Level of Technology

Some areas of Hamilton have far-below-average numbers of households that own computers or that have internet connections. Many of the privately owned machines are not high-end. For these reasons, the PIC Hamilton site does not employ software that requires sophisticated browsers, and it does not employ a large number of graphics. It is text-accessible.

Funding
HRDC has provided funding for two FTE staff members on 18-month contracts. There is also funding for three summer students in 1999 and three summer students in 2000. HDRC has also provided funding to assist in creating the middleware needed to provide the e-commerce components of the project. We do not have any intention to apply for Industry Canada funding.

Principles
    Principles form an important component in decision making. Whenever appropriate, we measure what we are doing against the underlying Principles.

Whenever a service is provided to the public for home access or self-service, the same service should be provided through staff. (e.g. If the public can book ice time at arenas throughout the region from their own homes, staff should have access to the same on-line resource. This principle is a prime reason we have built the infrastructure first and are placing a strong emphasis on staff training.).

 Ensure that public access points are available and that the public has a reasonable chance of using these access points when needed. (e.g. It is not good enough to promote public libraries and other places with public Internet access as places where interactive local government services are available if people must book ahead to pay bills or submit building plans.

No service should be offered which cannot be sustained.

Place all local sites on a common local backbone. Work with local ISPs to point them toward local services

Treat the entire project as a series of interrelated steps and ensure that each step is successful.

Keep specific project goals as simple as possible.

If you tour the site . . .

   Go to Local Residents and take a look, under Health, at the listing of all Retirements homes, with links to relevant web sites. Also under health, take a look at the listing under mental health. The description pages are what the Community Information Services staff will maintain. Look under Safety. You will see the links to full-text information. Under Sports, we will find links to Clubs. These fields will be populated during the summer.

   Go to Tourism. While you're here . . . offers the Cultural Landmarks site. This same site will eventually be linked to the Local Residents page since it contains a great deal of historical information.

    The Business section may not be linked. It is being developed independently. You can find it at http://www.hpl.hamilton.on.ca/NET/net.htm

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