



NET GOOD IN OTTAWA

Boosting Digital Equity: Piloting a free Community WiFi Network

Prepared by:
Shelley **Robinson**
Andrew **Martey Asare**



Project Partners:



Funded by:



01 ABOUT NATIONAL CAPITAL FREENET

National Capital FreeNet (NCF) is a not-for-profit ISP, providing internet and digital community services since 1992.

We believe everyone in our region has the right to affordable, high-quality internet that they understand how to use, while feeling safe online.

As part of NCF's commitment to advancing digital equity, we:

- Provide DSL and cable internet connectivity to thousands of residential and business subscribers
- Manage and maintain a secure, resilient network 24/7
- Support users with our award-winning HelpDesk, digital skills training and resources

02 THE NEED FOR FREE COMMUNITY WIFI

Those living on low incomes in urban Ottawa:

- are more likely to struggle to afford the high costs of home internet and cellphone data plans,
- are less likely to get needed digital skills support miss out on support to improve their digital skills.

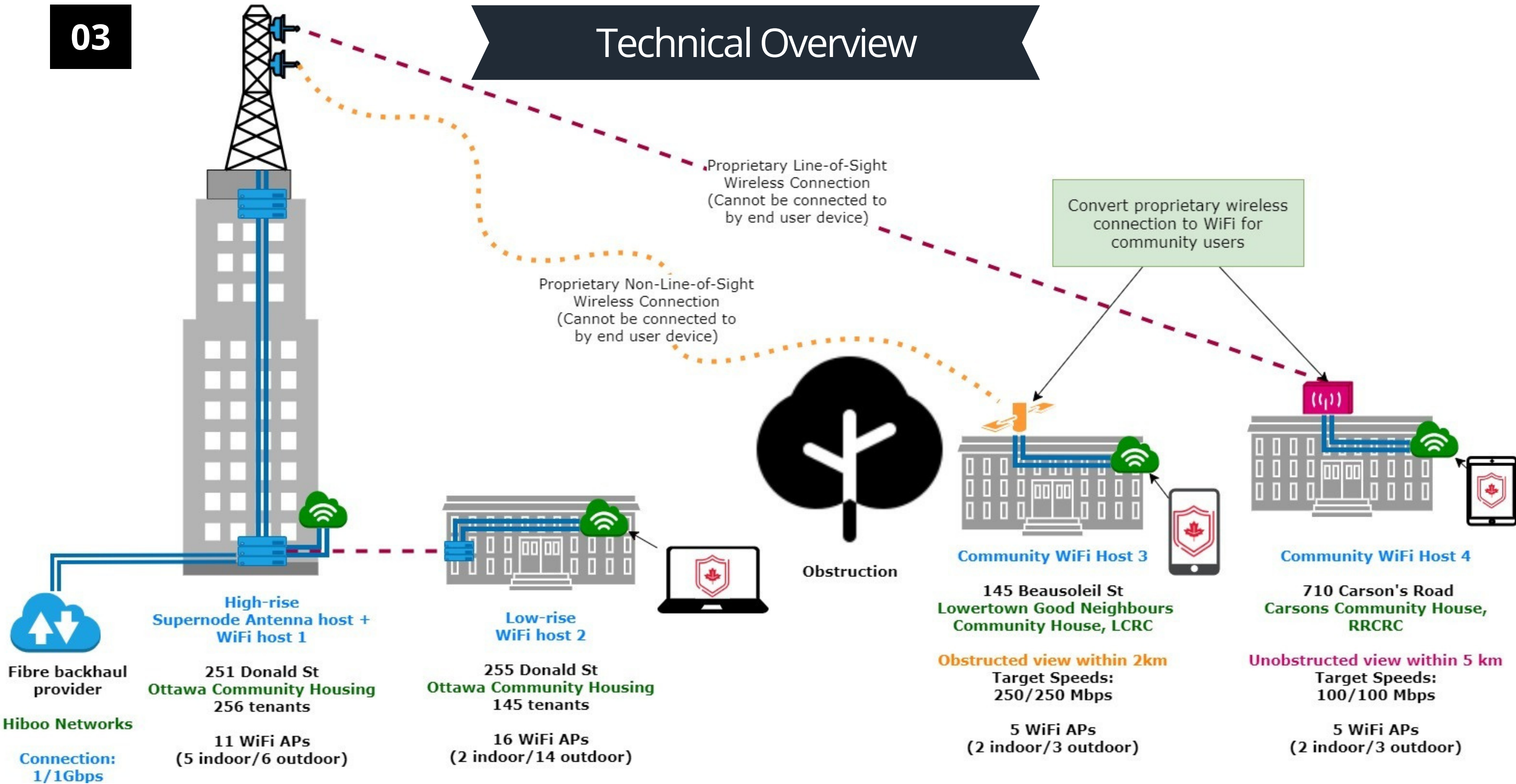
This is the digital divide at work.

To ensure no one is left behind, NCF's Community WiFi Network will:

- deliver free, fast and high-quality WiFi in community spaces where residents socialize and access social services
- ensure security and privacy
- offer one-on-one digital skills support
- connect two Ottawa Community Housing buildings and 10+ community organizations, inside and outside





Technical Overview



04 PILOT COMMUNITIES

We are focusing on Vanier, Overbrook, and parts of Lowertown and Sandy Hill because:

- The Neighbourhood Equity Index identifies these communities as facing some of the highest level of social inequities in Ottawa.
- 43.5% of residents lived on low incomes.
- The OCH high-rise at 251 Donald Street is ideally placed to reach across these communities while enabling future network development.
- There is a critical mass of community and social service organizations in these neighbourhoods, many of which don't offer public WiFi access.

NEIGHBOURHOOD EQUITY INDEX MATRIX							
 		Red = Strong equity concern Yellow = Possible equity concern Light green = Nominal equity concern Green = No equity concern					
Census Tract ID	Neighbourhood	Economic Opportunity	Social and Human Development	Physical Environment	Health	Community and Belonging	Overall Equity Index
5050014	Sandy Hill-Strathcona Heights	Red	Red	Green	Red	Red	Red
5050007.02	Heron Gate	Red	Red	Green	Red	Red	Red
5050100	Vanier-McArthur Ave	Red	Red	Green	Red	Red	Red
5050012	Overbrook-The Four Corners-Queen Mary Court	Red	Red	Green	Red	Red	Red
5050001.01	Ledbury-Albion-Heatherington-Fairlea	Red	Red	Green	Red	Red	Red

NETWORK DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

ESTABLISHING WIFI CONNECTIVITY

AREAS OF WORK	DEC '23	MAR '24	JUN '24	SEP '24	DEC '24	MAR '25	JUN '25	SEP '25	DEC '25
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1. Technical assessment & approvals



2. Network design & network security



3. Installation & network testing



4. Monitoring, maintenance & growth



MILESTONES:

Backhaul connectivity installed: May 23/24

Wireless Access Points installed and tested at 251 and 255 Donald St.: Aug 29/24

Free Community WiFi network official launch: Sept. 30/24

First five Community WiFi partners connected as hosts: Mar. 27/25

10+ Community WiFi partners connected as hosts: Sep. 25/25

06 COMMUNITY WIFI USER PROFILE

OCH tenants and other community members

Key barriers to full digital participation



The high cost of essentials



Digital skills gap



Limited access to connected devices and sufficient data/usage



May not be eligible or know about affordable home internet programs

Needs

- Safe & affordable housing
- Food security
- Job training & employment services
- Social & community engagement
- Daycare & after-school activities
- Accessing government programs
- Physical & mental healthcare
- Technical support

Connectivity context

- If they have home internet, it may be slow or have limited usage
- If they have a cell phone, it may have limited data & expensive overage charges
- Limited access to other connected devices
- They need help to transition from analog to digital service delivery

Potential community services

- Supportive housing services
- Employment services
- Homework clubs
- Income tax clinics
- Counselling and medical services

Free Community WiFi offers:



High-quality secure connectivity.



Flexible access that enables social and health supports.



Digital skills workshops, online resources and on-call support



Trusted, local spaces to access free WiFi, including when other services may be closed

Want to find out more, support the project or get involved?

communitywifi@ncf.ca

