A. Recommendations

THAT the Community Communications Advisory Committee receive Staff Report FAF.20.122, entitled “COVID-19 Communications Overview” for information purposes.

B. Overview

This report provides an update to Community Communications Advisory Committee members regarding communication efforts and initiatives through the COVID-19 pandemic and its ongoing recovery process.

C. Background

In response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Town of The Blue Mountains formed the Community Recovery Task Force which has been responsible for the coordination and implementation of recovery and relief efforts to support and assist local businesses, the community and stakeholders in maintaining as much as possible and reinvigorating our local and regional economies throughout the COVID–19 Pandemic and the recovery process. In addition, the Town’s Emergency Control Group was activated to oversee the management of essential Town services and operations as a result of the declaration of a State of Emergency.

The Town continues to maintain a municipal State of Emergency in response to COVID-19 and will continue to do so until the Emergency Control Group deems that it safe to end.

D. Analysis

As a strategic means of communicating with residents and stakeholders, Town staff developed and activated an internal COVID-19 communications plan to ensure streamlined and efficient communication procedures. A variety of communication actions and tools were implemented which are detailed below.
- **Dedicated COVID-19 Website Page**

  A dedicated one-stop COVID-19 information page was added to the Town website. With content added regularly, the page featured information regarding the continuation of municipal services, current and archived press releases, health and safety information, details regarding the Community Recovery Task Force, and links to the weekly video messages from Mayor Soever. In addition, a COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions page, a COVID-19 Open and Closed page and an interactive online map were created and added to the Town website. Collectively, the COVID-19 related pages on the Town website received over 30,000 unique page visits.

- **Press Releases**

  As a primary communications tool, the Town issued 28 COVID-19 specific or related press release between March and July. Each media release followed the standard review and approval protocol and was circulated to the Towns media list to aid in community outreach and awareness.

- **Task Force Meetings – Community Recovery Task Force**

  Various community organizations, community groups, and business associations participated on a bi-weekly conference call led by Mayor Soever. The purpose of the discussions is to gain feedback from the community for consideration by the Community Recovery Task Force for implementation.

- **Weekly Video Messages from Mayor Soever**

  Through community feedback, Mayor Soever launched a weekly video series which focused on providing updates related to Town business as a result of COVID-19. To be respective of cost, all videos were produced internally by Town staff. With the first video published on April 24th, 14 videos have been filmed and posted to the Town website and viewed over 5,100 times.

- **Launch of Explore Blue Website**

  To provide less structured corporate messaging to individuals visiting The Blue Mountains, the Community Recovery Task Force led the creation of the [www.exploreblue.ca](http://www.exploreblue.ca) website. Content focused on providing community-based information which included local volunteer and employment opportunities, local meal delivery programs, and local ministerial and support organization information. In addition, the website featured a robust business directory, curated video content, and information regarding events such as the Thornbury Clarksburg Hope in the Valley event and the Canada Day Virtual Celebration. Since launch, the website has achieved 17,425 visits. Going forward, the investment into the website platform will be leveraged into a tourism, recreation and community focused oriented website for the Town.
• **Community Safety Signage**

Working collaboratively with Town departments, Communications staff led the creation of COVID-19 community safety signage that was installed at Town owned parks, beaches and trails. In addition, 25 COVID-19 road signs were installed in late March at key locations and intersections throughout the community. Examples of the signs have been included below.

In addition, Communications staff coordinated the rental agreement for the reader board / letter signs that were placed at all beach entrances within the municipality.

**Sign Example #1: Facility and Location Signs**

Three different sizes / designs of the following sign was created and installed at various Town owned parks, beaches and trails throughout the Town.

![COVID-19 Safety Message Sign](image-url)
Sign Example #2: Road Signs

Visit the Town Website for COVID-19 Information
thebluemountains.ca/covid-19.cfm

- Communication to Local Businesses

A variety of efforts and initiatives were implemented to ensure open lines of communication with the business community and business associations including weekly local and regional calls and working groups. In addition, over 100 business re-opening toolkits, and more than 40 open for business signs were distributed to help support local businesses in The Blue Mountains.

Lessons Learned- What’s Next?

Ensuring clear, consistent and timely communication with residents, businesses and stakeholders was a primary focus of the Town and of the Communications and Economic Development department. The COVID-19 pandemic has been and continues to be an ever-evolving situation with new information, guidelines and regulations implemented regularly. This presented a both a unique communications challenge and opportunity for the Town as the need for information to be communicated through the various levels of government and respective organizations was often overlapped and required significant internal planning, coordination and consultation.

Town staff look forward to working with the Community Communications sub committee regarding the integration of the various lessons learned into the 5-year Communications Strategy which will be presented to the Committee within the coming months.

E. The Blue Mountains Strategic Plan

Goal #2: Engage Our Communities & Partners
Objective #1 Improve External Communication with our Constituents
Objective #2 Use Technology to Advance Engagement
Objective #3 Strengthen Partnerships
Goal #4:  Promote a Culture of Organizational & Operational Excellence
Objective #2  Improve Internal Communications Across our Organization
Objective #3  To Consistently Deliver Excellent Customer Service
Objective #5  Constantly Identify Opportunities to Improve Efficiencies and Effectiveness

F.  Environmental Impacts

No environmental impacts are anticipated as a result of this report.

G.  Financial Impact

N/A

H.  In consultation with

Shawn Everitt, Chief Administrative Officer

I.  Public Engagement

The topic of this Staff Report has not been subject to a Public Meeting and/or a Public Information Centre as neither a Public Meeting nor a Public Information Centre are required. However, any comments regarding this report should be submitted to Tim Hendry, communications@thebluemountains.ca.

J.  Attached

Respectfully Submitted,

____________________________________
Tim Hendry
Manager of Communications and Economic Development

____________________________________
Shawn Everitt
Chief Administrative Officer

For more information, please contact:
Tim Hendry
communications@thebluemountains.ca
519-599-3131 extension 282