



Communications Strategy

Draft #1 – October 15, 2020

Explanatory Note

The Town of The Blue Mountains strives to maintain a cohesive and inclusive community through communication that is transparent, timely and accessible. In the spirit of this, and through collaboration with the Community Communications Advisory Sub-committee, the first draft of the Communications Strategy was developed.

This Communications Strategy is derived from the 2020-2024 Corporate Strategic Plan and is essential in establishing a strategic approach to communications between the Town, the public and various stakeholders over the next five years. The strategy promotes two-way, transparent communication between the Town and the public that delivers news, updates and important information through a variety of mediums. A key focus of the strategy is to review and create workflows that promote early and often communication and dialogue between the public and the Town.

The development of the Communications Strategy started in 2019 but was delayed as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Efforts have continued internally by Town staff with the Community Communications Advisory Sub-Committee to ensure the strategy's timeline is maintained. The Community Communications Advisory Committee was brought up to date on these efforts in September 2020 when the Committee reconvened.

It is important to note that upon presenting the first draft of this strategy, a comprehensive communications survey and engagement initiative is currently underway after being postponed in March 2020 due to COVID-19. The feedback from the Communications Survey will be integral to the development of the final draft of the Communications Strategy. Town staff, through collaboration with the Community Communication Advisory Committee, will ensure that feedback from residents will be analyzed and incorporated into the document.

This first draft of the Communications Strategy was developed through the analysis of the following considerations:

- Work completed by the Community Communications Advisory Committee to-date
- 2014 Communications Survey
- Annual Budget Surveys
- 2019 Corporate Strategic Plan Survey
- 2019 Seniors Fair Communication Survey
- 2018 Internal Staff Communications Survey
- 2010 Sustainable Path Report
- General Feedback from Residents

Vision Statement

The vision guiding the Communications Strategy is clearly defined and supported within the Corporate Strategic Plan vision statement:

- *An approachable Council and Staff serving an engaged and well-informed community.*

Communications Goal

To lead and ensure the success of the Communications Strategy, a single communications goal was developed to encompass the importance of proactive communication efforts that engage the entire Town of The Blue Mountains community.

- *An engaged community in which every voice is heard.*

SWOT Analysis

As a primary step, the Town conducted a SWOT analysis to evaluate and provide valuable insight and reflection into the current state of the Towns communications efforts.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents are engaged and passionate about the Town and community well-being • Residents have a wealth of knowledge that can be leveraged as an asset • Commitment and dedication from Council and Senior Management to increase community engagement and public participation • Commitment from the Communications Committee to improve and strengthen the communications process • Well-developed communication standards and workflow processes • Well-developed and engaged media list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand standards are inconsistent throughout Town documents and templates • Unclear outline of internal roles and responsibilities regarding communication • Limited staff resources dedicated to communications • Reliance on surveys as an engagement tool • Lack of face-to-face engagement and in person presence with residents and in the community • Low number of email addresses compared to population • No unified and approved community vision statement
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creatively engage the community in a way in which they have not been engaged in before • Explore and improve the utilization of online and offline communications tools • Increase efforts on social media • Integration of public feedback into Town projects • Increase the effectiveness of paid advertising • Strengthen general Town advertising to increase awareness amongst residents • Increase community engagement with residents to foster transparency and public trust • Utilize communications as a tool to increase and improve customer service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different communication preferences and interest level amongst residents regarding Town business • Internet connectivity and availability (i.e. rural/urban access) • Survey fatigue and trust within survey process • Inherent mistrust with government in general • Unforeseen local and global issues (i.e. COVID-19) that impact project timelines and resources • Misinformation on social media and digital media

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize strategic communication efforts to increase public involvement and youth engagement 	
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Objectives

The four objectives outlined below are intended to be connected building blocks that together aim to achieve the communications goal, and ultimately the vision as outlined through the Corporate Strategic Plan. The objectives were selected based on the analysis of the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats as identified through the SWOT analysis exercise.

These objectives are interdependent to one another to achieve the Communications goal. Through the successful execution of the first three objectives, a foundation will be established that will **Foster engagement and uphold public trust**.

Objectives	How?	Success Indicator
#1: Establish a communications baseline	To use the appropriate communication tools to engage all residents and areas of the Town	Increase in the number of survey respondents that indicate that they are well-informed and knowledgeable regarding Town operations, projects and initiatives.
#2: Cultivate corporate communications excellence	To ensure factual, transparent and timely information within all Town communication	Increase in the number of survey respondents that indicate that the Town is open and transparent in sharing news and information with the public
#3: Develop creative content and enhance strategic communication efforts	To be creative and innovative within how the Town engages residents in conversation	Increase in the number of residents that indicate that they have participated in a Town public engagement opportunity
#4: Foster engagement and uphold public trust	To actively listen and engage with residents to instill public trust and confidence	Increase in the number of survey respondents that indicate that they are informed and knowledgeable about Council meetings and the decisions of Council

Tactics

To achieve the objectives, 18 internal and 17 external tactics were developed. Each tactic was created based on industry best practices and demonstrates the Town’s commitment to enhancing internal processes and strengthening external communication efforts through creative approaches.

Internal Tactics

The following chart details the internal tactics, estimated cost and implementation timeline. The internal tactics were created through the need to establish a strong foundation in Town communication efforts and to set standards for how the Town communicates and engages with residents.

Internal Tactics	Estimated Cost	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Host annual meetings with each Town department to develop communication work plans and review communication roles and responsibilities	\$0	X	X	X	X	X
Develop communications orientation package to onboard new Town staff members and Councillors	\$0		X			
Conduct media relations training for Senior Management Team and Council	\$2,500	X		X		
Publish monthly question and answers document to assist staff in responding to public inquiries	\$0		X	X	X	X
Host diversity and inclusion standards training workshop with Town staff and leadership	\$2,500	X		X		
Hire a full-time communications staff member	\$72,075		X			
Review viability of an internal communications work request and project management tracking system	\$1,000 annually	X	X	X	X	X
Conduct a review of internal staff intranet portal	Existing Budget	X				
Develop corporate brand standards document and create corporate templates to ensure brand and communications consistency	\$1,000		X			
Conduct annual review of Town Notice Policy	\$0	X				
Conduct annual local media review and update media and community distribution lists	\$0	X	X	X	X	X
Develop resident profiles and identify appropriate communication tools	\$1,500	X				
Conduct bi-annual external customer service review and recommend improvements to leadership	\$2,000		X		X	
Conduct annual website content, features and functionality, and menu navigation review	\$7,500	X	X	X	X	X
Develop communications crisis plan and conduct annual review	\$3,000			X		
Conduct annual review of online engagement tools	\$0	X	X	X	X	X
Develop social media strategy	\$2,000	X				
Develop corporate standard for site specific project signage	\$0	X				

External Tactics

The following chart details the external tactics, estimated cost and implementation timeline. The external tactics were created through the need for more robust and creative communication efforts between the Town and residents to increase community engagement.

External Tactics	Estimated Cost	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Develop tagline to encourage public participation and engagement	\$0	X				
Hire research firm to assist with all Town surveys	\$15,000 annually	X	X	X	X	X
Conduct annual focus groups to gain insight from residents regarding communication needs	\$2,500	X	X	X	X	X
Conduct annual communications survey	\$5,000	X	X	X	X	X
Email address collection campaign	\$25,000	X				
Launch annual Town promotion campaign to highlight engagement opportunities	\$15,000 annually	X	X	X	X	X
Launch quarterly printed and mailed newsletter	\$16,000 annually	X	X	X	X	X
Launch quarterly tourism and recreation e-newsletter	\$0	X	X	X	X	X
Implement communications street team to enhance on the ground presence throughout the community	\$2,000			X		
Conduct review of youth engagement opportunities	\$0		X			
Launch monthly e-newsletter featuring Town highlights, news and updates	\$0		X	X	X	X
Redesign corporate website to improve the user experience	Existing Budget	X				
Launch podcast to highlight Town and community news, updates, projects and events	\$1,000			X		
Purchase and improve use of digital screens in Town facilities	\$8,700			X		
Implement social media strategy	\$0	X				
Leverage Communications Committee members as Town communication ambassadors	\$0	X	X	X	X	X
Leverage Council members as project leads	\$0	X	X	X	X	X

Time Frame

Internal Tactics	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Develop communication workplans and review roles	X	X	X	X	X
Communications orientation package		X			
Media relations training	X		X		
Monthly communication Q&A document		X	X	X	X
Diversity and inclusion standards training workshop	X		X		
Hire full-time communications staff member		X			
Project management tracking system	X	X	X	X	X
Conduct a review of internal staff intranet portal	X				
Develop brand standards and create templates		X			
Develop corporate templates	X				
Conduct annual review of Town Notice Policy	X	X	X	X	X
Quarterly review of Town distribution lists	X				
Conduct annual local media review		X		X	
Develop resident profiles and identify tools	X	X	X	X	X
External customer service review			X		
Website content review	X	X	X	X	X
Communications crisis plan	X				
Review of online engagement tools	X				
Develop social media strategy	X	X	X	X	X
Develop corporate standard for project signage		X			
Total Cost	\$14,075	\$81,500	\$19,000	\$10,500	\$11,000

External Tactics	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Develop tagline	X				
Hire research firm to assist with all Town surveys	X	X	X	X	X
Conduct bi-annual focus groups		X		X	
Conduct bi-annual communications survey	X	X	X	X	X
Email address collection	X				
Launch annual Town promotion campaign	X	X	X	X	X
Launch quarterly printed and mailed newsletter	X	X	X	X	X
Launch quarterly tourism and recreation e-newsletter	X	X	X	X	X
Implement communications street team			X		
Conduct review of youth engagement opportunities		X			
Launch monthly e-newsletter		X	X	X	X
Redesign corporate website	X				
Launch podcast			X		
Purchase and improve use of digital screens			X		
Implement social media strategy	X				
Leverage Communications Committee members	X	X	X	X	X
Leverage Council members as project leads	X	X	X	X	X
Total Cost	\$81,000	\$58,500	\$67,700	\$58,500	\$56,000

Financial Requirements

The following chart outlines the financial requirements associated with internal and external tactics.

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Internal Tactics	\$14,075	\$81,500	\$19,000	\$10,500	\$11,000
External Tactics	\$81,000	\$53,500	\$62,700	\$53,500	\$51,000
Total Cost	\$95,075	\$135,000	\$81,700	\$64,000	\$62,000

Measuring Success

To ensure the effectiveness of the Communications Strategy, it is essential that the progress of each action item is tracked, and that performance is measured. Each action item will be tracked through an annual report card, which will set a benchmark to measure the success of communication efforts and aid in the annual review of budget and resource requirements needed to achieve each tactic.

Objective	Success Indicator	Metrics
Establish a communications baseline	Increase in the number of survey respondents that indicate that they are well-informed and knowledgeable regarding Town operations, projects and initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive and negative sentiment tracking Project-specific engagement rate Council/Committee/Meeting attendance Survey participation rate Distribution of communication material/information Project-specific website analytics Project-specific social media analytics
Cultivate corporate communications excellence	Increase in the number of survey respondents that indicate that the Town is open and transparent in sharing news and information with the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall number of customer service inquiries Average response time to resident inquiries Number of media releases Quantity of media coverage (i.e. number of news articles, radio segments, interviews, etc.)
Develop creative content and enhance strategic communication efforts	Increase in the number of residents that indicate that they have participated in a Town public engagement opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of phone inquiries to Town Staff Number of Town Hall in-person visits Average tone/sentiment of media coverage Email analytics (open rate and conversion rate) Number of email subscribers and average open/engagement rates
Foster engagement and uphold public trust	Increase in the number of survey respondents that indicate that they are informed and knowledgeable about Council meetings and the decisions of Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media analytics (i.e. engagement rate, impressions, likes/favourites, comments, Shares/retweets, video views, optimal post times, number of followers/subscribers, traffic to website)

Maintaining Progress

The overall success of the Communication Strategy will be determined through the completion of each of the four objectives. Town Staff will refer to these objectives while maintaining the progress through daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual actions that will assist in the research and analysis for the metrics developed and identified in the Communications report card.

Timing	Action
Daily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scan local media outlets for potential issues and coverage of Town happenings/events and send high-level update to members of SMT (Daily News & Issues Scan) as necessary • Monitor social media accounts for resident inquiries/engagement and to ensure that the platforms are reaching target audiences effectively
Weekly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a high-level update on Town happenings through the weekly recap email subscribers • Staff website monitoring and updating information (i.e. top website pages, items prioritized on the homepage, urgent communication needs, etc.) • Communications Staff meetings to analyze the effectiveness of communications tools and strategic planning
Monthly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications Staff to meet with service area managers for communications touch-base and ensure communications needs are being met and determine needs for improvement • Participating in monthly Communications Committee meeting to ensure communications needs are being met
Quarterly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with Senior Management Team to provide an update on the progress of the Communications Strategy • Meeting with Town department for communications touch-base to ensure communications needs are being met within their respective department