



REVISED – OCTOBER 22, 2020

## **COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE SEPTEMBER 28, 2020 DISCUSSION POINTS AROUND COUNCIL EXPECTATIONS/NEEDS/CHALLENGES**

### **BACKGROUND**

CCAC Chair invited to meet with Mayor Soever & Tim Hendry on September 9, 2020. Deputy Mayor Potter; Councillor Hope; & Shawn Everitt also in attendance. Discussed CCAC's mandate & progress to-date. CCAC Chair offered to write to each Council member "in an effort to make the CCAC of greater value to both you as a member of Council & to the Community as a whole," with two questions:

1. What are your expectations of the CCAC?
2. What do you see as the Town's three most pressing Communications needs/challenges?

Four Council members replied. Their responses are detailed below:

### **What are your expectations of the CCAC?**

My belief is that the CCAC should set the mechanisms and tools for TBM communication. Website, Mail and Social Media platforms.

The roadmap for HOW we communicate should be consistent throughout all correspondence. To me that is paramount. Working directly with TBM Internal Communications department to be on the same policy 'page'

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Work closely and collaboratively with Tim Hendry, and Town Staff to fulfill the CCAC mandate. The committee, like all committees, needs to stay focused on its mandate. An immediate priority should be advancing the Strategic Communications Plan for the Town (Item 3 on the mandate) to a point where actionable items can be included in the 2021 budget. The Strategic Communications Plan needs to provide clear advice that guides Council and staff on how to communicate with the public. For clarity it is not the role of the Plan to create the messaging it is to provide a framework for how to deliver it.

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I think the Committee's efforts should be directed to developing the best ways to get information and messages to the public. What media, social media, etc., will offer the broadest and most direct means of reaching our ratepayers (permanent, seasonal, etc.) businesses, farmers, and so on. It seems intuitive that no one or two methods will work, so we have to be as thorough as possible but also be cost-effective. In short, what do people want to know and how can we inform them. The Committee should also review the town's messaging to evaluate whether it is giving everyone clear, understandable

information. Too often, staff and/or Council talk in jargon and short-forms and fail to communicate in away that the public understands. For example, the average person does not understand the land planning process, or even what the term “planning” means in the municipal context. How can the Town do a better job of bridging that gap? Finally, we could look at what materials would be helpful to people taking part in municipal processes. For many years, I have felt that people attending a public meeting should be provided an information card telling them how they can participate, what are the protocols, etc.

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Firstly, it is my view that we have established the Council Advisory committees to do just that, to advise Council on matters within the Committee mandate as set out in the Terms of Reference (“TOR”). The questions asked by the Chair seems to assume the reverse is the case.

Most of our Council committees have looked to their TOR for guidance on what Council is looking for them to do, and when these Committees seek clarification, they typically do so by a Committee resolution asking Council for a revised and more defined TOR. It might be helpful for the Chair to send us the sections of the TOR mandate that are unclear to the Committee if he is looking for further Council direction.

From the TOR for the Committee I see that:

*The Mandate of the Town’s CCAC is to:*

- 1. Assist, in an advisory capacity, Council, Town staff, and the public on matters related to Town communication, both internal and external;*
- 2. Cultivate a positive culture of engagement and dialogue among residents, stakeholders, staff and Council;*
- 3. Assist with the development of a Strategic Communications Plan for the Town and assess ongoing progress and implementation of the same; a) Create a flexible vision for long-term and evolving community engagement.*
- 4. Oversee the development of policies and plans in support of the Strategic Communications Plan and remain committed to the policy and advocacy work that will be undertaken by the CCAC.*

Nevertheless, regarding the Chair’s questions:

**1. What are your expectations of the CCAC?**

The TOR for the Committee seem quite clear. Are there areas of that TOR that are confusing or unclear to the Committee and if so I suspect a request for clarification from Council would be enthusiastically received? Perhaps the Committee might focus on the *Strategic Communications Plan* as was asked of the Committee in the TOR some time ago.

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To provide advice to Council and support to staff who implement strategy for both input and output communications between the Town and community.

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I agree ... that an initial direction based on the ToR should be made available for comment. Within this context, the initial direction should also recognize that there are already a variety of public communication and mandatory public notice requirements in legislation that can be utilized as a basis to draw on for overall municipal communication parameters. Clear, consistent and detailed messaging that not only notifies but educates should be our goal

### **What do you see as the Town's three most pressing Communications needs/challenges?**

First, actual communication, true news and facts not rumours or false POV. The CCAC can be the catalyst for factual information in a timely manner.

Second, Platforms for that communication – all the tools you need

Third, Website redesign as more communication is this day is virtual this will be a huge undertaking for CCAC and TBM Communications Dept.

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Creating a more functional searchable website.

Developing a cost-effective strategy for dealing with issues that people create by just “putting things out there” that are not accurate or misleading. Dealing with citizen inquiries that are generated as a result of issues created by a very small minority of our residents, who spread inaccurate and/or misleading information, is taking up an increasing amount of staff time and effort, at a considerable expense to our taxpayers. The challenge is to be open and transparent and respond to all inquires, with staff still having time to advance their day to day work.

Communicating with our entire community and understanding the range of communication needs and opportunities.

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The media landscape is very diverse now. I suspect that any survey would find, for example, that several dozen different radio stations have significant numbers of listeners in The Blue Mountains. There is no newspaper of record now. Many people never visit the website until something comes along that catches their interest – often something that annoys them or, in their view, will have an adverse impact on them or their family. We need to be in contact with them sooner. We may not be able to bring everyone into the fold. Some people just don't take an interest, no matter how hard we try. But we do have to try and, even if we can't get everyone to communicate with us, we should do all we can to make sure they know that they can communicate, that we want them to communicate and how they can do so.

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Again, I was hoping that the Committee would advise Council on this but if the Chair is looking for suggestions then I would offer the following:

- First and foremost, we do not have a master communications plan. That is why it was included in the TOR. We need to get on with developing, approving and acting on such a master plan.
- The Town needs a way to communicate better to the vast majority of ratepayers who are not typically and actively engaged in/following the day to day Town administration. We seem to be able to reach out to a very small minority when we ask for citizen input and we have no way to gauge if the responses we get are representative of the population in general. I suspect that a review of the surveys we have completed to date would show that the respondents are typically the same people. We have no idea if these respondents are representative of the majority of ratepayers, yet we seem to act on these results as if they were.

- Social media is a means of communication we need to use more effectively, but it is also a vehicle for those to “put things out there” that are not factual and on random topics. Quite often it seems that the authors of this misinformation are only interested in increasing their social media profile. This then means the Town staff spend a considerable amount of time refuting nonfactual information and focusing on communicating about subjects that are now priorities for the Town. We need to develop and implement strategy that mitigates this waste to time and distraction for staff.
- Related to the second item, I suspect that many ratepayers are overwhelmed with emails and other communications from other parties and our message is often lost in that firehose of information flow. The challenge then is how do we get our message out effectively and efficiently?

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- Advise and support the communication of correct information and messaging from the Town to the community.
- Advise and support the correction of misinformation when it circulates in the community.
- Advise and support the communication of input and questions from the community to the Town.

For example, as the Sustainability Advisory Committee supports and guides the development of the ICSP, we will look to the advice of the Communications Advisory Committee on the best strategy to reach out and encourage community participation as well as to convey the resulting vision that comes from the ICSP process.