

## **COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

### **BACKGROUND**

As part of the Strategic Plan process the municipality undertook in the spring of 2018, it became apparent to not only be strategic but to become proactive in how we communicate municipal information to our ratepayers. Municipal employees are very familiar with federal, provincial and local legislation, regulations and requirements. However, our taxpayers rarely experience these concepts unless directly impacted.

### **OBJECTIVES**

The Township of Front of Yonge's Strategic Plan has a key principal that defines the importance of "Communication". This principle stresses the importance of the municipality to have clarity in its communications and be transparent and accountable.

### **EXPECTATIONS**

In the past, residents would actively read local newspapers, listen to local radio and television broadcasts, and take an interest in materials sent by direct mail to ensure that they were aware of local issues and matters. Things have changed significantly over the past few years, with internet and the growing popularity of social media. Now that news information is so easily accessible the Township is competing with an abundance of national/global news and information. Engaging with our residents can be very challenging, as individuals have different views of how they want information.

#### **Channels of Communication**

The following is a list of the methods currently used to engage with our residents, in order to assist in becoming more effective to communicate our messages.

#### **News Print:**

The Recorder and Times  
The Athens Mural

#### **Direct Mail:**

Unaddressed Ad Mail – All residents in Front of Yonge including those with, Lyn and Athens addresses.  
Tax Bills – All property owners

#### **Email Distribution:**

Direct through the township website: [www.mallorytown.ca](http://www.mallorytown.ca)

## **Social Media:**

Facebook

Twitter

## **Television & Radio Stations:**

104.9 FM, CFJR - Brockville

103.7 FM, CJPT – Brockville

99.9 FM, MY FM – Gananoque

Hometown TV 12- Brockville

## Print Media

It seems as though the general public is losing interest in reading print newspapers, choosing online resources first. The Athens Mural is a monthly, no fee newspaper that gets sent to all properties in Front of Yonge. The municipality occasionally advertises in the Brockville Recorder & Times or the Athens Mural, however it is extremely difficult to gauge how often the advertisements are seen.

## Tax Bills

Occasionally information sheets/newsletters are placed in envelopes and are distributed along with tax bills. This method only sends information to property owners, so not all residents receive the information, such as renters. In addition, there are only two distributions of tax bills sent each year so this method of delivery has its limits. It is a cost effective way to communicate as the tax bills are already being delivered.

## Direct Mail (Ad Mail)

Front of Yonge uses direct mail for quarterly newsletters and other information pieces (such as election information). Direct mail, to the best of Canada Post's abilities has the most effective distribution of information to the residents of Front of Yonge.

## Television and Radio

From time to time, the Mayor or other municipal officials appear on local stations. Although it presents a great opportunity to inform residents of key issues, (especially since it does not cost Front of Yonge) there is no way to measure effectiveness.

## Website/Email Distribution

The web site is constantly being updated. During the past year there have been 758 views on our website. These statistics show the web sites's on-going strength. E-newsletters through our website has a current subscriber account of 199. However, not all residents in Front of Yonge Township have access to reliable internet, which makes these difficult methods to use to reach all residents.

### Digital Sign

A digital sign will be installed in the spring of 2019 at the Township Office, instantly providing current and up-to-date information. This is a prime location, as this sign is visible when entering and existing the Village of Mallorytown via County Rd 2.

This method will reach all persons within viewing distance of the sign but will have limited capability of the amount of information provided at one time. It will be used to compliment other methods of communication.

### Social Media

Front of Yonge has been using social media (specifically Facebook) since early 2016 with 116 “likes” and 127 users “following” the page. Although use is growing quickly, this method is better used to compliment other methods of communication.

Appendix A details steps to be followed to ensure successful social media distribution and use.

## **GOALS**

Front of Yonge needs to ensure that messages are delivered in as many forms as possible and that the right combination of communications tools needs to be used and constantly audited to ensure that we are always being effective.

### Newspapers

Staff feels that municipal messaging is being lost in conventional print advertising. Municipal advertisements is one of many different messages in a newspaper. It is recommended that Council consider using the Recorder and Times, Athens Mural or other print publications when required for statutory notices under the *Municipal Act* and *Planning Act*.

### Direct Mail

Direct mail can be delivered to all township residents with general reliability. This form of communications is very targeted and the recipient receives municipal related information.

### Digital Sign

Traffic is generally steady through the Village of Mallorytown, so even though the audience is limited to those in direct view of the sign, it is anticipated that the sign will be viewed by a wide audience. This method should be used to deliver information in conjunction with other forms of communication.

### Website and Social Media

With growth of the municipal web site and the ability to track readership, it is recommend that this communication continue to be enhanced to cater to specific audiences and issues. All other forms of communicaiton should drive traffic to the website to ensure continuity of messages.

### Tax Bills

The municipality will continue to consider using tax bills for specialized time sensitive information. Staff feels that this is not the most ideal approach as bills are only generated semi-annually and does not reach all target audiences such as tenants.

### Financial Implications

The cost of advertising in print media is usually more than distributing by direct mail. The impact to change the distribution method will be minimal. At this time the cost to distribute the quarterly newsletters by direct mail costs approximately \$220.00 each mailing. However, if the municipality combines several forms of communication (print media, direct mail, etc.) to enhance communication on strategic issues, additional costs will be incurred.

### **MOVING FORWARD**

The Township of Front of Yonge should strongly consider a more effective balance between newspapers and direct mail. Distribution of Front of Yonge's municipal strategic/key information can be undertaken more effectively through direct mail.

The Municipality will encourage more use of the website and social media by directing residents to these outlets via direct mailings. Over time, staff is confident direct mailings can decrease as the website and social media accounts gain popularity.

## **COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

### **APPENDIX A - SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

#### **Policy Statement**

The Township of Front of Yonge is committed to focusing on accountability, transparency, communication and customer service. As a result, the Municipality strives to provide open access to information about its policies, services, and initiatives. The Municipality is committed to disbursing information in a range of formats to reach a variety of stakeholders.

The Communications policy establishes general guidelines for the use of communication method. This appendix establishes guidelines specific for social media applications so that the disbursement of timely and accurate information is balanced with the Municipality's need to ensure that:

- a) The use of social media tools does not compromise public safety or the Municipality's image.
- b) The information provided through social media is in line with the Municipality's vision and guiding principles
- c) Social media content does not violate individual privacy or conflict with existing municipal policies and by-laws or other the regulations as applicable.
- d) Social media content posted on behalf of the Municipality is accurate, accessible, transparent and accountable.

In a municipal setting, Facebook and Twitter can be used to communicate public notices, which include emergency management notices, promotion of businesses, organizations, events and destination marketing.

#### **Purpose**

The Township of Front Yonge's Communication Plan outlines for employees and elected official the corporate standards for communication and engaging the public using communication tools. This appendix outlines the steps using social media tools:

- That the Township of Front of Yonge provide a comprehensive corporate Facebook page that is monitored and maintained by the Clerk's department on a daily basis. The Front of Yonge Fire Department monitors and maintains their own page.
- That the Township of Front of Yonge provide a corporate Twitter feed that is maintained by the Clerk's Department.

#### **Application**

Social Networking applications shall be executed following the same guidelines as other Township of Front of Yonge communication applications. The following information will be permitted:

- Information pertaining to Municipality sponsored events and activities;
- Information pertaining to the enhancement of tourism in the Township of Front of Yonge;
- Information pertaining to Municipality programs and services;
- Information pertaining to Emergency Management (i.e. road closures, inclement weather, burn bans etc.)

The policy also serves to:

- Protect the Municipality's reputation and ensure consistency and professionalism in how the Municipality and its employees communicate about the Municipality's business with our public stakeholders;
- Provide employees and members of Council with clear usage guidelines and acceptable corporate and personal use of social media sites and/or personal websites as they relate to discussing the business of the Township of Front of Yonge;
- Provide protocol around monitoring, administration, acceptable use and privacy.

### General Guidelines

The policy establishes guidelines for the use of social media applications specifically so the disbursement of timely and accurate information is balanced with Municipality's need to assure that:

- a) Social networking relies on regular, timely posting of new and relevant content. For the ease of use by the reader, ensure that postings are kept consistent in grammar, spelling, style and format.
- b) The use of social media tools does not compromise safety or the Municipality's image.
- c) The information provided through social media is in line with the Municipality's vision and guiding principles.
- d) Social media content does not violate individual privacy or conflict with existing municipal policies and by-laws or other regulations as applicable.
- e) Social media content posted on behalf of the Municipality is accurate, accessible, transparent and accountable.

### Governance

As the hub of information and social media expertise within the Municipality, the Clerk's Department will lead the management and operations of the Municipality's social media channel. This ensures that the channel is managed and the tone is clear and consistent for followers. While other municipalities sometimes chose to segment their networks, (e.g., Twitter account specific to road/facility closures or other enterprises), a unified approach will remain in place for the Township of Front of Yonge based on our size and established practice in municipal social media management, except for the Fire Department's Facebook page, which will be monitored and managed by Fire Department personnel.

During emergency situation, communication resources will be made available so that information can be transmitted through social media channels in accordance with corporate emergency

management protocols. The Clerk's Department and Fire Department will work together to ensure consistent and accurate up-to-date information is shared jointly between the two corporate accounts.

#### Guidelines for Members of Council

Members of Council may participate in social media of their own accord. Council are welcome to like/follow the official Municipal site and are encouraged to share content that has already been officially posted to and Township of Front of Yonge social media channels, the Municipality's official sites will not share/retweet political content.

The Mayor is the official spokesperson for the Municipality and this will also apply to social media. Members of council should clearly identify where they are expressing personal views, and not necessarily the views of the Municipality.

#### Guidelines for the Site Moderator

The Township of Front of Yonge is committed to operating its social networking sites as an effective method of communication. The following procedures will be followed when monitoring the site:

- The site will be monitored during the municipality's regular business hours of Monday to Friday 9:00 am to 4:30 pm.
- If noticed outside of business hours, the Clerk or other staff in the department will flag items for follow up during regular business hours or on an as needed basis.
- Correct misinformation and ensure that content is up to date.
- Deny access to users who post inappropriate or offensive comments.
- Remove posts that are considered to be inappropriate.
- Respond to any concerns or questions posted. While the municipality will make every effort to respond to concern and questions directed to our Social Media accounts, at our discretion we may request that the discussion be redirected to the appropriate department by either our phone or email. The reason(s) for this request would include, but is not limited to, privacy concerns (your, a fellow resident(s), or employee(s) of the municipality), character limitations for messages (Twitter), and amount of detail require to resolve situation.

#### Guidelines for Staff

Employees who post, discuss, share or comment of municipal business via corporate or personal social media sites, networks or website should reflect the municipality's values and follow these guidelines:

- Make sure communications are in good taste.
- Be careful about linking to other websites. Despite our disclaimers, redirecting to another site may be interpreted as an endorsement of its content.
- Do not publish or report on conversations of information that is confidential, pre-

decisional or speculative. A good rule of thumb is to ask: Is this information suitable to post to or available on the Township website?

- Be respectful. Never engage in personal attacks or divulge personal information about other. Ethnic or discriminatory slurs, insults, obscenity will not be tolerated.
- Do not defame or speak negatively about the Township of Front of Yonge, its personnel, other companies or to other people when conversing on social media.
- Employees must have approval from Council, prior to establishing a social media site or a page within an existing social media service, on behalf of the Township of Front of Yonge.
- Online participation in a social media site as an employee of the Township Front of Yonge must be job-related and fit into the employee's work schedule and duties.

### Guidelines for the Public

While the Township of Front of Yonge is committed to the concept of free speech, that speech must, at all times, be responsible, free of insults and respectful of others.

Participants in discussions must not:

- Defame, abuse, harass or threaten others;
- Make any bigoted, hateful or racially or sexually offensive statements;
- Advocate illegal activity or discuss illegal activities with the intent to commit them;
- Post or distribute any material that infringes or violates any right of a third party or any law including copyright;
- Post or distribute any vulgar, obscene, discourteous or indecent language or images;
- Advertise, sell or solicit others;
- Impersonate other participants or public figures.

For the most part, user comments and messages posted to the Township of Front of Yonge's official social networking sites are considered transitory records and will not be kept as permanent record by the Municipality. By using the Township of Front of Yonge's Social Media, users acknowledge and consent that their comments or messages may become part of the public record and used in official Township of Front of Yonge documentation. It is at the Municipality's official business records.

The Township of Front of Yonge will not be responsible for any losses or damages suffered as result of using third party Social Media site. Those using Social Media participate at their own risk and for their own benefit, and in so doing accept that they have not right of action against the Township of Front of Yonge related to such use.

A link between the Township of Front of Yonge's Social Media sites and any other website does not imply an endorsement or sponsorship by the municipality of the website, or the creator of the website.