

Communications Master Plan 2017



City of
Prince Albert

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This plan was prepared in consultation with City of Prince Albert employees and incorporated feedback from the Prince Albert public during the 2015 Official Community Plan open houses. It also incorporates strategies identified in other municipal communications and engagement plans including the City of Navato, California Communications and Community Engagement Plan (2015), City of Nanaimo, British Columbia Communications Plan (2013), City of Guelph, Ontario Communications Plan (2010), and the City of Mississauga, Ontario Communications Master Plan (2012).

Introduction

The purpose of this plan is to identify the goals of the Communications Office so that Council and Administration are aware of the direction that will be taken over the next several years. This document will be reviewed annually to ensure objectives are being achieved and updated to reflect changing needs.

The plan identifies ambitious goals and activities that are beyond the current resource levels but that need to be identified in order to ensure a comprehensive approach. The intention is not to attempt to achieve everything all at once, but instead to identify the long range outcomes and the activities that will help to achieve those outcomes. In order to improve it is important to have a plan forward to ensure there is measurable progress in how we communicate and not just continual maintenance of the status quo arrangements.

Background

In the last several years, the city has made considerable progress in expanding the methods it uses to communicate with the public. Email distributions lists, social media, radio and newspaper advertising, improved website content and navigation, and regular communication with the media through media releases and press conferences have all contributed in recent years to improved flow of communication to the public.

Important progress has been made but there continues to be gaps. The priorities reflected in this plan are the result of a review of Communications Plans of other cities, discussions with senior management and employees at the City and a review of the City's Strategic Plan. This plan attempts to reflect on what has been working in communications to date, what has not and sets priorities that will help the organization to communicate more effectively with residents and stakeholders.

Objectives

The goals of this plan are:

1. Encourage a Culture of Proactive Communication
2. Improve Public and Stakeholder Engagement
3. Strengthen the City Image and Establish a City Brand
4. Improve Access to Information
5. Improve Internal Communication Flow and Coordination

GOAL #1 - Encourage a Culture of Proactive Communication

The largest impediment to good communication at the City of Prince Albert is the organization itself. The City spends a significant amount of time explaining itself after actions have already been taken rather than in advance. This reactionary approach is impeding the progress of the strategic plan, affecting the credibility of the organization and is causing frustration among the residents that the City aims to serve.

The closure of a facility, the opening of a new facility, the start of a major and disruptive infrastructure project and the increase of rates and fees are all examples of areas that have a direct impact on residents. It is in these areas that proactive communication becomes most important, but this can only be successful if the entire organization (and each employee) participates in the communication process.

Employees need to start to identify potential sensitive areas in advance, identify the information that will assist people in understanding the issue and using different methods to communicate that information.

The role that Communications plays in achieving this is largely through education and training of employees. Through targeted approaches, it would be the goal of Communications to improve how employees see their role in the communication process, understand its value and equip them to better anticipate and respond to issues.

The goal here is to empower the organization so all employees are engaging in the process and to provide the support and guidance necessary to ensure it is done in the most effective way possible given existing and emerging communications tools.

Goal #2 – Improve Public and Stakeholder Engagement

Generally speaking the role of communications in an organization is about finding the most effective ways to inform the public. Engagement is a form of communication that goes beyond just sending out messages through advertising or the media. Engagement is about actively reaching out to the public to invite feedback so that it can be incorporated into the decision making process. To be clear, engagement is not about finding absolute consensus within a group.ⁱ It is about gathering enough perspectives so that we can be sure a decision has been made that considers all needs. When you fail to consult, you risk making a decision that does not consider the needs of an important group which often times leads to frustration and negative criticism. It also can lead to wasted time and resources if a decision has to be withdrawn in the face of criticism of the organization.

Forms of engagement depend on the size, scope and nature of the issue at hand and can range from limited or low-involvement to comprehensive or higher-level engagement as shown in the chart below.ⁱⁱ

Less engaging ----->More engaging			
Inform	Consult	Deliberate	Co-create
Fact sheets, websites, open houses, pamphlets, social media	Public comment, focus groups, questionnaires, public meetings, twitter town halls, online idea forums	Workshops, deliberative polling, advisory committees	Consensus-building, participatory decision making panels, formal partnerships, informal coalitions, networks.

Similar to the challenges of proactive communication, effective engagement is only possible and worthwhile if our administrative team is first interested in receiving feedback from the public, taking the time to reach out to them and then incorporating that feedback into decision making. In the last year, there has been improvement in the number of engagement activities undertaken. Some have been driven by the Communications Office and some by the departments. This is an important step forward given that in previous years there has been little to no public engagement.

The role of the Communications Office, as identified in this plan, is to assist employees with understanding when and how to engage, and exploring new methods of engagement (such as web-based applications). As with anything, the goal is not to

simply do more, but to ensure it is effective. Our challenge as an organization is to first understand the role that engagement can have in strengthening the decision making process and then determining what types of activities to pursue and when to pursue them. To be effective, the public needs to be involved in the appropriate way and at the correct time.ⁱⁱⁱ

Goal #3 – Strengthen the City Image and Establish a City Brand

There are two brands at play when discussing a City brand: the City's brand as a corporation and the City's brand as a community. The activities identified in this plan are largely focused on the City's brand as a corporation. This means undertaking activities that help to identify for the City's stakeholders and residents what the City represents and the direction it wishes to pursue for the future. The 2015 Strategic Plan identifies many of the principles and goals for the organization. One of the challenges for the organization will be to continually identify ways to communicate the goals identified in the strategic plan, how the City has shown commitment to its core values and operational themes and the areas where it is making progress in achieving the projects identified.

Establishing a strong corporate brand is also about maintaining a professional image for the organization. This means being consistent with the use of the City's Coat of Arms as its logo and also standardizing the look of the City's visual elements (website, promotional material, application forms, information brochures etc.). The primary activity in this regard will be to establish a consistent visual identity guide (being finalized this year) and then identify and incorporate this into all of the City's visual elements.

As discussed, the primary concern of the Communications Office is to ensure a strong image and city brand for the corporation. A secondary and related concern is the City's brand as a community and the image it has a place to live, work and invest which directly relates to the City's role in fostering economic development. In this regard, the Communications Office would work with Economic Development and continue to investigate options for community re-branding and also establishing new ways to pursue high quality, professional images and video that can be used to market the City.

Goal #4 – Improve Access to Information

The core responsibility of any Communications function is to manage the process through which information is distributed to the public. As a large and complex organization the City of Prince Albert offers a very broad range of services to residents. It is this function that has been the primary focus of attention in the last several years and continues to be an important one.

Ensuring the effective delivery of information through existing channels (website, traditional media advertising, media releases etc.) continues to be important but exploring new methods of communication is as well. With increasing access to mobile devices, the City's website and web based applications will continue to grow in prominence. Exploring new digital options will be important. Traditional methods of communication such as print brochures and guides also continue to have a place in disseminating information. The challenge for the organization will be to continue to identify gaps in information and methods of communication while also ensuring existing communications continue to be relevant and effective.

Goal #5 – Improve Internal Communication Flow and Coordination

Internal communications has an important role to play in the effective functioning of the City. As a large organization the impact of decisions often crosses multiple departments and divisions. It is important therefore that they are not made in isolation and that the impacts on both employees and the public are fully considered before implementing. The best way to ensure this is achieved is by taking on more of a teamwork approach, including more employees in the decision making process and empowering them to contribute their knowledge where applicable.

Another key component of internal communications is ensuring that employees in the organization understand the vision, mission, goals and core values of the organization and the role they have in achieving these. If we want to be innovative we need to talk to staff about what that means in their daily work lives. If we want to be more open and accountable we need to talk about how that can be achieved and not just by senior administration but all employees. Without communicating what is important to the organization, it will remain difficult to ever get a coordinated approach among employees.

There has been some notable progress in this area in the last year. In the Spring the City Manager held an orientation session with all staff to review major initiatives and to elaborate on the City's core values and operational themes. The message of innovation and how this might apply in the daily work lives of employees was discussed. This same message is delivered at the City's Out-of-Scope staff meetings. The primary role of the Communications Office will be to continue to support and facilitate opportunities that allow for employees to learn more about the direction the City is going and to provide input into that direction.

TIMELINES

It is expected that progress will be made in all areas of this plan. The Communications Office will report back to City Council annually to identify what projects have been completed and what is targeted for the future.

OPPORTUNITIES

Financial Opportunities:

The financial goal of this plan is to provide communication services in the most cost effective manner possible. The primary opportunities for this are in the areas of advertising and printing. The City is legally required to advertise public notices through a newspaper. Several years ago, all of the City's print advertising was centralized and a bulk purchase price was negotiated with the Prince Albert Daily Herald. Through this process a more favourable rate is secured and advertising is reviewed on a regular basis.

A second opportunity that is being explored is the centralization of printing services. Although this concept requires further investigation, the idea is to take all of the City's printing and centralize it in the Communications Office. Similar to print advertising, all of the print shop services spending would be centralized and managed out of one office. This would allow for the opportunity to make purchases based on a bulk rate and ensure an increased level of quality control in the documents being printed externally. This option is currently being explored for business cards.

A third opportunity being explored is the concept of an internal print shop. This is something that many large organizations establish when there is a considerable volume of documents being printed. The idea here is to create an actual print shop and manage all large scale print jobs (water bills, tax notices, garbage collection calendars, annual reports, mapping etc.) through this shop. The opportunity is that fewer printers would be required and an employee would be responsible for ensuring the effective operation of the shop. This concept is in the early stages and will continue to be explored with consultation with the IT department.

Non-Financial Opportunities

Some of the largest opportunities in communication are non-financial in nature. If the City were to be successful in achieving the goals identified in this plan, it is reasonable to expect that; staff and council will be better informed and better equipped to handle questions from the public; there will be less frustration in the community if they see that concerns are being considered and addressed; there will be more confidence in the organization from both from the public and employees.

Of course, success will be dependent on the willingness of employees to participate in the process, continued leadership from senior management about the importance of communications, and continual evaluation of the tools we are using to communicate.

With limited resources it is critical that efforts are focused on the activities that will garner the most impact and that all employees are engaged in the process. Our biggest opportunity therefore are the employees of the City of Prince Albert. If we can get the employees on board with communications, there is a lot more that will be possible than if we simply rely on communications staff to do it.

OUTCOMES AND REPORTING

Measurable indicators of success

Outcome #1 - Proactive Communication

- Increase the number of staff trained to speak with the media
- Increase the number of inquiries handled by the Communications office completed
- Frequency of stories and whether they are negative or positive

Outcome #2 - Engagement

- Increase the number of engagement activities undertaken in a year
- Increase the percentage of stakeholder groups that consider themselves to have a good relationship with the City (survey).

City Image and Brand

- Increase the number of documents converted to new logo

Improve Access to Information

- Increase website visits
- Evaluate effectiveness of City advertising
 - o Ask participants at City events how they heard about the meeting
- Measure the number of email subscribers, followers on social media, web traffic, exposure of social media posts
- Track the number of advertising campaigns done in each year, both small and large scale.

Internal Communication

- Conduct an annual employee survey
 - o Determine the percentage of employees that consider themselves well informed of City issues
 - o Determine the percentage of employees that consider themselves included in the decision making process

CONCLUSION

The City as an organization has a responsibility to communicate with the public and, as noted in the 2015 Strategic Plan, it is incumbent upon the organization to provide information that is relevant, accessible, timely and accurate.

This plan identifies many activities that can be undertaken to achieve communication goals that are important to the overall effectiveness of the organization. In order to be successful in these goals, it will be important that senior management continue to support communications.

Good communication is the responsibility of the entire organization which starts with a senior management team that supports the important role of communications and ends with each employee taking a role in the process. Good communication is not possible without employees that participate in the information sharing process and make it a priority in their own workday.

The role of the Communications Office therefore, is to assist the departments with their communication efforts by helping them to identify what their communication objectives are and by providing advice, support and guidance to ensure successful outcomes. It will also continue to be very important for the Communications Office to evaluate the tools being used to communicate internally and externally so time is not wasted on communication activities that are not having an impact.

This plan is broad in scope and it identifies many ambitious activities for the future. While more staff resources would be ideal to move initiatives forward in a timelier manner, there is some progress that will be possible by focusing attention on priority issues and performing more of a support role to the organization.

APPENDIX A - GOALS PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS

GOAL #1 Encourage a Culture of Proactive Communication

PRIORITIES

1. Improve the organization's ability to anticipate and respond to issues
2. Increase communication skills and enhance the communications capacity of the organization as a whole
3. Build understanding of the organization's communications function in helping to build better relationships
4. Foster a cultural shift so employees understand their role in the issues management process
5. Work with employees and Council earlier on to develop key messages, be more proactive.
6. Establish a unified command so as to manage the message through one central office
7. Through training and behavioural change, improve the communications capacity of employees, better equipping them to interact with key stakeholders and respond to issues more effectively

ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL:

- Provide media and issue management training to spokespeople in the organization
- Make communications the single point of contact for media inquiries
- Implement media monitoring to measure coverage of city issues and effectiveness of media relations
- Develop background information and key messages for employees for large projects.
- Provide training opportunities and resources for employees to improve their communication skills (writing, presentations, etc).
- Better inform employees on the role of Corporate Communications; incorporate more information into employee orientation program
- Host bi-annual meetings with senior leadership to nurture understanding of the communications function.
- Work with the Fire Department to host ongoing emergency operations centre training
- Formalize a Crisis Communication Plan to supplement the Emergency Response Plan
- Develop a media relations policy that includes a protocol for responding to media inquiries for members of City Council and administration.

GOAL #2 Improve Public and Stakeholder Engagement

PRIORITIES

1. Provide support and guidance to Departments in their efforts to engage with the public
2. Better promote opportunities for the public to get involved and provide feedback
3. Increase participation in engagement activities
4. Increase the public's trust that the City genuinely wants input and will take various points of view into consideration.
5. Increase awareness of existing opportunities for public the public to get involved and provide feedback

ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL:

- Explore best practices in public engagement and develop a public engagement strategy to guide the public consultation process and create consistency across the organization
- Research and recommend best practices and options for neighbourhood outreach
- Identify new/alternative opportunities for public engagement that are accessible and convenient to the public including online engagement platforms.
- Support and promote online engagement platform
- Host an annual meeting with major stakeholders in Prince Albert to share priorities and direction for upcoming year
- Take consultation activities out of City Hall to a place that's convenient for the public
- Establish communication channels with local organizations to reach a multitude of stakeholders in a targeted and cost-efficient approach
- Training for communications in how to hold public meetings and best practices in public engagement
- Train employees to select the best engagement strategies to serve their purpose, train employees on how to facilitate them
- Support and encourage the establishment and functioning of neighbourhood planning committees
- Review, update and promote existing social media policy which outlines when employees can initiate and manage new social media on behalf of the City
- Equip employees with tools and guidelines for pursuing social media For example, best practices, dos and don'ts, guidelines for sharing information, etc.
- Create "How to get involved" section of website that lists public engagement opportunities, how to provide feedback, a summary of feedback received, and how the feedback was used. Promote the webpage, generating awareness and encouraging future participation.

GOAL #3 Strengthen the City Image and Establish a City Brand

PRIORITIES

1. Establish a City Brand and Identity that elicits community and organizational pride
2. Promote the positive attributes of the City which will support our economic development efforts and workforce attraction and retention.
3. Ensure consistent use of City logo citywide

ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL

- Reinforce key messages identified in City's strategic plan and build into City communications
- Explore options and begin to plan for community re-branding effort
- Create graphic standards manual, make available to staff and train how to use
- Create style guide for standard city templates (brochures, posters, etc).
- Identify existing materials and convert to standards in style guide
- Identify opportunities to incorporate current branding (i.e. funding projects, partner publications, sponsorships, vehicles, city signage, banners, city documents, promotional material, public notices etc.)
- Create a sign strategy for all City signage in the City
- Centralize all external printing with the Communications Office to ensure consistency in image, brand, messaging and to ensure effective pricing is maintained
- Apply for at least two City awards/honors/recognitions for projects that demonstrate the City's commitment to the principles identified in the Strategic Plan.
- Implement amateur and professional photography programs to expand upon the inventory of marketable photography that represents the City of Prince Albert
- Establish filing system for City photography
- Establish a multi-media asset library of video, photos and other multi-media content to promote the City.

GOAL #4 Improve Access to Information

PRIORITIES:

1. Explore and utilize multiple and maximize existing technologies to enhance the delivery of City services to best communicate with our citizens
2. Explore the establishment of new/emerging and traditional mediums to reach a larger audience.
3. Enhance the City's media relations strategy – Ensure that the City news is covered by local media, increase accurate media coverage of City services and initiatives
4. Provide more information on critical or complex issues through media packages, media briefings and more face-to-face time with key reporters.
5. Consistently identify newsworthy stories and present them in a way that's compelling

ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL:

- Explore best practices in website development and incorporate changes to make information more accessible
- Consider professional website upgrade/redesign
- Develop a content strategy for the website to determine logical navigation and identify gaps in information
- Explore interactive website tools (online forms, photo gallery's, imbedded video, commenting, etc)
- Continue to work with staff to ensure compliance on review content process to keep website information accurate and up-to-date.
- Work with departments to inventory City material and make recommendations for improvement, consolidation or creation of new material
- Continue to engage community via social media outlets – promptly responding to inquiries, provide timely information
- Review existing advertising arrangements and determine if there are new ways to get information out to the public (i.e. is there a new way to approach existing radio spots, incorporate new types of information, etc.)
- Explore and implement new ways to increase exposure of social media posts
- Create print guide to Municipal services that is distributed annually to residents that details municipal amenities and services. Include for new residents to Prince Albert.
- Continue to prepare and distribute Annual Report to clearly communication the City's financial position and success in achieving long term goals
- Continue to prepare and distribute tax notice insert that explains the City's goals for the year and key budget items that will help achieve those goals.
- Identify and translate key city publications
- Create a monthly column/blog from the City Manager
- Collaborate on the development a corporate customer service strategy

- Engage special interest groups in order to better understand citizens interest and concerns
- Use existing city infrastructure to promote programs and services including TVs in facilities, print promotions with cash receipts, inserts in utility bills, display materials at facilities, interior of transit busses (pop up banners, brochure stands) etc.
- Develop a more coordinated approach to the use and storage of email lists, explore new options for email newsletters (mail chimp, constant contact) and ensure compliance with CASL regulations.
- Explore videos as a new means of sharing information
- Identify tradeshow where the City can have a presence to teach the public about the different services of the Departments
- Review signage on main floor of City Hall that directs people for thoroughness and accuracy
- Develop and implement a 5 Year Digital/Interactive Strategy that reviews existing digital assets and identifies new marketing and promotion opportunities in social media (Youtube, Instagram), video, online advertising, etc.

GOAL #5 Improve Internal Communication Flow and Coordination

PRIORITIES:

1. Increase opportunities for employees to share input with senior management
2. Promote and expand existing internal online database of general inquiries/frequently asked questions for employees to find answers to questions (Expand COPA, include updated content regularly)
3. Inform employees of matters affecting them before informing the public
4. Improve operational information sharing
5. Promote the City's mission, vision and core values and ensure that employees understand their role in achieving the vision

ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL:

- Establish internal notification system for informing employees when there is an emergency situation that affects their department/area of responsibility.
- Incorporate COPA Connected into Review Content Process
- Host annual Spring meeting with all-staff and include upcoming projects, employee expectations, etc.
- Continue to host bi-annual out-of-scope staff meetings
- Work with City Manager's Office to host quarterly information sessions for employees to keep themselves informed about City priorities, initiatives, financial position (budget), etc. Record sessions and make them available to employees via webcast.
- Host roundtable discussion for front-line staff and mid-level managers interested in providing feedback on City initiatives
- Host employee events at satellite locations
- Consider hosting routine meetings between City Manager and Department Heads and individual work units to discuss priorities, ideas and future plans.
- Continue to participate in the promotion and coordination of the Employee Awards to encourage a culture that identifies and celebrates accomplishments of City employees.
- Consider a departmental trade show at the City Manager spring orientation to educate employees on what each department does
- Annually develop a list following budget approvals (no later than January) that identifies upcoming projects for the year and circulate internally so all departments are aware and can prepare or assist where applicable.
- Establish a way for information to flow from Managers to City Manager and Council on sensitive topics. An issue may not require Council approval but they should still be informed.
- Develop and implement a process to ensure that all staff are informed of the new policies and procedures and are properly communicated, implemented and monitored for compliance.

- Provide all staff with a basic understanding of other departments and how best to connect the public with the appropriate person to help resolve an inquiry
- Implement an internal communications component to communications plan on projects where there are program changes and prepare “sell sheets” for circulation to all internal and external stakeholders that may be impacted by a program or service change.
- Collaborate with HR and Corporate Information Manager on social media protocol that outlines appropriate conduct for employees on their personal social media accounts.

ⁱ City of Victoria, “Foundations for Success: A strategy to Improve Civic Engagement at the City of Victoria,” page 3.

ⁱⁱ Newfoundland Labrador Office of Public Engagement, “Public Engagement Guide,” http://ope.gov.nl.ca/publications/pdf/OPE_PEGuide.pdf , page, 14.

ⁱⁱⁱ Newfoundland Labrador Office of Public Engagement, “Public Engagement Guide,” http://ope.gov.nl.ca/publications/pdf/OPE_PEGuide.pdf , page, 2.