

CITY OF VAUGHAN

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF OCTOBER 29, 2013

Item 1, Report No. 45, of the Committee of the Whole (Working Session), which was adopted, as amended, by the Council of the City of Vaughan on October 29, 2013, as follows:

By approving the following:

That Communication C4 from the Director of Corporate Communications, dated October 29, 2013, be received.

1 CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The Committee of the Whole (Working Session) recommends:

- 1) That the recommendation contained in the following report of the Director of Corporate Communications, dated October 22, 2013, be approved;**
- 2) That staff report to the October 29, 2013 Council meeting with an organizational chart for Corporate Communications and comments from Information and Technology Management (ITM) on the use of Vaughan On Line (VOL); and**
- 3) That the following Communications be received:**
 - C1. Presentation material, entitled, “*The Way Forward*”, and**
 - C2. Strategy Report, entitled, “*The Way Forward: A Corporate Communications Strategy*”.**

Recommendation

The Director of Corporate Communications, in consultation with the Executive Director, Office of the City Manager, recommends:

- 1. That the presentation and strategy report titled: “The Way Forward: A Corporate Communications Strategy” be received;**
- 2. That the Strategy positioning the City of Vaughan as a two-way communications organization – both internally and externally, be adopted;**
- 3. That Corporate Communication staff convene a meeting with internal stakeholders to discuss the goals and objectives outlined in the strategy, the approach, and the Phase One work plan; and**
- 4. That the staffing and organization of the department be realigned as to provide best-in-class corporate communication services which will maximize the opportunity to fulfill the strategy’s goals, objectives and actions, and;**
- 5. That any financial requirements to implement the strategy be considered during the annual budget process.**

Contribution to Sustainability

The Corporate Communications Strategy supports a key component of the Community Sustainability and Environmental Master Plan to create a vibrant community through civic engagement.

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Economic Impact

Elements of the strategy are reliant upon two Additional Resource Requests (ARR) that have been submitted for 2014. The first ARR is a conversion of a vacant senior position into two junior level communications co-ordinators, who will assist in the delivery of the many new tactics and communications initiatives that are outlined in the strategy. The second ARR for a web content manager, which was previously recognized for potential funding in 2016, is being requested to move to 2014 to support the delivery of the strategy. As outlined in the strategy, the demand from stakeholders for increased web and online communications initiatives has increased, and will continue to increase in the near future. The City's corporate website is essential to the operations of departments within the City and is the largest communications channel available, receiving on average 100,000 visits per month. The web content manager will assist all departments across the organization in ensuring web content is current and concise, as well as manage the delivery of the other online communication channels within the strategy.

Potential costs of Phase Two may include programming dollars and additional personnel. Costs will be determined when the analysis of Phase One of the Strategy is complete. At that time, new funding requirements will be requested through the City's annual budget process.

Communications Plan

The Corporate Communications Department will inform other City departments and key stakeholders about the Communications Strategy's strategic purpose and direction through presentations to teams, staff and senior management after it is approved by Council.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to present to Council a multi-phased communications strategy that will align corporate communications to the Vaughan Vision 2020 strategic plan and our corporate values.

Background/Analysis

In 2002, the mandate of the then newly-established Corporate Communications Department was presented in the strategic plan, *Mastering Communications Excellence*, approved by Council on June 24, 2002. Over time, the department's goals and objectives did not evolve to meet the challenges of a rapidly-changing communications landscape and the growth of the City.

The attached Corporate Communications Strategy is the first comprehensive and multi-phased communications strategy for the City of Vaughan. This document serves as a model of how best to support the delivery of two-way communications between the City of Vaughan and its citizens.

The goals and objectives outlined in the strategy align communications to the Vaughan Vision 2020 strategic plan and our corporate values. In addition, it supports a positive internal corporate culture, while, at the same time, turning the communications research collected into actionable items.

The role of communications in municipal government continues to quickly change and evolve. With the wide adoption of new technologies, the communications process has progressed beyond traditional print and broadcast methods to include communications channels that are more responsive, accessible and broadly-based. This Communications Strategy serves as a working framework for understanding and responding to these changes.

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The main objectives for developing a communications strategy are:

- to provide a framework for the Corporation on how the City can best exchange information with the public;
- to maximize the use of technology and build upon the benefits of social media and new media channels (digital, web, mobile); and
- to align communications channels with the way citizens prefer to communicate with local government.

Based on industry best practices, market research and current communication trends, as well as input from internal and external stakeholders, the Communications Strategy outlines a new vision, framework and plan that will guide the communications function at the City of Vaughan for the next two years.

This Communications Strategy will be executed in a multi-phased approach. Phase One will begin in 2013 and conclude in 2015 and will include several actionable items that will be employed to reach the goals and objectives outlined in the plan.

Near the conclusion of Phase One, an analysis of communications measurements will help form the next phase of this strategy – the Five-Year Communications Plan. This plan will map out the future framework and vision of the City of Vaughan communications function, building on the success of the 2013-2015 Communications Strategy.

The Communications Strategy has been developed with:

- Public input through a survey on preferred methods of communications
- Input from Council and senior management
- A departmental review and SWOT analysis, including an environmental scan of best practices in municipal government communications
- Review of citizen surveys to identify issues impacting the City

The purpose of the Corporate Communications Strategy is to identify the opportunities and actions that will lead to more robust and citizen-focused communications to strengthen the City's brand and reputation. The following priorities have been identified:

- Promote the City brand and build credibility
- Engage the community through citizen-focused communications
- Develop an engaged and informed workforce

At the City of Vaughan, the emphasis on open, transparent and accessible government is supported by the City's commitment to two-way communications. This Communications Strategy provides the process for evaluating and employing communications products and services that effectively engage the larger community and positions the Corporate Communications department to successfully deliver on its mandate.

A strategic approach to communications requires the alignment of communications activities and outputs with the overall strategic goals of the Corporation.

These efforts are directly aligned with the Vaughan Vision 2020 strategic plan and its vision statement to realize "A city of choice that promotes diversity, innovation and opportunity for all citizens, fostering a vibrant community life that is inclusive, progressive, environmentally responsible and sustainable."

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Communications Research

Communications research was conducted using a four-step approach, including both quantitative and qualitative data-gathering, and consisted of the following components:

- Online survey – Corporate Communications conducted an online survey to collect data and satisfaction levels. 752 surveys submitted.
- Telephone poll (automated) – 1,000 automated calls were placed, polling residents on their communications preferences.
- Focus group – Residents participated in a workshop as a method of collecting qualitative and quantitative data on communications tools and practices. 10 members (2-hour session).
- Conference call – A conference call was held to further discuss topics raised by the focus group. 10 participants.

In addition to these components, surveys were distributed at Vaughan festivals: Maple Fest, Thornhill Village Festival, Binder Twine and Woodbridge Fall Fair.

Results

Survey results indicate that most residents, across all age groups, are comfortable with technology and mobile devices and prefer increased electronic formats for information delivery along with supporting printed materials.

The research confirms that there is an opportunity and a need to move toward more technically advanced communications methods. Residents want to be informed and expect the City to effectively provide information in a format that makes it easy for them to engage where and when it is convenient for them.

- Nearly 6-in-10 (58 per cent) feel that there is a need for a more effective communications strategy – one that is more engaging and relevant to the residents.
- There appears to be a strong need for information about everything that is going on in the city, indicating that the existing efforts of disseminating information are not in line with residents' expectations.
- 89 per cent of residents feel it is important to receive regular communications from the City.
- Residents would like to see more social media (Twitter, Facebook).
- Mobile apps and a mobile friendly website are important. People are busy and want the ability to connect anywhere and at any time.
- Although electronic communications are preferred, hard copy is still an important component in the mix of communications.
- Top topics of interest are City programs and services, news, events, Recreation and Culture updates, and building projects and new development.
- Citizen engagement and inclusivity are important.

Devices and Technology

IN VAUGHAN:

- 72 per cent* of Vaughan respondents use desktop or laptop computers most frequently
- 38 per cent* of Vaughan respondents use smartphone and mobile apps most frequently
- 94 per cent* of respondents have the internet at home
- 1.5 million visits to the City's website annually

** Results collected through Communications research conducted in Aug-Sept 2013*

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ACROSS CANADA:

- 86 per cent of Canadians have internet access
- 37 per cent now have mobile internet, compared to 5% in 2001
- 95 per cent under 55 years of age have internet access, 47% have mobile access
- 67 per cent over 55 years of age have internet access, 16% have mobile access
- 92 per cent of Canadians have sought news from a computer
- Only 7 per cent of Canadians currently own a computer tablet
- Smartphone owners spend on average 2.5 hours a day on their mobile device
- 31 per cent of Canadians consider themselves active social media users
- 43 per cent find out about news and current events via social media/social networking

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020 Strategic Plan

The attached Corporate Communications Strategy is aligned with the City's strategic plan in demonstrating leadership and promoting effective governance by strengthening the City's image and identity through effective communications with City stakeholders.

Regional Implications

This strategy will allow us to better connect and share information with our regional and municipal stakeholders.

Conclusion

This Communications Strategy marks a new beginning for the City of Vaughan's Corporate Communications department. It sets out – for the first time – a comprehensive approach for the City to engage in two-way communications with residents that is based on stakeholder feedback, best practices, market research and communications trends.

To achieve this mission, the department is positioning itself to take a giant LEAP – Lead, Engage, Action and Position – into the future. These goals will guide the department as it moves forward, while focusing on four core principles: consistency, citizen-focused communications, continuous improvement and feedback, and support of the corporate culture.

This strategy also reflects the key objectives of providing a framework that will allow the City to best exchange information with the public, maximizing the use of technology while building upon the benefits of social and new media channels, and employing the communications tools that Vaughan residents prefer.

One of the key changes outlined in the strategy is a new “team” approach to communications. The department will be reorganized by areas of focus and specialty: media relations, eCommunications, marketing, and strategic communications. As well, communications specialists will be assigned to specific commissions in an effort to more effectively identify emerging issues and to keep the public informed on what matters to them.

A multi-phased approach will be employed to implement this multi-year strategy which will allow Corporate Communications to effectively measure its success. These results will be used, in part, to set the future direction of Corporate Communications through Phase Two, a Five-year Communications Plan beginning in 2015. Measurement is central to the success of this strategy and each action item will be measured semi-annually to ensure the team is on track to achieve its goals and objectives. Corporate Communications is committed to achieving the City's strategic goals, and will analyze measurement results to ensure it is meeting this commitment.

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This strategy represents a leap from the past for Corporate Communications. It outlines a new plan for supporting the mandate to deliver two-way communications between the City and its residents, while supporting the Corporation's commitment to open, transparent and accessible government.

Attachments

Attachment #1: 2013-15 Corporate Communications Strategy

Report prepared by:

Gary Williams, Director, Corporate Communications

(A copy of the attachments referred to in the foregoing have been forwarded to each Member of Council and a copy thereof is also on file in the office of the City Clerk.)