

**THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF GEORGINA**

**REPORT NO. SI-2024-0007**

**FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF COUNCIL**

**April 10, 2024**

**SUBJECT: COMMUNICATIONS PLAN UPDATE**

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**1. RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1. That Council receive Report No. SI-2024-0007 prepared by the Communications Division dated April 10, 2024 respecting communications highlights of 2023 and the 2023-2026 Communications Plan.**
- 2. That Council approve the policy titled “Public Notice Policy.”**
- 3. That the Communications Division continues to provide updates on the Communications Plan on an annual basis.**

**2. PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this report is to present an update on the Town’s 2023-2026 Communications Plan with milestones achieved in 2023, and a look ahead to 2024.

**3. BACKGROUND:**

Council endorsed the corporation’s first communications plan in July 2018. The plan was updated in 2023 to include the following strategies:

- External communications
- Community engagement
- Internal communications and efficiencies
- Issues Management

On an annual basis, the Communications Division reports to Council on progress being made under the plan as well as other highlights.

**4. ANALYSIS:**

We live in a digitally connected world where expectations are high for communicating quickly, accurately and through multiple channels simultaneously. Information is everywhere and comes from a variety of sources – online, social media platforms, broadcast and print. The Communications Division is responsive to the needs of its many stakeholders both internally and externally. It works to connect residents, staff, media, tourists and businesses with the information they need, when they need it.

### **2023 Communications highlights**

The Division has made significant progress with a number of achievements in 2023 including:

- Advertorials published in the Georgina Advocate
  - 2023 budget advertorial
  - Spring advertorial
  - Two Building Georgina advertorials
- Continued ongoing commitment to Truth and Reconciliation and strengthening relations with the Chippewas of Georgina Island
  - Supported Truth and Reconciliation flag raising event
  - Facilitated Truth and Reconciliation staff training with band member
  - Led the Town booth at the annual Pow Wow
- The corporate website saw 1.57 million views in 2023
- Automation for the closures and disruptions map
- Chatbot had 3,898 interactions
- Launched the interactive trails map
- eNews followers grew by 18 per cent
- Facilitated the 2024 Waste and Recycling calendar, including a new single-page two-sided calendar that went to all residents
- Supported the launch of the new Economic Development website – Choose Georgina
- Issued the annual Community Snapshot
- Issued 35 media releases and 32 Council Highlights
- Published 37 Town Pages in the Georgina Advocate until Metroland ceased production of all weekly newspapers in September 2023
- 2023 major communications campaigns
  - ‘Georgina’s Game Plan’ was launched to obtain public feedback and develop a plan to revitalize the Town’s Strategic Plan
  - 2024 Budget
  - Programs and events including SnoFest and Canada Day
  - Keswick Cemetery Master Plan

- Keswick Parkette revitalization
- Lake Drive Assessment
- New corporate strategic plan
- Off-road vehicles
- Pefferlaw amenities including Community Garden, Sports Zone and Pump Track and Skatepark
- Pioneer cemeteries management plan
- Pigeons in residential areas
- Tree Preservation Policy
- Udora Roads project
- Winter maintenance campaign
- 2023 videos
  - Ghost at Pioneer Village (6,000+ views)
  - Jack report a problem video (9,000 views)
  - MURC time-lapse video (11,200 views)
  - Truth and Reconciliation video (13,000+ views)
  - MURC sneak peek video (30K+ views)
- In 2023, there was a 6.5 per cent increase from 2022 in social media followers across all channels (Town Facebook, ROC Facebook, Town Twitter, ROC Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn) – this included 14 per cent increase in LinkedIn and a 12 per cent increase in Instagram.
  - 30K+ followers for Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram and LinkedIn
  - Average of 342 social media posts per month throughout 2023.

**The Communications Division played a vital role in promoting Building Georgina, in particular the new Multi-Use Recreation Complex (MURC)**

Throughout 2023, the Communications Division provided updates on its communications channels about a number of capital projects within the Building Georgina campaign. This included information about the Pefferlaw outdoor recreation amenities, the Keswick Parkette revitalization and the construction and opening of the new Multi-Use Recreation Complex. The division produced a sneak peek video of the MURC which has more than 30,000 views and a time-lapse video with more than 11,000 views.

**Communications Division wins three MarCom awards**

The Communications Division captured three MarCom awards in 2023. It won a platinum award for Georgina's Game Plan – a creative marketing campaign for the Town's Strategic Plan in the category of Strategic Communication, Integrated Marketing. The division also received a gold award for the 2023 National Day for Truth and Reconciliation video in the category of Web Video, Event; and, an Honourable Mention for its sneak peek video of the new Multi-use Recreation Complex in the category of Social Media Video. The MarCom Awards are an international creative competition from the Association of Marketing and Communication Professionals that recognizes outstanding achievement by marketing and communication professionals that exceed a high standard of excellence. MarCom Awards are among the largest, most respected international creative competitions.

**In September 2023, Metroland Media stops production of community newspapers. This impacted the Georgina Advocate, the community's print option for statutory notices and the weekly Town Page.**

### **Public notices**

In addition to the Georgina Advocate, numerous other community newspapers in Ontario were moved from printed to digital publication only. Many municipalities in Ontario, including those in York Region, are now revising their respective public notice policies accordingly.

Section 270 (1) of the *Municipal Act* requires municipalities to adopt and maintain a policy outlining the circumstances in which the municipality shall provide notice to the public, and the form, manner, and times such notice shall be given.

The Town's current Notice Policy was adopted by Council in 2007. The current policy contains references to certain notices being provided through a newspaper with general circulation in the Town. Staff are proposing an updated Notice Policy to address changes to how we communicate with our residents and provide notice required by various pieces of legislation. The draft updated Notice Policy is attached as 'Attachment 1' to this report.

Due to the discontinuation of printed editions of the Georgina Advocate, the updated Notice Policy has been drafted to allow for notices previously provided via newspaper to be posted on the Town's website, under the "Town Public Notices" webpage. Additionally, Staff recommend leveraging the Town's Corporate social media accounts for posting of public notice information for additional coverage and higher visibility, as required.

### **Planning Notices**

The ceasing of the Georgina Advocate print publication has had implications on the Town's means and ability to fulfill its statutory notice requirements under the Planning Act since the former Town Page of the newspaper was historically used to advertise statutory notices for a variety of planning matters including complete applications, public meetings and open houses, and decisions on development applications. Staff have been able to revise our statutory notice procedures to comply with the Planning Act in the case of site-specific development applications through a combination of on-site signage and direct mailouts. Unfortunately, these alternative measures are not practical or feasible in the case of broader planning initiatives such as an Official Plan Review, a new Comprehensive Zoning By-law, or area specific general amendments to the Zoning By-law.

The Planning Act establishes enabling provisions to adopt alternative notice procedures related to planning applications such as Official Plan Amendments, Zoning By-law Amendments and Plans of Subdivision; however, to do so, the Official Plan must specifically contain policies that set out those alternative measures for informing and obtaining the views of the public. In the absence of legislative changes by the province to update the statutory notice requirements of the Planning Act, staff will need to initiate a general amendment to the Town's Official Plan seeking to adopt alternative notice procedures that do not rely on a newspaper. As this project was not included in the Planning Policy Division's 2024 Work Plan, a reassessment of priorities will need to occur in order to advance a Town-initiated Official Plan Amendment this year.

**In addition to daily communications operations, the Communications Division will be leading or supporting a number of initiatives coming forward in 2024 including:**

- The opening of the new Multi-Use Recreation Complex
- Development of a social media strategy and dashboard
- Continued enhancements to the website focussed on the user experience
- On-going work to strengthen the partnership with the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation including leading the Town's presence at the annual Pow Wow and supporting Truth and Reconciliation awareness efforts

- Communications support of major campaigns including – Waterfront Parks Master Plan, 2025 Budget, projects under Building Georgina (replacement Civic Centre), Online Services
- Pilot - launching a hard copy seasonal newsletter, Georgina Matters, that will be delivered to residents. With the loss of the weekly Town Page, the Communications Division is exploring new ways to reach residents. Georgina Matters provides updates on Town programs, services and projects in a condensed high level format, directing readers to the website for more info. In some circumstances, the newsletter could serve as a vehicle for legislative notices.

**5. RELATIONSHIP WITH CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN:**

This report addresses the following Town of Georgina corporate strategic goals:

**Delivering service excellence** The Communications Division provides both internal and external service to a variety of stakeholders.

**Diversifying our local economy** Promote Town visibility and identity

**Creating a vibrant, healthy and safe community for all**  
Communication, engagement, collaboration and partnerships

**6. FINANCIAL AND BUDGETARY IMPACTS:**

Financial considerations can be absorbed under the current operating budget.

**7. CONCLUSION:**

The Town recognizes the delivery of effective communications to residents, businesses, staff and visitors as a high priority. The Communications Division will continue to deliver on items set out in the 2023-2026 Communications Plan with the goal of engaging with the community and generating awareness of Town programs, services and initiatives. The plan is a living document and will be adjusted in response to the needs of its audience.

Prepared by:

Recommended by:

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Approved by:

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Attachment 1: Notice Policy