

2025 -2027

Municipality of Huron East

Corporate Communications Plan & Strategy



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Executive summary

The Municipality of Huron East recognizes the urgent need to enhance and refresh its communication strategies at a pivotal moment. Residents and stakeholders are expressing a demand for timely information in a manner that best suits their needs, including 24/7 access to information, opportunities for input, and improved internal processes to ensure effective communication with stakeholders.

The Municipality is experiencing benefits from a reorganization of its Corporate Communications Division, with a stronger emphasis on strategic and consistent messaging, as well as heightened interest in both internal engagement and external outreach. Despite these significant advancements, there remains an opportunity for more frequent, transparent, and open communication.

This Communications Plan aims to inject clear strategic direction into the Municipality's communication initiatives, providing actionable tactics that will help target limited time and budget resources to the most relevant channels. This effort begins with a commitment from all levels of municipal staff to achieve meaningful results.

The Communications Plan must address communication at every level, seizing opportunities to position the Municipality as a proactive and welcoming community. Initiatives such as revitalized internal communications and departmental communications plans will be key steps in this process. The Plan anticipates a carefully implemented and monitored tactical strategy overseen by the Communications Coordinator, supported by the expertise and skills of the Municipality's existing departments.

Clearly defined responsibilities and ongoing collaboration with community partners will be vital for the success of this program. Strengthening internal relationships, engaging with local media, harnessing resident enthusiasm, and leveraging community resources and connectivity will ensure that the Municipality of Huron East's communications remain accountable, affordable, and accessible.

This Plan should be viewed as a living document, particularly in the face of new growth and service disruptions which may significantly alter the messages and activities of the department or the Municipality. Strategies and tactics are included to measure performance, assess public perception, and facilitate dialogue with stakeholders to continually review and refine the Communications Plan.

This Communications Plan does not encompass the activities of the Economic Development Department, as these operations have distinct communication initiatives tailored to different target audiences and messaging.

Introduction

The Strategic Action Plan for the Municipality of Huron East (May 2024) outlines specific and focused goals and actions to ensure the community remains resilient and prepared for the future. Among residents, communication ranks as the fourth most important aspect, achieving an average importance score of 4.1 out of 5.

Communication falls under Goal 4: Working Together, which encompasses:

4.1 Enhancing communications with our residents

1. Create a one-stop “Huron East What’s Up” page one click away from the Municipal website homepage where residents have access to important community events, infrastructure projects, Council decisions and important upcoming Council agenda items. Other media channels (newspaper, radio, social media) will link/direct residents to this page. (2024, Q2)
2. Establish a one-page Council Meeting Summary and Upcoming Agenda items that can be linked to the “Huron East What’s Up” page as well as pushed out to email subscribers. (2024, Q2)
3. Engage an external company to work with staff to complete a branding project to establish a consistent Huron East brand across all programs, projects, and facilities. (The primary Huron East brand/logo can include secondary branding for the traditional communities within Huron East.) (2024, Q4)

4.3 Recognizing and rewarding hard work and excellence among our employees

1. Continue and improve the bi-annual CAO-led Town Hall staff sessions to provide important updates, progress on strategic priorities, recognize staff excellence, and provide an opportunity for staff questions. (ongoing)
2. Create a Department Spotlight showcasing the important work staff are doing to make Huron East a great place to live. The link to the Department Spotlight should be included on the “Huron East What’s Up” page, pushed out on social media and emailed to all staff. (2025, Q1)
3. Establish a “Huron East Rocks” committee with the mandate to establish and plan staff appreciation/team-building events. (2024, Q3)

Strategic alignment

This plan supports:

- **Strategic Action Plan (2024–2027):** Focused on infrastructure, economic growth, and community well-being.
- **Community Improvement Plan (2024):** Offers financial incentives for façade, signage, accessibility, and agri-business innovation.
- **Accessibility Plan:** Aligns with AODA standards and promotes barrier-free access.
- **Public Engagement Platform (H.E.A.R.):** Encourages resident input on municipal projects and services
- **Economic Development Plan:** Communications to assist with enhancing business opportunities, supports local entrepreneurs, and fosters sustainable growth through targeted initiatives and partnerships.

Roles and responsibilities

- **Communications Coordinator:** Lead strategy, content creation.
- **Department Heads:** Provide updates and coordinate messaging.
- **Council Members:** Engage with residents and promote initiatives.
- **Community Partners:** Amplify messaging and gather feedback.

The importance of a communications plan

The municipal Communications Division plays a crucial role in guiding staff to provide clear, accurate, and timely information to fellow employees, community members, and key stakeholders, ultimately benefiting residents. This three-year plan outlines specific strategies and tactics to ensure the Municipality of Huron East achieves the highest level of success by focusing its resources on the planning, implementation, and sustainability of strategic communications both internally and externally.

The aim of this Communications Plan is to enhance awareness of municipal services, news, and programs, highlighting their value to the community. A key aspect of this initiative will be to deliver relevant, comprehensive, and impactful information while engaging and collaborating with residents and stakeholders in organizational decision-making.

Communication and services (current and anticipated)

The Corporate Communications of the Municipality of Huron East is set to embark on a successful realignment, aiming to deliver a comprehensive range of services as outlined below.

While there are instances where Communications leads and solely owns a project, frequently it collaborates with various departments, providing limited assistance on an as-needed basis.

Key areas of focus

- **Support:** Offer day-to-day assistance for media relations, issues, etc., serving as a leader and consultant for staff to guide communications.
- **Graphic design:** Create materials in-house or outsource to pre-approved vendors as necessary, while developing overarching templates.
- **Printing:** Work with pre-approved vendors to facilitate large-scale or professional printing needs.
- **Social media:** Manage and populate the Municipality's social media platforms, establish guidelines, and oversee broader social media channels.
- **Event (departmental) assistance:** Provide promotional support for both departmental and external events.
- **Issues management & crisis:** Offer communications support during crises.
- **Media liaison:** Serve as the primary contact in conflict or crisis situations and in most secondary circumstances.
- **Partner liaison:** Often, the main contact for partners at the Municipality is not Communications, but rather a departmental liaison. These existing relationships should remain intact, with Communications offering support, messaging, and informational materials to the staff contact, along with organizing annual or bi-annual meetings that include Communications, the staff member, and the partner.
- **Meeting attendance:** When Communications acts as a primary liaison, committee member, or project coordinator, attending or chairing developmental or collaborative meetings is often required.
- **Training:** Develop and conduct regular workshops for staff on key topics (media training, template usage, social media, etc.) and provide one-on-one training for essential staff as needed.
- **Management:** Periodically review produced materials and engage with departments and individuals to address concerns and explore opportunities for future productions.

Communications strategy

Vision

Create a well-informed and engaged community where every resident has transparent and equitable access to municipal information. Strengthen trust and collaboration between the municipality and its residents by using effective and inclusive communication channels.

Objectives

1. Deliver strong, strategic communication leadership and support to municipal staff and departments.
2. Maintain a resourceful and skilled communications approach.
3. Prioritize informing municipal staff about issues and new information first.
4. Provide information that is timely, accurate, clear, accessible, and responsive.
5. Utilize a mix of traditional and modern technological methods to ensure easier access and cost-effective delivery.
6. Achieve consistency in identity and voice throughout communications.

Audience

Internal

- **Council:** The Mayor and Council serve as the community's spokespersons and require clear and concise information and messaging for effective governance and leadership. Additionally, Council members may also participate in other boards or roles (e.g., business owners), serving as trusted channels or ambassadors.
- **Municipal staff (including volunteers):** Communication must primarily target internal municipal staff, as they are the brand and communication ambassadors, acting as the front-line personnel when other audiences reach out to the Municipality for information. Communication with staff must be clear, concise, and frequent.

Community at large

- **Residents:**
 - **Established:** Long-standing community members and multi-generational families respond positively to communications that resonate with traditional and trusted channels. Some segments of this group may also appreciate more innovative communication methods.
 - **New:** There is an opportunity to engage new or recently-returned residents by introducing more progressive methodologies, as they often bring fresh ideas and approaches.

- **Business (General):** Through testimonials, case studies, and their participation in various communications and events, established businesses can showcase their confidence and success within the Municipality. Therefore, understanding the Municipality's vision and communication goals is crucial. Additionally, encouraging their active involvement in Municipality marketing initiatives will foster a sense of ownership and loyalty to the community, ideally leading to their permanent presence.
- **Business (Downtown):** Given the close-knit nature of downtown businesses, particularly within the BIA, personalized communications from the Municipality are essential. These interactions should promote collaboration and allow for ample feedback. This audience possesses a strong sense of ownership and community spirit.
- **Visitors:** The Municipality of Huron East warmly welcomes a diverse array of individuals, from outdoor enthusiasts and history buffs to those who enjoy delightful shopping experiences. While the main audience usually lives within a 2-3 hour travel distance, this wide-ranging group can be successfully engaged through tailored communication channels and strategic partnerships.

Influencers

- **Media:** Local and regional reporters have a significant impact on public understanding and perception. Cultivating trusted relationships with local media should remain a fundamental aspect of effective communication strategies.
 - Both of the local papers serves various needs and all should be considered for placement of press releases and other Municipal news:
 - The Huron Citizen
 - Seaforth Huron Expositor
 - Additional publications, such as the Mitchell Advocate, Clinton News Record, Exeter Lakeshore Times Advance, and the Listowel Banner are not top resources by target audiences when seeking municipal information.
 - While radio should be included in standard media release lists, continued and significant effort to engage with audiences via radio is not recommended:
 - Country 104.9
 - CKNX, AM920
 - Additional noted stations, such as MYFM Exeter/Grand Bend, 94.5 Cool FM, and 101.7 The One are not top resources by target audiences when seeking municipal information.

Organizations/Associations/Institutions

There are additional communication and partnership opportunities with local school boards, churches, sports groups, health service organizations, social services, and other administrative bodies. These typically strong community supporters are often receptive to the benefits of collaboration and are well-connected. However, they tend to respond more favorably to personalized outreach rather than generic communication efforts.

Overarching strategic directions

The vision for communications in the Municipality of Huron East is centered around a proactive, community-oriented, personable, and engaging approach. The new direction shifts from a distant delivery of messages to a more conversational, interactive, and open style.

- **Prioritize electronic communications while retaining traditional methods:** Online communication is preferred and expected to gain even more acceptance, yet traditional methods remain vital for certain residents. Engage citizens through the website, email blasts, social media, and more, while ensuring essential corporate information is also available through traditional print channels.
- **Emphasize traditional public and media relations over paid advertising:** A skilled media relations professional can achieve greater objectivity and broader coverage than even a substantial advertising budget could provide.
- **Centralize communications whenever possible:** Aim to centralize all essential communications planning and execution, adhering to established brand guidelines and templates. Standardized communications create best practice examples, ensuring consistency in structure, appearance, and tone, which helps minimize confusion or missed information among audiences.
- **Plan for sustained, strategic, and proactive communications:** Recognize ongoing communications as a key responsibility for all participants in a program or campaign, clearly defining what each person can contribute.
- **Implement layered communication:** Offer various content layers, from concise Facebook posts and media advisories to comprehensive online briefs and additional background materials. This approach allows audiences to control their engagement, preventing information overload while catering to individual preferences for accessing information.
- **Cultivate a distinct brand voice/identity:** There is an opportunity to fully embrace a welcoming, collaborative (“we”) and “charming” personality in communications to attract and engage both internal and external audiences. This can be fun and playful, provided it remains honest and respectful.
- **Improve internal communications:** Ensure that internal stakeholders are not the last to receive important updates. These individuals are ambassadors and can serve as an army of communicators equipped with timely information.

Key messages

The Municipality of Huron East is dedicated to delivering essential service information to its key audiences with transparency and clarity. By combining traditional and modern communication methods, we commit to providing regular, informative updates that ensure accuracy and accessibility for all. Our approach centers on fostering a collaborative community, offering various opportunities for resident engagement and input into municipal decisions. With a comprehensive communication strategy, we aim to reflect the community's needs while maintaining proactive connections with partners.

The Communications Coordinator will play a pivotal role in enhancing these efforts, offering strategic guidance and communication services that allow municipal staff to focus on delivering outstanding services. This strategic approach ensures that all staff are well-informed and equipped to act as knowledgeable community ambassadors.

The use of 'we' and 'our' statements is intended to support a friendly and inclusive tone.

- The Municipality of Huron East is committed to sharing essential and core service information with all key audiences.
 - We will maintain **openness and transparency** through proactive and frequent communications.
 - We will provide clear and informative updates on municipal programs and services by utilizing a mix of traditional and modern technology methods.
 - We will ensure the accuracy of the information presented and clearly indicate where additional details and ongoing updates can be accessed.
- **Engagement** will be the foundation of the Municipality of Huron East's communication efforts to foster a collaborative and connected community.
 - We will offer continuous and varied opportunities for residents and other key audiences to engage and contribute to municipal operational decisions.
 - We will create and implement a communication strategy that prioritizes resident engagement and input.
 - We will proactively connect with all key partners to ensure that our municipal planning efforts are comprehensive and truly reflect the needs of our community.
- The **Communications Coordinator** of the Municipality of Huron East will assist and enhance the initiatives of municipal staff to provide outstanding services.
 - Communications Coordinator will offer strategic planning and guidance, along with a full spectrum of communication services, allowing municipal staff to concentrate on service delivery.
 - Our initiatives will be thoughtfully planned and efficiently executed to maximize available resources and staff time.
 - We will keep department staff informed and updated on broader municipal programs and initiatives, enabling them to serve as knowledgeable ambassadors within the community.

Brand guidelines - key messages and calls-to-action

Communications is committed to adhering to the brand guidelines developed in November 2024, ensuring consistency and clarity in all our communications. These guidelines are designed to reflect our values and identity, guiding us in presenting a cohesive message that resonates with our community and beyond. By following these principles, we aim to maintain a strong, recognizable brand that embodies the essence of Huron East.

Huron East: A Small Town with a Comfortable Lifestyle

With affordable living and convenient access to larger urban centers, residents find a perfect balance between rural charm and modern amenities.

A Thriving Municipality Embracing Growth

Huron East embraces growth while staying true to its roots, showcasing the potential for investment and development in agriculture and services.

A True Multi-Generational Community

In Huron East, residents find a home they can grow in and with. Residents move through life's milestones surrounded by a supportive community and all the opportunities needed to succeed.

Community and Hospitality Await You in Huron East

Huron East is an inclusive community welcoming everyone. With a strong sense of togetherness and community spirit, it is an ideal place to visit or settle down.

NOTE: Please refer to the full Brand Guide for additional details on visual elements, tone of voice, and logo usage to ensure all communications align seamlessly with the municipality's established identity.

Issues management

Effective issues management is essential for maintaining public trust and organizational stability within municipalities. By proactively identifying, assessing, and responding to emerging concerns, municipal teams can minimize risk and ensure clear, consistent communication. This framework outlines a structured approach to predicting potential issues, evaluating their impact, and executing strategic responses, empowering staff to act confidently and collaboratively in the face of challenges.

Predicting issues

- “Potential issues” should be included on the agenda at municipal executive team meetings at least once a month, where they will be addressed and next steps determined.
- The Communications Coordinator should regularly meet with management supports to monitor and discuss potential issues, as well as identify cyclical concerns on a communications event calendar.
- Review Council agendas prior to meetings to pinpoint possible issues.
- Keep an eye on local media, websites, and blogs.

Assessing issues

- For low-risk issues, the department should review and discuss them, developing an associated communications plan.
- Medium or high-risk issues must be addressed by the CAO, who will analyze the municipality's risk from a communications standpoint, create a specific strategy, and communicate with Council.
- Plans should encompass the issue's history and background, a list of stakeholders, relevant statistics and facts to clarify the situation, an outline of threats and opportunities, and a forecast of potential scenarios and municipal actions. For high-risk issues, this preparation should involve Communications Coordinator/CAO in collaboration with the relevant department. For low-risk issues, the relevant department should handle preparation, with the Communications Coordinator providing support as needed.

Acting on issues

- Generally, unless directed otherwise by the CAO, staff should be informed of the issue, and appropriate messages and responses should be communicated.
- Public notifications should take the form of targeted media, such as news releases, advertisements, posted flyers, and content in existing channels like newsletters.
- For critical issues, a municipal hall or public meeting should be organized and publicized.
- When necessary, media contact initiated by the municipality will rely on factual information, emphasizing the municipality's key messaging determined with key players.
- Continuous monitoring of the issue is essential. A concluding report (for internal review) assessing the strengths, weaknesses, and overall effectiveness of the communications plan should be prepared for future reference.

Official spokespersons of the Municipality

- At any time, the Mayor serves as the voice of the municipality, or their designate, or the CAO, as agreed upon by one or more of these individuals.
- For most other matters, such as regular services, events, and awards, a senior department content expert will be designated as the media contact for further information or discussion.
- General inbound media inquiries should be directed to the Communications Coordinator or designated staff in their absence.

Social media

Social Media Policy development

Establish a clear internal policy to guide all social media activity:

- **Tone and voice:** Friendly, informative, and community-focused.
- **Content approval:** Define who approves posts and responses.
- **Crisis protocols:** Outline steps for handling negative feedback or misinformation.
- **Privacy and permissions:** Ensure consent for photos/videos of individuals.
- **Accessibility:** Use alt text for images and plain language for clarity.

Monitoring and analytics

Use tools like Meta Business Suite, Google Analytics, or third-party platforms to:

- **Track engagement:** Reach and follower growth.
- **Identify trends:** What types of posts perform best (e.g., infrastructure updates, community events).
- **Respond promptly:** Monitor comments and messages for timely replies. Aim for responding to social media messages and comments within two hours. If waiting for an answer from a senior manager, acknowledge receipt of the message or question requiring a response within two hours by commenting or messaging the customer. Inform them that a reply will be provided once the necessary information is obtained.
- **Monthly reports:** Implement monthly analytics reports to visualize growth and engagement.

Branding and visual identity

Ensure consistent branding across platforms:

- **Profile and cover images:** Use high-quality, recognizable visuals (e.g., municipal logo, landmarks).
- **Color palette and fonts:** Align with municipal branding guidelines.
- **Hashtags:** Create branded hashtags (e.g., #HuronEastUpdates, #ConnectingLinkNews).
- **Templates:** Use branded templates for recurring content like announcements or event promos.

Content strategy: variety is key

- **Images:** Use engaging visuals (construction progress, community events, nature).
- **Videos:** Short clips of interviews, updates, or drone footage.
- **Carousels:** Multi-image posts for storytelling or step-by-step guides.
- **Stories/reels:** Quick updates or fun behind-the-scenes moments.

Engagement tactics

- **Ask questions:** Encourage comments (e.g., "What's your favorite local trail?").
- **Tag partners:** Boost reach by tagging organizations or media outlets.
- **User-generated content:** Invite residents to share photos or stories.
- **Contests and giveaways:** Promote local pride and participation.
- **Encourage engagement:** If a user asks a question in a respectful and appropriate manner, respond accordingly and promptly to encourage future interactions. Use the H.E.A.R platform for public engagement initiatives.

Rules for Facebook and Instagram

- **Posting frequency:** Allow at least two hours between posts to prevent posting fatigue when possible.
- **Content requirements:** Every post should include a visual or a link. This could be a link to the Municipality's website, another relevant site, contact information, or a video.
- **Call to action:** Ensure each post has a clear call to action, such as:
 - Details
 - Learn more
 - Register here
- **Sharing content:** When sharing content from partners, include a meaningful message, avoid blank shares.
- **Hashtags:** Use hashtags appropriately, limiting them to a maximum of three when relevant.
- **Photo posts:**
 - Watermark photos with the Municipal logo or website link.
 - Use high-resolution images only.
- **Engagement:** Respond meaningfully and maintain a friendly tone consistent with the Municipal "voice."
- **Comment management:**
 - Do not delete comments unless they are inappropriate or defamatory or do not meet the commenting guidelines.
 - Invite individuals to private message sessions to address concerns empathetically.
 - Hide comments that violate the social media policy and have said policy visible on website
 - Remain factual and remove emotion from the Municipality's side while acknowledging the user's feelings.
 - If a conversation cannot be resolved, express appreciation for their input, agree to disagree, and end the communication.
 - Apologize and withdraw if the Municipality is at fault. Always be honest, kind and admit when you are in the wrong.

Internal communications tactics

Staff

A recommendation for enhancing communication and collaboration between the Communications Coordinator and Municipal departments is well-founded. Improved communication enables staff to better understand, appreciate, contribute to, and support organizational goals and objectives. This, in turn, can motivate them to deliver maximum performance and provide exceptional, cost-effective service.

- **Emails:** Email remains the preferred method of communication among staff, and it is advised to maintain this as the primary form of engagement, complemented by the strategies outlined below. This ensures that it continues to be an effective tool.
- **Microsoft Teams Messenger:** Utilize for real-time communication and collaboration. Encourage staff to use it for quick queries, project discussions, and instant updates, promoting a more dynamic and responsive work environment. Teams can also facilitate virtual meetings and integrate with other Microsoft 365 tools to streamline workflows and enhance productivity.
- **Formalized meetings:** Department head meetings are convened after council meetings to discuss updates and upcoming projects. These gatherings ensure everyone is informed about current events and serve as a platform for coordination and planning. The Communications Coordinator will participate in these meetings to provide insights and assistance when needed.
- **Templates:** Despite this plan, there remains a chance that individuals or departments might continue to handle all or part of their communications independently. While this poses inherent risks, they can be reduced by supplying standard graphic templates and tools. This will help make communications easily recognizable as “Municipal,” even if the messaging or strategy may differ.
 - Photo Library: A collection of high-quality stock images (or authentic Municipality photos, with consent) organized into categories (e.g., Housing, Community Engagement, Council, etc.).
 - Town logo: Standard files in various formats (PNG, EPS, JPG, and both color/black and white).
 - Templates: May include standard brochures, inserts/flyers, memos, PowerPoint presentations, department newsletters, posters, and advertisements.
- **Departmental planning:** It is suggested that the Communications Coordinator meet with each department in the first quarter for proactive communications planning. The coordinator can provide a template and coaching, which the department will fill out. Both parties can then meet to review and refine the plan, which should include a mid-year review in subsequent quarters.
 - These plans will outline how each department can and should utilize current resources—or additional ones as necessary—and may include:
 - Goals for the department and the corresponding focus of communications
 - Specific messaging needs for particular departments or programs
 - Target audiences (internal/external)
 - Key spokesperson(s) if necessary for public communications
 - Communication partnerships
 - Tactics (both electronic and print)
 - Critical path
 - Social media strategy
 - Budget/resources
 - Timelines
 - Measurement criteria
 - Website content

- **Training:** The most effective way to engage with these contacts is through brief (30-minute) training or informational sessions:
 - **New hires:** Continue to deliver and assess Communications 101 training for new employees during the Human Resources onboarding presentation.
 - **Brand guidelines:** Review and update the guidelines, along with a one-page “cheat sheet,” to assist staff in proper usage (e.g., email signatures, logo application, existing templates, etc.).
 - **Communications overview:** As the Communications Coordinator role is still relatively new, some staff and departments may not yet fully understand its functions and available services.
 - **Media training:** An external consultant can provide targeted media relations training, working closely with the Communications Coordinator on a term basis.
 - **Social media:** Individuals responsible for monitoring and managing social media content should receive formal training on the Municipal policy and their roles and responsibilities every two years.

Council

As the elected representatives of the public within the Municipality, Council plays a vital role in supporting communication messaging and strategies. Greater efforts should be made to effectively promote the “value” and benefits of communications, fostering enthusiasm and investment in these initiatives.

- **Presentation:** It is advisable to create a presentation (or video) that specifically highlights the role of Communications in supporting Municipal Councillors and fostering a “culture of communications”:
 - The value of communication and the current communications climate
 - An overview of Municipal community outreach and engagement
 - A summary of the direct impact communications have on achieving strategic goals
 - The roles of Communications staff and Council
 - Examples of communication initiatives
 - How Communications will directly support Councillors
- **Monthly reports:** Communications will prepare a monthly report outlining analytics, engagement and growth within the department that included a high level breakdown of campaigns and initiatives that involved support from Communications.

External communications tactics

Electronic

- **Enewsletter:** The Communications Coordinator should explore the creation of a subscriber-based ENewsletter, designed as a ‘What’s Up Huron East’ one-stop shop, as highlighted in the Strategic Plan. It is essential to promote the newsletter and subscription methods vigorously to encourage participation.
- **Website:** The website serves as a vital communication tool. Recommendations include:
 - Ensuring accuracy and correcting any misinformation.
 - Making news and notices more easily accessible.
 - Updating frequently and removing outdated information.
 - Streamlining navigation for improved user experience.
 - Enhancing the promotion of high-traffic pages and tools through a dedicated ‘What’s Up Huron East’ page that functions as a comprehensive information hub, as outlined in the Strategic Plan.
 - It is advised that the Communications team take on the role of key content manager for the website. This includes evaluating and adding content to support municipal communications, collaborating with staff as needed to update specific departmental information. Additionally, ongoing analysis of website analytics, community feedback, and a strong focus on SEO should be overseen by Communications as a fundamental aspect of the website’s continuous development.

- A website maintenance plan should be created that includes monitoring content accuracy, refreshing outdated information, and adapting to new industry trends or changes in user needs. By doing so, the website can continue to provide valuable and up-to-date information, enhancing user trust and engagement.
- **Social media:** See page 13 for social media recommendations regarding Facebook and Instagram.

Media relations

Local newspapers remain trusted sources for news and information, although their online presence may not be as robust. There has been significant growth in relationships with local media, leading to more frequent press releases and increased placement. A strategy to build on these successes can be established:

- **Set Media Policy:**
 - Response: The ideal response to a media inquiry should be immediate or within 1-2 hours, with same-day responses as the maximum requirement.
 - Monitoring: Continue tracking media coverage, evaluate, and maintain communication with the department/media sources.
 - Establish roles: The Communications team should strive to create personal connections with key media representatives.
- **Determine main contact:** The Communications Coordinator will serve as the media relations contact in all situations unless:
 - Another source is identified in a media release;
 - A prior relationship exists between a media representative and a department's Manager or Supervisor, or;
 - The information does not require strategic oversight (e.g., road closure dates).

For points a and b, Communications should be notified of any exchanges and/or consulted to provide or review messaging and appropriate responses.

Implementation

Phase	Timeline	Actions
Setup	Q3 2025	Finalize plan, train staff, implement branding
Launch	Q4 2025	Begin campaigns, activate H.E.A.R. tools, create website management plan
Engagement	2026	Host events, run surveys, social media contests and incentives
Review	Q2 2027	Evaluate metrics, adjust strategies

Measurement

Overall communication goals: Develop a measurement dashboard, reflective of overall communication goals and review progress, on a yearly basis against previous results:

- Greater awareness of Municipal services
- Audiences are quickly and easily able to find information
- Council and Municipal staff are better informed on services
- Staff supported by a sufficiently-resourced Communications department
- Increased positive presence in media
- Communications have a positive and successful impact
- Increased likelihood of key audiences engaging
- Audiences feel their input is valued
- There is a greater level of readiness/preparedness to address issues
- Communications are proactive
- Increased staff integration and morale
- Consistent image, voice and graphic look to communications
- Fluid and frequent communications
- A friendly brand that attracts and engages

Tracking/Measurement: In order to substantiate the recommended strategies, additional and reallocated resources, and supporting tactics – to demonstrate benefits and results – both qualitative and quantitative measurements are recommended. These measurements should include:

- **Surveys and feedback:** Regular surveys should be conducted to gather feedback from key audiences, including residents, businesses, and stakeholders. This will help assess awareness levels, satisfaction, and the perceived effectiveness of communications.
- **Media monitoring:** Track media mentions and sentiment to evaluate the positive presence and reputation of the Municipality in various media channels. This includes traditional media, social media, and online platforms.

- **Website and social media analytics:** Utilize analytics tools to monitor website traffic, engagement metrics, and social media interactions. This data will provide insights into how easily audiences are finding information and engaging with communications.
- **Internal assessments:** Conduct regular assessments with Council and Municipal staff to gauge their awareness and understanding of services, as well as their satisfaction with the support provided by the Communications department.
- **Engagement metrics:** Measure the level of public engagement in initiatives, such as participation in events, public consultations, and feedback submissions. This will indicate how valued audiences feel and their likelihood of future engagement.
- **Readiness and response times:** Evaluate the preparedness and responsiveness of the communication team in addressing issues. This can be measured through response times to inquiries and the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies.
- **Employee surveys:** Conduct surveys to assess staff morale and integration, focusing on how well communications support their roles and contribute to a cohesive work environment.

By utilizing these comprehensive methods, the Municipality can ensure that its communication strategy is effective, adaptive, and aligned with its overall goals. Regular reviews and adjustments based on these measurements will enhance the impact and success of communication efforts.