

STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE – JUNE 23, 2008

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

Recommendation

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

1. That the draft Terms of Reference, forming Attachment No. 1 to this report, be endorsed; and
2. That a staff working committee be established to assist in achieving the objectives presented in the draft Terms of Reference.

Economic Impact

None.

Communications Plan

N/A

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to propose a Terms of Reference for an internal staff working committee to review the issue of strategic communications including a revised communications strategy, as it relates to City marketing, communications and advertising.

Background - Analysis and Options

This report addresses Item 1, Report No. 15 of the Committee of the Whole (Working Session), March 18, 2008 which was adopted without amendment by Council on March 31, 2008. The recommendation states that the matter of the Effectiveness of City Page Advertising “be referred to the Strategic Planning Committee” and that this review address “Members of Council’s comments.”

March 18, 2008 CW Working Session

Comments by Members of Council focused on three areas:

1. The City Page advertisement in its current format may not be an effective communications vehicle, and a public survey would help measure its effectiveness.
2. The City Page advertisement is only one vehicle for communicating with key stakeholders, and the entire process of City marketing, communications and advertising by all City departments needs to be assessed, including the total cost of these activities.
3. A proper assessment of City marketing, communications and advertising could be addressed by launching an initiative akin to a “Communications Task Force,” and this function would be best managed by the Strategic Planning Committee.

Objective

The objective is to improve the effectiveness of City communications for the purpose of enhancing the City’s reputation among residents and local businesses. A key consideration will be the development of a strategic framework to more effectively interact with external stakeholders.

Scope of Project

To review the issue of strategic communications involving all key stakeholders in the City corporation in order to identify the key pressures and issues impacting the City. Also included in the review would be the development of an updated Communications strategy.

Background notes on the draft Terms of Reference

Explanatory notes on the following objectives included in the draft Terms of Reference are presented in *italic* type.

1. To improve the effectiveness of City strategic communications for the purpose of enhancing the City's reputation among residents and local businesses. A key consideration will be the development of a strategic framework to more effectively interact with external stakeholders.
2. To conduct a "communications audit" or inventory of all advertising, marketing and communications vehicles used by City departments, including advertising in local papers, production and distribution of brochures and public notices, specially designed website components, public meetings, information sessions, and related initiatives.

It is the recommendation of the Corporate Communications department that this objective be given the highest priority. It will provide a complete list of all activity across the Corporation and will be a useful tool for determining next steps and the composition of the proposed staff working committee.

3. To determine the effectiveness of the current "City Page" weekly advertisement, utilizing the City Page to conduct a readership survey.

Although survey questions about the City Page could be printed on the City Page, this vehicle does not provide an effective response mechanism. It is recommended that any survey be posted as an online feature on the City's website.

4. To support the review of the City's public notification policies and procedures, including appropriate revisions to the City's Notice By-Law if necessary.

The formulation of policies and guidelines for public consultation is being addressed by two staff reports: Public Notice – Planning Applications (J. Zipay); and Report on all other notifications to the public (J. Atwood-Petkovski). In addition, the business plan of the Corporate Communications department includes the task to "establish and implement a more effective model for civic engagement and enhance our public consultation strategy," scheduled for completion Q4/09. These initiatives will impact any assessment of the City's marketing, communications and advertising activities.

5. Formulate a policy or procedure to improve media relations that establishes criteria for determining what stories or issues are "newsworthy" and appropriate subjects for a news release, as opposed to a "marketing message" that could be posted to the website or communicated through other distribution methods.

The City issues a large number of media advisories and news releases (approx. 100 per year). The mainstream media has questioned the "newsworthiness" of many of these items. For some topics and initiatives, there may be more effective ways to convey this information, including website postings, brochures, community presentations, or public relations efforts to promote special media features.

6. To assess whether the corporate identity could be strengthened by establishing content and design guidelines for City marketing initiatives.

Currently, there are no corporate guidelines for producing marketing materials, with the exception of including the tagline on the City logo and publishing a Council group photo. A survey of all communications materials produced by the City through the proposed communications audit may show some inconsistencies in the presentation and production of these materials.

7. To determine what cost efficiencies may be provided through the consolidation or coordination of the production management function, including contracting and managing the design and production of all printed materials and special website components.

A coordinated approach to production management could produce such benefits such as volume discounts for print jobs.

8. To formulate appropriate website content policies and procedures that will establish standards for content posted by various City departments, and address public requests for external links on the City's website.

9. Determine the requirement or feasibility of establishing a "web team" to manage the content and user features of the City's website.

A "web team" is the standard approach to website management by larger municipalities.

10. To assess the potential of multimedia in supporting the City's strategic communications, in terms of video production capabilities and related technologies.

11. To assess the potential of "social media" in supporting the City's strategic communications, including blogs, vlogs, chat rooms and online discussion forums.

12. To assess the benefits and resources required to establish a public relations function to proactively market City programs and initiatives.

Next Steps

A more detailed work plan and timelines will be presented at a Strategic Planning Committee meeting in September, 2008, to provide an update on the staff committee's work and other planned activities.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council and the necessary resources have been allocated and approved.

Regional Implications

N/A

Conclusion

The adoption of the attached Terms of Reference by the Strategic Planning Committee, and the establishment of a staff working committee, will provide the basis of a work plan to review and evaluate the effectiveness of City marketing, communications and advertising initiatives.

Attachments

1. Strategic Planning Committee Review of City Marketing, Communications and Advertising Initiatives: Draft Terms Of Reference
2. Effectiveness of City Page Advertising: Extract from Council Meeting Minutes of March 31, 2008

Report prepared by:

Madeline Zito, Director of Corporate Communications
Thomas Plant, Senior Manager of Strategic Planning
Ted Hallas, Manager of Corporate Communications

Respectfully submitted,

Madeline Zito
Director of Corporate Communications

Strategic Planning Committee

Review of City Marketing, Communications and Advertising Initiatives

DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE:

The Strategic Planning Committee will review City marketing, communications and advertising initiatives for the purpose of evaluating and improving the effectiveness of the City's communications with key stakeholders. It will formulate and recommend appropriate policies and strategies to Council.

Reference: CW Item 1, Report No. 15, adopted at the Council meeting of March 31, 2008.

Objectives:

1. To improve the effectiveness of City strategic communications for the purpose of enhancing the City's reputation among residents and local businesses. A key consideration will be the development of a strategic framework to more effectively interact with external stakeholders.
2. To conduct a "communications audit" or inventory of all advertising, marketing and communications vehicles used by City departments, including advertising in local papers, production and distribution of brochures and public notices, specially designed website components, public meetings, information sessions, and related initiatives.
3. To determine the effectiveness of the current "City Page" weekly advertisement, utilizing the City Page to conduct a readership survey.
4. To support the review of the City's public notification policies and procedures, including appropriate revisions to the City's Notice By-Law if necessary.
5. Formulate a policy or procedure to improve media relations that establishes criteria for determining what stories or issues are "newsworthy" and appropriate subjects for a news release, as opposed to a "marketing message" that could be posted to the website or communicated through other distribution methods.
6. To assess whether the corporate identity could be strengthened by establishing content and design guidelines for City marketing initiatives.
7. To determine what cost efficiencies may be provided through the consolidation or coordination of the production management function, including contracting and managing the design and production of all printed materials and special website components.
8. To formulate appropriate website content policies and procedures that will establish standards for content posted by various City departments, and address public requests for external links on the City's website.
9. Determine the requirement or feasibility of establishing a "web team" to manage the content and user features of the City's website.
10. To assess the potential of multimedia in supporting the City's strategic communications, in terms of video production capabilities and related technologies.
11. To assess the potential of "social media" in supporting the City's strategic communications, including blogs, vlogs, chat rooms and online discussion forums.
12. To assess the benefits and resources required to establish a public relations function to proactively market City programs and initiatives.

CITY OF VAUGHAN

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF MARCH 31, 2008

Item 1, Report No. 15, of the Committee of the Whole (Working Session), which was adopted without amendment by the Council of the City of Vaughan on March 31, 2008.

1 EFFECTIVENESS OF CITY PAGE ADVERTISING

The Committee of the Whole (Working Session) recommends:

- 1) That the recommendation contained in the following report of the Director of Corporate Communications, dated March 18, 2008, be approved;**
- 2) That this matter be referred to the Strategic Planning Committee;**
- 3) That a survey be conducted utilizing the current City Page; and**
- 4) That the City Page be reviewed addressing Members of Council's comments.**

Recommendation

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

That Council receive this report for information purposes.

Economic Impact

None.

Communications Plan

Not applicable.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide a review of the efficiency and impact of the City Page with respect to content, placement and distribution.

Background - Analysis and Options

This report addresses Item No. 5, Report No. 4 of the Committee of the Whole (Working Session), January 29, 2008 which was adopted without amendment by Council on February 11, 2008. The recommendation states that "staff review the efficiency and impact of the City Page with respect to content, placement and distribution."

Purpose of the City Page

In 2000, Council authorized the establishment of a "City Page" to communicate City information to residents and other target audiences through the use of advertising published in a newspaper with the widest possible circulation in the City of Vaughan.

The Corporate Communications department was assigned responsibility for producing and managing the "City Page."

The primary purpose of the "City Page" is to provide Vaughan residents with reasonable notice in order to meet statutory requirements. Approximately 70% of "City Page" space is used for statutory ads, which are considered priority content.

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In terms of "Appropriate Form Of Notice," the Municipal Act states that it is the responsibility of Council to ensure compliance with various provincial statutes that require Ontario municipalities to notify the public of proposed changes to by-laws and to provide public notice of various decisions.

Council determines what is an appropriate form of notice for the City, which can include newspaper advertising.

Section 251 of the Municipal Act, 2001, Part VI, states: "Where a municipality is required to give notice under a provision of this Act, the municipality shall, except as otherwise provided, give the notice in a form and in the manner and at the times that the council considers adequate to give reasonable notice under the provision."

All statutory advertisements intended for general circulation to the residents of Vaughan can be published on the "City Page," space permitting, with the exception of those statutory ads targeting a specialized audience, including tender advertising placed in specialized trade/business publications that reach a specific audience and recruitment advertising. It is the responsibility of each City department with statutory notice requirements to submit advertising content to the Corporate Communications department for inclusion in the "City Page."

In addition, the "City Page" can include advertising in support of non-statutory City initiatives and programs, space permitting. Corporate Communications also coordinates these placements.

Placement of City Page advertising

Since 2000, the City has placed an annual contract with local community papers to publish the "City Page." The selection of publications for City Page placements was the responsibility of the Commissioner of Economic/Technology Development and Communications, formalized in the Corporate Advertising Policy, passed by Council on June 15, 2005. For the past two years, Council has made the determination of "City Page" placements based, in part, on placement options provided by the Corporate Communications department.

The criteria used by Corporate Communications for presenting placement options for the "City Page" to Council include:

Audited Circulation – A newspaper audited by the industry-standard Canadian Circulation Audit Bureau (CCAB) can accurately report its circulation in the City of Vaughan. If this is not available, a publisher's sworn statement detailing the circulation of the publication can be requested.

City-wide Circulation – Newspapers with the widest distribution in the City of Vaughan best fulfill the City's statutory notice requirements.

Weekly frequency – A weekly publishing frequency is required for some statutory notifications. Placing the "City Page" as a weekly advertisement in one publication has the potential advantage of becoming recognized by residents as a regular feature of the paper, and regular weekly placements in one publication would meet any requirements of various City departments for consecutive placements of statutory notices.

Placement Costs – The advertising placement rate is negotiated by the Director of Corporate Communications.

Editorial Content – Newspapers publishing local news of interest to the residents and businesses of Vaughan.

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Community Engagement – Certain newspapers reach specific communities or groups that may not be served by other publications.

Performance Measurements

To determine the effectiveness of the “City Page” for the purposes of this report, three approaches to performance measurement were reviewed:

1. Readership surveys
2. Complaints from Vaughan residents
3. Best practices

1. Readership surveys

Readership surveys have been used by the publishing industry for many years to market the effectiveness of print advertising. Most often, there are proprietary reasons for commissioning readership surveys and published results may selectively support this marketing purpose.

Survey results published by industry organizations do demonstrate that newspapers are an effective communications vehicle, as highlighted by the following findings:

- According to the Canadian Newspaper Association’s *NADbank 2007 Readership Study*, 73% of adults in the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) read a newspaper at least once a week.
- Across Canada, 50% of adults read a newspaper yesterday.
- Of those adults reading newspapers, 73% read local news.
- 22% of adults in the Toronto CMA read online editions of Canadian daily newspapers, but only 3% of that total read online editions only.
- According to the Ontario Community Newspapers Association, 73% of the Ontario adult population read their local community paper.
- Most community newspaper readers read almost every edition, and most or all of each issue.
- Community newspapers reach 68% of those not reading daily newspapers.

2. Complaints from Vaughan residents

As the City has not commissioned a readership survey of local community papers publishing the “City Page,” there are no direct performance measurements available. However, an indirect measurement of providing “reasonable notice” through statutory ads published on the “City Page” can be made by tracking public complaints.

The Corporate Communications department surveyed City departments to track public complaints about insufficient notification of public meetings over a 12-month period (see attachment #1: Departmental survey of statutory public notice requirements). The survey results indicate that the City is not receiving public complaints about public meeting notifications.

The one telephone complaint received by Corporate Communications was from a resident who had not received the local community paper and who therefore could not read the “City Page.”

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In addition, about ten complaints are received for each mailing of public information meeting notices by the Traffic Engineering Division. These complaints are usually about no mailed notice being received or the “late” delivery of the notice. These complaints may not indicate lack of “reasonable notice” as the division does publish its notices on the “City Page,” on the City website, and through standard newsletters delivered door-to-door to each household of affected residents.

In addition, the departmental survey provides information on specific policies, procedures or regulations for publishing statutory notices of public meetings or project announcements that are followed by various departments. This information is provided for reference purposes (see attachment #1: Departmental survey of statutory public notice requirements).

It is important to note that most City departments do place statutory notices on the “City Page” and post the information to the City website. Other forms of notification used by various City departments include mobile signs, mailings, and door-to-door notice distribution.

3. Best Practices

For the purposes of this report, Corporate Communications conducted a telephone and website survey of statutory notice practices by municipalities in York Region and the Greater Toronto Area. A total of 16 municipalities were surveyed. Highlights include:

- 12 of the 16 municipalities regularly place statutory notices on a weekly basis in the local community paper, most often formatted as a City or Town Page.
- 2 of the 16 municipalities only place statutory notices in community papers as needed (Town of Caledon, Halton Region).
- 2 municipalities do not place statutory ads in local papers (City of Mississauga, Township of Brock)
- All municipalities surveyed do post statutory notices on their websites.

Evaluation

The “City Page” has been an effective tool in communicating to our citizens in recent years.

- The three local community papers under contract for 2008 placements of the “City Page” meet the criteria used by Corporate Communications for presenting placement options to Council for the “City Page,” including:
 - A stated city-wide circulation to the approximately 70,000 households in Vaughan – Vaughan Citizen/Liberal (63,750); Vaughan Today (69,000); and Vaughan Perspectives (52,000).
 - Editorial content covering local news of interest to the residents and businesses of Vaughan, including Council news and coverage of City programs and initiatives.
 - Minimum weekly publishing frequency.
- According to industry surveys, community papers are well-read and an important local news source.
- The use of a “City Page” published weekly in a local community newspaper is consistent with the best practices of other municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area.

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- In addition to publishing the “City Page,” the City of Vaughan publishes statutory notices on the City’s website and uses other communications vehicles – such as mobile signs, mailed notices, and notices distributed door-to-door – to ensure the widest possible dissemination of City information to residents and local businesses.

The absence of complaints about insufficient notification of public meetings is a clear indication of the effectiveness of the “City Page.”

Relationship to Vaughan Vision

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council and the necessary resources have been allocated and approved.

Regional Implications

Not applicable.

Conclusion

City Page advertising continues to provide an effective vehicle for communicating statutory notices to Vaughan residents and businesses, and for advertising City programs and initiatives.

Attachments

1. Departmental survey of statutory public notice requirements
2. Municipal survey of statutory ad postings

Report prepared by:

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(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.)