

SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (WORKING SESSION) – FEBRUARY 27, 2009

CITY PAGE ADVERTISING AND NOTIFICATION OPTIONS

Referred Item (Item 5, CW(W.S) Report No. 9)

Committee of the Whole (Working Session), at its meeting of February 23, 2009, recommended the following:

That this matter be referred to a Special Committee of the Whole (Working Session) meeting to be held on February 27, 2009, immediately following the Special Committee of the Whole (Working Session) meeting that is scheduled for February 27, 2009 at 10:00 a.m.

Report of the Director of Corporate Communications, dated February 23, 2009

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

1. That Council approve the use of the City's website as the primary communications vehicle for City Page advertisements, including statutory notices; and
2. That the practice of publishing City Page advertisements in a print format, placed as paid weekly advertising with local newspapers, be discontinued; and
3. That a transition period of four months from Council approval of this program be implemented, during which time City Page advertisements will continue to be published in local papers and overlap the launch of the new website feature.

Economic Impact

The savings in 2009, should the City Page print advertisements be discontinued by July 2009, will be approximately \$53,000. Per annum, there will be savings of approximately \$90,000.

Communications Plan

A communications strategy will support this program. A news release will be issued to announce the launch of the new Public Notices feature on the City website, and notices of this change will be published in the printed version of the City Page during the transition period. Other opportunities to inform residents and encourage wider website use will include the Corporate e-newsletter, content for Council e-newsletters, notices posted at City facilities, and an advertising campaign through City publications and local media.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to request Council approval to replace weekly City Page advertisements in local papers with a new website feature and promote the website as the City's primary communications vehicle. The intent is to encourage wider website use and provide residents and businesses with a "one-stop shopping" internet resource for in-depth information on City services and initiatives.

Background - Analysis and Options

In 2000, Council authorized the establishment of a "City Page" to serve Vaughan residents and to be published weekly in a newspaper with the widest circulation possible.

The Corporate Communications department was assigned responsibility for producing and managing the "City Page." Approximately 70% of "City Page" space is used for statutory ads.

Publications for City Page placements are selected according to City criteria that includes: an audited circulation; City-wide circulation; minimum weekly frequency; negotiated placement costs; and editorial content of local interest.

Although the selection criteria provides essential distribution information, there are no quantifiable measures available to determine the effectiveness of the City Page published in local newspapers in terms of guaranteed readership by residents and businesses in Vaughan.

An item entitled "Effectiveness Of City Page Advertising" was submitted to the Committee Of The Whole (Working Session) of March 18, 2008. Three approaches to performance measurement were reviewed: industry readership surveys; tracking complaints from Vaughan residents, and a survey of best practices of other municipalities. Although no specific problems with the City's print advertisements were identified, it was not possible to determine the "effectiveness" of print advertising in terms of guaranteed readership. This matter was referred to the Strategic Planning Committee.

This year, the redesign of the City's home page introduced a "Quick Survey" feature. The two polls posted this year relate to the question of City Page advertising and use of the internet.

Do you read the City Page in your local newspaper?

Yes – 54.5 %

No – 17.8 %

Don't know what the City Page is – 27.7 %

(101 responses)

What is your preferred source for local news?

Internet – 39.2 %

Television / Radio – 31.6 %

Newspapers / Magazines – 29.2 %

(159 responses)

Numerous studies have shown a steady increase in the use of computers and the internet in recent years. There also has been a steady increase in the popularity of the City's website. Currently, an average of 6,500 people visit the City's website each day. In the Corporate Communications Strategic Plan (revised March, 2007) the City's website is identified as the City's main communications vehicle. A renewed focus on the City's website, including the posting of the City Page advertisements, is consistent with this strategic plan.

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.

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."

The issue of notification requirements is being addressed by the Office of the Commissioner of Legal and Administrative Services.

New Website Feature

The City Page advertisement is currently posted each week on the City's website in pdf form. It is accessed through the Quick Links navigation on the home page. In addition, individual items are listed in the Major Projects and Reports section, on the What's On calendar, and in the sub-directories for specific departments.

The new City Page website feature will consolidate these various postings in one location, easily accessible from the home page. A "Public Notices" section will be accessible from Quick Links left navigation and the Online Services pull-down menu.

Advertising Budget

The advertising budget for the Corporate Communications department is \$108,525. The 2009 placement schedule of the City Page would account for \$98,800, leaving unallocated funds of \$9,725. These funds could support an Ethnic Advertising program in 2009 (holiday greetings, etc.) and/or used for special one-off advertising opportunities during the year. The savings in 2009, should the City Page print advertisements be discontinued by July 2009, will be approximately \$53,000.

Related Issue

Council Corporate Advertising – Council Corporate Advertising is a Council budget item administered by the Clerks Department. For the past several years, ad production and placement have been coordinated by the Corporate Communications Department. In 2006, a series of "holiday greeting ads" were placed in eight local papers on behalf of Vaughan Council. This practice was reviewed in 2007, and staff was directed to "implement the use of the City Page to publish Council greetings" – Item 2, Report No. 43, of the Committee of the Whole (Working Session). As a cost-saving initiative, the placement costs of Council Holiday Greetings are now covered by the approved City Page advertising budget, administered by the Corporate Communications department. This will no longer be the case with this new initiative. Council Greetings can be posted to the City's website, but some consideration might be given to reinstating the print advertising program for this purpose.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020

This report is consistent with the priorities set forth in Vaughan Vision 2020, specifically in providing service excellence to citizens by pursuing excellence in service delivery and providing excellence in the management of our city by demonstrating leadership and promoting effective governance.

Regional Implications

N/A

Conclusion

Council approval of using the City's website as the primary communications vehicle for City Page advertisements and discontinuing the practice of publishing City Page advertisements in a print format will provide cost savings while still communicating City programs and initiatives to Vaughan residents and businesses.

Attachments

None

Report prepared by:

Madeline Zito, Director of Corporate Communications
Ted Hallas, Manager, Corporate Communications

Respectfully submitted,

Madeline Zito

Director of Corporate Communications