CITY OF VAUGHAN

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 24, 2009

Item 1, Report No. 4, of the Strategic Planning Committee, which was adopted without amendment by the Council of the City of Vaughan on November 24, 2009.

1   ENHANCING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION THROUGH
THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The Strategic Planning Committee recommends approval of the recommendation contained in the following report of the Commissioner of Legal and Administrative Services and the Director of Corporate Communications, dated November 16, 2009:

Recommendation

The Commissioner of Legal and Administrative Services and the Director of Corporate Communications, in consultation with the City Manager, Chief Information Officer, City Clerk and the Senior Manager of Strategic Planning recommend:

1. That a staff working committee be established to evaluate appropriate opportunities for using social media, establish a strategic direction and create policies as required to guide social media implementation in the Corporation;
2. That Attachment 1 – Social Media Staff Working Committee Draft Terms of Reference be approved;
3. That the presentation from Robert Hutton, Pollara Inc. be received.

Contribution to Sustainability

Social media applications will facilitate the use of alternative channels of communication which contribute to sustainability.

Economic Impact

Funds for this initiative are not required at this point and therefore have not been allocated in the 2009/10 operating budget.

Communications Plan

A communications plan will be discussed by the proposed staff working committee.

Purpose

This report is being presented for information purposes and to discuss next steps in the process.

Background - Analysis and Options

Council at its meeting on September 21, 2009 approved the following recommendation from the Strategic Planning Committee at its meeting on September 15, 2009:

1. "That staff bring forward a report on the use of electronic communications and social media for communication purposes," and

2. "That staff bring forward a report on a creative public engagement plan for forums, including the Budget Public Information Forum" which is linked to a strategic initiative in the Vaughan Vision 2020; "Ensure citizen focused communication initiatives: establish and implement a more effective model for civic engagement and enhance our public consultation strategy."

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<u>Understanding Social Media</u>

Social media can be defined as primarily internet and mobile-based tools which are used for sharing and discussing information among people. These online technologies and practices allow people to share opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives with each other. A characteristic of all social media is User-Generated Content (UGC) which allows users to post their own information. A sample of tools currently being used includes: Facebook, Twitter, Linked-in, YouTube, Flickr, Wiki's, blogs and discussion boards.

Before engaging in a discussion of the applicability of social media to the government environment, it is important to keep in mind that social media is best used as a *tactical* and not a *strategic tool.* In other words, it is a great tool for getting messages out, for mobilizing, and for engaging. However, it is not as useful a tool for developing sound strategies and policies. An example of a successful social media campaign is that of President Barack Obama.

<u>The Obama Phenomena</u>

There has been a lot of attention paid to the success of Barack Obama and his use of social media during his successful presidential Campaign. The Obama Campaign used social media very effectively to communicate and mobilize. However, there was absolutely no policy or platform development, or strategic development, using social media. Instead Obama's strategists saw social media as *"A virtual mechanism for scaling and supporting community action."* In particular, the website My.BarackObama.Com, was used as a networking site that aggregated Obama supporters and provided the tools to create groups, plan events, raise money, and connect to each other. Social media tools such as Twitter and e-mail blasts were used primarily to alert supporters and potential supporters of town hall meetings and other campaign gatherings. This allowed the campaign to gradually and effectively grow momentum and communicate.

The Obama campaign developed policy and strategy through focus groups primarily and it is a successful example of uniting people, and mobilizing them. The keys to success were:

1. A sophisticated software engine which allowed users to interact with the website
2. Using social media as an information and messaging tool not as a policy tool
3. Mobilizing people through social media to 'get out the word' and attend campaign events

<u>Pros and Cons of Social Media</u>

An example of a municipality using social media effectively is the Region of Waterloo and their rapid transit initiative. The Region was interested in investigating ways to reach out to youth regarding their various transit initiatives. By establishing a Facebook account various events such as open houses, public consultations and council meetings are advertised on the site which can alert citizens and other stakeholders to events which are being scheduled to discuss the rapid transit event. They also offer the opportunity for those who cannot attend the event to fill out an online comment sheet which can capture their feedback. Users can also access any documents about the rapid transit initiative on the site as well as any articles which have appeared in local papers.

Currently, Vaughan Public Libraries has a Facebook account which is aimed at teenagers. It is called Vaughan Public Libraries Teen Vortex and provides information regarding upcoming teen programs and other information teens may be interested in. They also have two blogs, one for teens and one for adults.

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There are two key drawbacks to using social media as a strategic tool; representativeness and control. Representativeness refers to the difficulty in getting representative, unbiased information since there is a significant risk that the process will be hijacked by radical individuals or groups. Online discussion groups have increasingly become characterized by a lack of civility and intensifying and amplifying extreme rhetoric. This makes it hard for more reasoned middle of the road voices to be heard. The drawback associated with control is, by utilizing Facebook, Twitter and other external programs it is hard to maintain management control over the dialogue and reaction to information which is posted.

Organizations who host online discussions struggle with this problem. If they use a light hand in moderating, any extreme opinions will quickly dominate, and that drives the "middle" views – those that are most typical out of the discussion. If a heavy moderating presence is used, deleting extreme and uncivil language extreme views may be eliminated from the process, however, the discussion is heavily biased due to the ever-present threat of deletion and dismissal – and conversation becomes stifled.

An increasing body of theory suggests that uncontrolled, open social media has caused an increased *polarization* of political discussion and values, rather than aiding in bringing people together. Open discussions, such as discussion forums and wikis, are declining in use.

Social media can be used as a tactical outreach and engagement vehicle. A virtual town hall could be created using the City's new website Vaughan Online. Seeded by participants from a community attitudinal survey, this virtual town hall could be used by numerous City projects such as Vaughan Vision 2020, Vaughan Tomorrow, Green Directions and the Budget process as a sounding board for feedback and input on the various initiatives. Further, the larger community could be engaged on multiple levels such as Twitter, Facebook, and email in outbound communications to provide information about upcoming events. These types of applications could be made available through the Vaughan Online website if applicable. It would be an efficient and effective way to engage, refine, and mobilize as well as provide a venue as it grows organically for a regular, well controlled and moderated virtual town halls.

Other applications such as live streaming video and podcasts could be considered as the technology is made available through Vaughan Online and the new city hall. Overall, the goal is to use 'social media' type applications for outbound informational purposes while gathering qualitative strategic information through creative methods such as an attitudinal survey and virtual town hall. It is recommended that all social media applications be administered through the Vaughan Online system.

Next Steps
Currently some City departments such as Vaughan Public Libraries, and Economic Development have experimented with different social media applications. Others such as Corporate Communications, City Clerks and Strategic Planning are considering using these tools in future applications. Thus, there is a need to look into the application of social media tools in a strategic and deliberate manner in order to ensure a corporate approach. To approach this issue it is recommended that a staff social media committee be created composed of key user departments whose goal would be to develop some strategic objectives, guidelines and policies to guide the use and application of social media in the City. This committee would report back to the Strategic Planning Committee periodically to keep the Committee informed of its discussions.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/Strategic Plan

This report is linked with strategic initiative number five "Ensure citizen-focused communication initiatives: establish and implement a more effective model for civic engagement and enhance our public consultation strategy."

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Regional Implications

Staff will monitor social media trends occurring throughout York Region

Conclusion

Exploring utilizing new technology to improve civic engagement and public communication provides new opportunities. Implemented in the most effective manner social media can be a useful tool for outbound messaging to support public forums for the Budget, Vaughan Tomorrow or the Vaughan Vision 2020. The concept of a virtual city hall offers the opportunity for a creative public engagement approach which can build off the capacities of the Vaughan Online system. Forming a staff social media working committee will assist in establishing a corporate approach to the issue.

Attachments

1. Attachment 1 – Social Media Staff Working Committee Draft Terms of Reference
2. Attachment 2- "Social Media in Government: A Quick Primer" Presentation

Report prepared by:

Thomas Plant MBA, MPA
Senior Manager of Strategic Planning

(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.)

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 24, 2009

Item 2, Report No. 4, of the Strategic Planning Committee, which was adopted without amendment by the Council of the City of Vaughan on November 24, 2009.

2   **2010 COUNCIL/SMT SYMPOSIUM/WORKSHOP**

The Strategic Planning Committee recommends:

1)   **That Attachment 1 entitled, "Council/SMT Symposium/Workshop Quotes", contained in the following report of the Senior Manager of Strategic Planning, dated November 16, 2009, be received; and**

1)   **That the Council/SMT Symposium Workshop be held on April 15, 2010 at the Thornhill Country Club.**

Recommendation

The Senior Manager of Strategic Planning in consultation with the City Manager recommends:

1) That Attachment 1- Council/SMT Symposium/Workshop Quotes be received and the date of April 15, 2010 be approved and direction provided for the location of the workshop.

Contribution to Sustainability

N/A

Economic Impact

Funds are already included in the 2010 operating budget.

Communications Plan

The Senior Manager of Strategic Planning will work with Corporate Communications and other appropriate staff to manage appropriate questions and answers.

Purpose

To confirm the 2010 Council/SMT Symposium/Workshop meeting date and location.

Background - Analysis and Options

At the September 21, 2009 Council meeting it was approved that the 2010 Council/SMT Symposium/Workshop be scheduled for a one day session in early April 2010 held at a location in the City of Vaughan.

This report provides quotes for a number of locations in Vaughan and surrounding municipalities as seen in Attachment 1. As well it is recommended that April 15, 2010 be selected as the date for the workshop.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/Strategic Plan

The annual Council/SMT strategic planning workshop is an opportunity to review and discuss the strategic plan document and process.

Regional Implications

N/A

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Conclusion

It is appropriate and timely to schedule the date and location for the 2010 Council/SMT Symposium/Workshop. By approving the date of April 15, 2010 and selecting a suitable location planning can be initiated for the workshop.

Attachments

1.   Attachment 1- Council/SMT Symposium/Workshop Quotes

Report prepared by:

Thomas Plant MBA, MPA
Senior Manager of Strategic Planning

(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.)

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Item 3, Report No. 4 , of the Strategic Planning Committee, which was adopted without amendment by the Council of the City of Vaughan on November 24, 2009.

3   **STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN UPDATE**

The Strategic Planning Committee recommends that the verbal update of the Director of Corporate Communications, be received.