

## Communications and Engagement Inventory

This Communications and Engagement Inventory is a companion to the Town's Communications and Engagement Strategy. The Inventory provides an overview of the communications processes at the Town of Claresholm, as well as recommendations for improvement, and options for new initiatives. Administration will provide Council with a yearly review of the Inventory, which will include a scan of municipal best practices, to ensure Claresholm's practices are current, and to ensure the Town is communicating with and engaging residents in ways that support Council's Vision for the community.

The Town's Communications and Engagement can be categorized in the following ways:

- *Legislatively Required Communications and Processes* - LUB Amendment notices, Public Hearings, elections notices, Utility Franchise Fee changes.
- *Information Sharing* - notifying public of upcoming events, road construction, water shortages or outages, and Town programs and policies
- *Information Gathering* - to gather information from the public to inform a Town policy or council decision
- *Involve and Collaborate* – Council Committees such as Economic Development, Facility and Infrastructure Planning, Municipal Planning, and the Museum and FCSS.

It should be noted that a given communications process or tool can fall into more than one category. For example, a Public Hearing for a Land Use Bylaw amendment is legislatively required, shares information on a proposed bylaw change, and seeks input from the public.

### *Legislatively Required Notices and Processes*

Land Use Bylaw Related Open House and Public Hearing (LUB amendment, for example)

- Process for notification – Local newspaper, neighborhood circulations, etc.
- **OPTION:** Public Notification Bylaw - Several municipalities have passed the Public Notification Bylaw, which allows a municipality to meet its legislatively required notifications via a council approved set of methods. The primary advantage of a notification bylaw is not having to publish in newspaper which can add cost savings.
- **RECOMMENDATION:** Administration is satisfied with the current notification methods of publishing our statutorily required communications in the Claresholm Local Press via Town News or advertising as we feel this is a predictable and reliable method of notifying the public. Moreover, the Communications and Engagement Survey indicated that residents rely on the Town News as one of their preferred options for staying up to date with Town information.

Public Hearing – Process laid out in Procedural Bylaw #1731

- This bylaw was updated in April 2025 to comply with new legislation requiring the option for public to attend a Public Hearing electronically.

Public Participation Policy 2.1.01 – July 15, 2019

- legislated policy, which provides guidance to council and administration

- Council directed administration to prepare 2 public participation strategies in 2024 in accordance with the Policy. Strategies were developed for the Recreational and Cultural Facilities Reserve and Communications and Engagement Strategy.
- RECOMMENDATION: This policy requires review every 4 years, and has not been reviewed for several years. Recommendation: Review the policy and legislation, review best practices and bring recommendations back to Council.

#### Municipal elections, petitions and plebiscites

- These processes should be discussed in this section because they are legislatively required (and the Town is legislatively required to notify the public of these events). Additionally, through these processes residents are empowered to make decisions that directly affect their government. The public is the decision maker, and there isn't a higher form of citizen engagement in anything we do.
- Municipal Affairs tracks 13 viability indicators. One of the indicators is 'Interest in Public Office'. This is a pass/fail indicator, and municipalities only trigger this if they have an acclaimed election. The Town held elections in 2021, 2023 (by-election) and will hold one in 2025, and in each election, there were no acclamations. This is a very broad measurement of citizen engagement in local government and a potential indicator of a lack of citizen engagement in the community. Voter turn-out is another metric that we can track, which was 46% in the 2021 election, which is a strong turnout compared to the provincial average of (find provincial average).
- Being flagged by municipal affairs or having lower than provincial average voter turn-out are broad indicators that the community may not be engaged with their local government, which should mobilize Council and staff to find communications and engagement solutions.

#### *Information Sharing*

These are the most frequently used communications processes and tools, and they include social media, Town website, Town News and newspaper notices, and updates about Town services, events or activities.

#### Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram

- Facebook is the primary social media used by the Town. The Town posts the Town News, updates on services and service outages, Council updates, community events, etc. The Communications and Engagement Survey indicates that Facebook is a preferred method for residents to get informed.
- The Town has X and Instagram but rarely uses it, and the Town does not have a LinkedIn account. Locally, the MD of Willow Creek has a LinkedIn page, the Towns of Stavelly, Fort Macleod and Nanton do not appear to have accounts.
- OPTION: Platforms like Hootsuite allow users to create one message to all social media accounts. The cost is around \$1500 a year.
- RECOMMENDATION: do not implement currently. If Council wanted more of a presence on Instagram and X, then we suggest we explore this. We have capacity issues that would prevent us from managing more social media platforms.

#### Policy 1.4.20 Social Media Policy – August 17, 2020

- RECOMMENDATION: Review and update policy if required.

#### YouTube

- The Town streams and uploads Council meetings on YouTube, along with promotional videos. Residents know about this page. The YouTube channel is working as it should. No changes or recommendations.

#### Policy 2.1.05 Streaming and Recording of Council Meetings

- RECOMMENDATION, Review and update if required.

#### Annual Report

- The Town currently compiles a two-page annual report that goes out as a utility stuffer in January/February. This report provides the highlights from the various town departments, organizational structure, etc. The Town of Okotoks annual reports can be found here: [Annual Report | The Town of Okotoks](#), as an example.
- RECOMMENDATION: The Town could go to a more formal annual report that includes more information on department activity, statements from the Mayor and CAO and the Town's financial statements. This will cost approximately \$2,000 annually as we do not have the capacity or ability to perform the design in house, but can contract this work.

#### Website

- The website is being revamped. The Town received a Small Community Opportunities Program grant of approximately \$20,000 to assist with the revamp, which will be streamlined to make information more accessible and will promote better navigation and useability.
- OPTION: Some communities have engagement platforms on the website. Staff can design interactive engagement pieces for specific projects, for example lowering the town wide speed limit, having chickens and bees in town, etc. The platforms can be structured to have surveys, message boards and comments section, and allow registered users to interact with one another and share opinions about a given topic. The cost is about \$4000 a year.
- RECOMMENDATION – Do not implement now due to staffing/capacity issues. This platform is a good tool that could be utilized a few times to engage the community, however, it is time consuming to build the platform and monitor it for each new engagement.

#### Emergency Alert and Notice Systems

- Connect system and Alberta Emergency Alert (transitioned to Alert Ready?) Allows the Town to contact residents in the event of a water break, new service, etc. Or used in times of emergency to inform and direct the public.

#### Conventional Media

- Town News – weekly updates on timely operational and Council issues. Important means for sharing timely information, as well as legislatively required notices. Residents

value the Town News, as indicated in Communications and Engagement Survey. The Town budgets for this weekly communications expense.

- RECOMMENDATION: Maintain the Town News.

#### 5.2.15 Electronic Community Sign Usage – March 25, 2019

- Review and Update Policy

#### Utility Billing

- Ad Hoc Messages as needed
- 60 Day News Scoop – Administration and Council implemented this initiative following the findings from the Communications and Engagement Survey, which indicated that residents wanted information through a greater variety of mediums.
- RECOMMENDATION – This is working well and is an effective way of communicating.

#### New Initiative:

- Council Meeting Highlights: Updates to the public following Council meetings to highlight Council decisions. Issued via Facebook. This is an excellent way bring the public up to speed on important issues and decisions from council meeting.
- RECOMMENDATION – Continue using this tool. The Communications and Engagement survey indicated that the public wanted to hear more about Council decisions.

#### *Information Gathering*

#### Open Houses

- Usually held quarterly, with a different theme, dependent on current events. Open Houses are a combination of information gathering and information sharing, but are most often the latter. Here is a recent history of the Town's Open houses:

##### 2022 Open House Schedule

- July: Budget and Council Strategic Plan – approximated 8 attendees

##### 2023 Open House Schedule

- January: Immigration – dozens in attendance
- May: Budget and Emergency Management – no attendees

##### 2024 Open House Schedule

- February: North Point ASP – 20-30 attendees
- March: Evolution ASP – 20 attendees

##### 2025 Open House Schedule

- September Castle ASP – 20-30 attendees

Pre-COVID there were four Open Houses each year. Coming out of COVID restrictions, attendance was low in 2022 and 2023, except for the Immigration Open House, which was well attended. In 2024 and 2025 the Town held three development-related Open Houses, which were well-attended.

- RECOMMENDATION: Sync Open Houses with cyclical/yearly events such as budgeting, and do ad hoc open houses – Ex: Budget priorities survey in the fall and then follow-up budget open house in the spring.

#### Surveys

- Over the course of this Council term, there have been several survey engagements. Some have been targeted to specific populations, while others have been to the community at large:
  - FCSS – Social Needs Assessment – community wide via Survey Monkey approximately 100 respondents.
  - Broadband Survey to businesses (performed door-to-door)– targeted to commercial and industrial areas of Town. Approximately 100 visits.
  - Communications Survey and Facilities Reserve – community wide via Survey Monkey upwards of 190 responses.
  - Recreation Needs Assessment – community wide survey via Microsoft Forms under 30 respondents. Possible explanation is new survey style/delivery and lack of promotion.
  - RECOMMENDATION – Conduct a Communications and Engagement Survey once/ Council term to inform the Communications and Engagement Strategy.

#### Coffee With Council

- Council implemented in 2024 out of a desire to connect directly with residents. Council meets twice a month, turnout has been ok, the opportunity for dialogue with Council excellent for those who attend.
- RECOMMENATION – Continue this initiative, the Communications and Engagement Survey indicated that respondents wanted more information about and interaction with Council.

#### Policy 2.1.10 Delegations to Council – July 15, 2019

- RECOMMENDATION: Review and update where possible.

#### *Involve and Collaborate*

Refers to public involvement on Council Committees and is one of highest levels of public engagement in Town processes. Council committees such as Economic Development, Facility and Infrastructure Planning, Municipal Planning, and the Museum and FCSS Boards provide opportunities for members of the public to be directly involved in decision-making, as outlined in their respective Bylaw or Terms of Reference. These committees sometimes make recommendations to Council on service delivery or possible policy decisions, in which case, the committee and its public members can be seen to take a more engaged, involved and collaborative role in organizational decision-making.

#### Internal Committees

- Good way to engage community members in council priorities
  - Volunteers can inform and guide council decisions in an advisory role, volunteers can also be directly involved in decision making and service levels that are within their

purview, as outlined by the Bylaw or Terms of Reference for their respective committees.

- A good measurement to gauge effectiveness and engagement is whether there are committee vacancies, or, if there are long periods of having vacancies. Generally there are no vacancies and often there are multiple persons applying for a single vacancy.

RECOMMENDATION: to improve public attendance, administration will begin publishing internal committee agendas to the calendar on the Town's website. Not only will agendas be available to the public but the date and time of the meeting will be advertised.

Policy 2.1.15 Youth Council Representatives – this policy has not been active.

- This policy increases 'awareness of local government activities among Claresholm youth to increase Council's awareness of youth issues in Claresholm.' Council mentors a youth from the community for high school credit/work experience.
- This policy has not been active for several years.
- RECOMMENDATION: Review with new Council to determine desire to rejuvenate the program or disband and repeal the policy.

#### Summary

The Town has a part-time Communications Administrator, along with several other staff doing communications from the side of their desks. There are several communications options discussed in this assessment (Engagement page on the website, more proactive presence on social media) that could be implemented, however, there is no existing capacity. With a dedicated communications officer, these processes could be implemented. The operational cost for a dedicated staff is about \$90,000/year which would add operational capacity, and increased and streamlined communications. Council has indicated that they are satisfied with the Town's current level of communications.