

STAFF REPORT: Administration



REPORT TO: Council
MEETING DATE: May 12, 2008
REPORT NO.: CEDC.08.09
SUBJECT: Community Communication Initiatives

PREPARED BY: Lisa Kidd, Communications and Economic Development Coordinator

A. Recommendations

That Council receive Staff Report CEDC.08.09 'Community Communications Initiatives' for information purposes; and

THAT Council authorize proceeding with the communication initiatives outlined herein.

B. Background

The Town of The Blue Mountains is committed to the open flow of information among Elected Officials, Staff and the community. Effective communication with our community helps to ensure that the Town develops and delivers quality policies, programs and services that meet the needs of our residents and property owners.

Citizen participation is an integral part of Council's decision-making process. An open flow of information between government and the community is a requirement of any successful and sustainable community. It also reinforces a commitment by the Town to be a government that is trusted, transparent, accessible and meaningful.

It is important to engage and encourage solid and meaningful participation from the public, where information, knowledge and positions are shared through open, fair, constructive and balanced discussion. This is achieved through the strengthening of citizen participation.

Citizen participation is about engaging the public in a range of activities and relationships, including two-way communication, education, consultation, advisory bodies, partnerships, volunteerism, feedback, forums, program

involvement, outreach and ongoing dialogue that adds value to Town projects, policy development, programs and services.

It is the intent that the development of new communications initiatives will significantly increase citizen participation so that the values and opinions of the broader community are effectively understood and considered by Council.

Since June 2007, Town Staff has put into practice the following initiatives as a means to encourage citizen participation in local government:

- Addition of a Town Hall Phone Attendant
- Continual improvement of the Town Website, including the addition of 8 new project pages and a blog site
- Development of a local media list, now including 36 members of the local media
- Creation and distribution of 33 media advisories and news releases in 2007 and 25 media advisories and news releases in 2008
- Promotion of Town events and activities using Community Boards
- Promotion of Town events and activities using Community Calendars
- Increase in Elected Official and Staff appearances on local radio and cable programs
- Addition of full-colour advertising on the Enterprise Bulletin Town Ad Page
- Addition of 'website highlight' weekly on the Enterprise Bulletin and Courier Herald town Ad Pages
- Implementation of a Grants and Donations Program, resulting in 23 community groups receiving financial support from the Town in 2008
- Creation of a Volunteer Awards Event for Community Volunteers and 'Order of The Town of The Blue Mountains' Recipients (to be an annual event)
- Creation of an Agricultural Advisory Committee to receive input from the agricultural community and provide an opportunity for the Town of The Blue Mountains to participate in meaningful dialogue with members of the agricultural community
- Addition of a toll-free line

The following is a list of communications initiatives proposed for implementation in 2008:

- Neighbourhood walks
 - Select members of Staff and Council will visit neighbourhoods across the Town, meet local residents, exchange dialogue, identify needs, interests and concerns of ratepayers
- Development of a web portal
 - A redesigned web portal will serve as the 'gateway of the community', highlighting all community services, organizations, businesses and government information in an accessible, organized and aesthetically pleasing fashion

- Development of an e-subscription list
 - Visitors to the web portal will be able to e-subscribe to postings, news and bulletins, event information, etc.
- Creation of weekly, bi-weekly polls and/or 'question of the week'
 - Web portal will provide a weekly or biweekly poll for participation
 - Web portal will provide an archive of poll results
- Development of a Citizen Survey
 - Short citizen survey, up to a maximum of 5 questions, will be distributed by mail to all ratepayers to determine top of mind and latent issues, concerns, and/or priorities of ratepayers
- Creation of 'The Blue Mountains Think Tank'(s)
 - Think Tank(s) will include a composite of interested and engaged community residents to discuss salient and top of mind issues relating to our community

C. The Blue Mountains' Strategic Plan

Strategic Action 6.3 Practice open and proactive communications

Strategic Action 6.5 Involve the community, business sector, developers, public partners and others in the ongoing work of the municipality

Strategic Action 6.6 Implement process for continuous improvement

D. Budget Impact

Neighbourhood walks, development of an e-subscription list, creation of weekly and bi-weekly electronic polls, citizen surveying and the creation of 'The Blue Mountains Think Tank' will be completed by staff.

The development of a web portal for the Town of The Blue Mountain is estimated at \$50,000 and is included as part of the 2008 IT Budget.

E. Attached

None.

Respectfully submitted,

Signature