

Township of Wilmot

# Corporate Communications Strategy: 2026 – 2030



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## VISION:

A focused and stable communications function that shares the Township's story, information and progress openly and professionally.

## MISSION:

Together as an organization, we communicate accurate and timely information that informs the community and strengthens understanding.

## Introduction and Background

Local governments touch the lives of their communities every day. They provide essential services and are responsible for bringing and demonstrating value to taxpayers. Often, the community is not aware of the full scope of programs and services delivered by their local government, and common feedback is that residents and stakeholders crave more information and to have a stronger voice.

Effective, strategic communications plays a critical role in meeting and achieving Township priorities and community needs. When done well, communications strengthens trust between a municipality and its constituents. Proactive communications reduces misinformation, supports elected officials, inspires behaviour change, improves staff morale, and can save taxpayer dollars. For a community the size of Wilmot, it supports an enhanced sense of local pride and feeling of connectedness.

This Communications Strategy is a refresh of a draft strategy presented to Township Council in 2024 that was never formally approved. Since that time, the local context has evolved: the senior leadership team has changed, the Township is implementing recommendations from a Service Delivery and Organizational Review to help address key pressures, the mayor has been delegated strong mayor powers by the Province, and the Township's designated communications role has shifted several times.

Given that the Township's communications function has been in flux over the past few years, this strategy aims to provide direction and set priorities to help the municipality focus its efforts and resources, and consider areas for potential investment.

This strategy sets guiding principles to create a stable foundation for communications efforts and defines the scope of work for communications at the Township. It is informed by both quantitative and qualitative research from internal resources, the community and from other leaders across the profession. Actions identified in this strategy are intended to set the municipality on a path to consistent and effective practices related to communications management, and to help strengthen the way that Wilmot Township promotes and shares its story with the community.



## Community and Communications Context

Wilmot Township is a small municipality of approximately 22,000 residents in the Waterloo Region. Residents live in the towns of New Hamburg and Baden and across and surrounding the 12 other settlements that make up Wilmot.

Wilmot has several sources of media: four local newspapers, two television stations and several radio channels. The community is active on social media channels, especially Facebook. Many community members are highly engaged and vocal on key issues.

Since 2019, when the Township first established a dedicated communications position, the function and role has continued to evolve in response to shifting expectations and priorities from leadership and Council. From 2019 to 2026, the job title, level and scope of work have changed four times: from general communications coordinator to digital media coordinator and website administrator, to communications manager to the current communications specialist. In that time, four different professionals have occupied those roles. The current communications specialist has been with the Township since November 2024.

Further, despite having these permanent roles, demand has consistently outweighed capacity for many years, and the Township has long supplemented these positions with contracted services to ensure organizational needs have been met. The previous support contract was terminated in 2025; however, the funds remain in the current budget. Their allocation will be informed by this strategy and the recent service delivery review.

The specialist role includes a broad scope of work, mostly focused on meeting daily operational needs from all department areas and supporting a variety of communications efforts for the Mayor and Council. The role, as it functions currently, is highly demanding and exceeds a manageable workload during regular business hours. As well, if the specialist is absent or off, there is limited to no skilled back-up capacity.

Following a recent restructuring, the communications position now reports to the Director of Corporate Services.



# Communications Overview

## Guiding Principles

The Township aims to follow these principles for effective communications and engagement to guide the Township:

- Timely
- Positive
- Transparent, respectful and inclusive
- Consistent and collaborative
- Accessible and clear

## Core services

All Township employees communicate and engage with people in the community through the delivery of programs and services. Based on the current complement, the Corporate Communications function is focused on supporting the organization to communicate and engage effectively by providing:

- Strategic communications, implementation, and evaluation
- General reputation management support
- Strategic advice and counsel
- Content creation including general daily creative and graphic design services
- Crisis and emergency communications response
- Digital communications and engagement (website, social media, Engage Wilmot)
- Media relations, including leading responses and providing spokesperson support and coaching, including for the Mayor as needed
- Employee communications support to Human Resources and the CAO
- Some public engagement support and event promotion
- Advertising and print oversight and production

## Target Audiences

- Residents
- Staff
- Council
- Businesses
- Local Indigenous Communities
- Community organizations and agencies
- Diverse communities in Wilmot
- Potential investors and newcomers
- Media (web, print, radio, TV)

# Research

## Methodology

This strategy is informed by the following research inputs:

- Facilitated meeting with the Corporate Leadership Team
- Interview with the Deputy CAO / Director of Corporate Services
- Interview with the Communications Specialist
- Interview with the Mayor
- Review of current communications materials, processes and analytics, including assessing progress made since the first draft of the Communications Strategy
- Review of the Township's social media channels
- Review of Strategy Corp's *Current State Service Delivery Review Report* and the *Final Recommendations Report*
- Responses to the 2025-2027 Strategic Action Plan Community Questionnaire
- Research into comparable municipal communications budgets
- Current trends and municipal communications best practices – drawn from Redbrick Communications' more than 20-year history and expertise working in the sector and recent consultations on past projects with municipalities across Ontario and Canada

## Key Findings

### Review of materials and channels

- Wilmot is transitioning into a mid-sized, rural-urban municipality with increasing demands on services and a growing population.
- Strategy Corp reported that the Township's staffing levels for Communications are lean and most comparable municipalities have two permanent employees for this function. They recommend that Wilmot establish a Manager of Communications and Government Relations position.
  - » Strategy Corp also identified that the Township has tended to over-leverage existing staff to absorb additional responsibilities when there are vacancies etc., a practice that is not sustainable and can result in prolonged risk to the organization.

- In the community questionnaire for the strategic plan, “increasing spending and the level of service for communications from the Township” was the second highest priority area identified by the community. It followed increasing spending for “parks, trails, playgrounds and open spaces,” which was ranked number one.
  - » Further, in the same questionnaire, **“Communication about Township programs, services, and events” received the lowest level of satisfaction from the community.**
- The Township’s website and social media are the top two ways that residents prefer to learn about local government information.
- There is a strong sense of community pride and engagement. Residents value the small-town feel and friendly people the most, followed by outdoor open space, parks and trails.
- Facebook is the main social media channel used by the Township and its community. Daily posting is overall strong. Posts have a professional and consistent look, and staff use a rolling social media calendar to help plan content. However, most content is reactive, and while visibility is high, engagement on the channel is relatively low.

## Internal interviews

- The communications function has improved since late 2024. The website has been completely revamped. Materials are more professional. There are stronger relationships with local media.
- The one communications resource is pulled in many directions by each of the departments and the office of the Mayor. Capacity is limited and is significantly stretched by increasing demands. The specialist works a high degree of overtime hours to keep up with daily work and is overextended in the role.
- There is limited to no back-up ability for when the specialist is not available. The position also has limited strategic authority.
- The Township has benefited from having a specialist who is skilled beyond the expectations for a specialist role.
- The specialist scope of work currently balances both corporate and political goals. An Executive Officer in the Mayor’s office has some communications responsibilities as part of the job description. However, there is overlap between the two roles. Leaders would like each role better defined and more clarity between political and corporate responsibilities.
- The approach is highly tactical and operational to get key stories out. However, most communications are done with little proactive planning.

- The senior leadership team unanimously agrees that more communications capacity is needed to meet each department's everyday needs and demonstrate value for taxpayer dollars.

## **Current trends**

- The communications profession has changed dramatically over the past five-plus years. Demands have increased across the board. Organizations and teams need to build in resiliency in the role to keep up.
- Trust in government continues to decline.
- There is an increase in the spread of mis- and disinformation, and influence from online sources.
- Reputations take care and ongoing attention to maintain. They can be lost far faster than they can be rebuilt. Having to rebuild trust also costs more than proactive maintenance.
- Traditional media outlets are in decline, while other digital platforms have emerged to fill gaps and share local stories, in many cases led by individuals not formally trained in journalism, and in some cases, from a position of advocating or promoting special interest agendas.
- There is a growing trend of municipal communicators needing mental health support or taking leaves due to job stress and burnout, which is a risk and cost to the municipality.
- The use and capabilities of artificial intelligence have increased dramatically and will continue to evolve quickly.
- Workplace dynamics have changed with more remote or hybrid work environments.
- Social media algorithms have changed the type of content users see. For example, Meta restricted access to Canadian news content in response to Bill C-18. As such, audiences receive more targeted content that limits the breadth of information they see based on the type of content they typically engage with.
- International political dynamics are leading to greater polarization.

As a result of the evolution of the profession and to ensure they deliver the greatest strategic value, practitioners now need to bring multidisciplinary skillsets, from business acumen to change management to data analysis, in addition to keeping up with channel and storytelling trends, audience needs and changing technology. Communicators need to be able to demonstrate the return on investment for their work and show how communications contributes to achieving business goals.

## **Municipal-specific best practices**

Redbrick has interviewed more than 50 municipal communications directors and managers over the past few years. Those who are leading the pack have the following practices in place:

- ✓ They focus on strategy first and connection to business goals, then determine appropriate tactics.
- ✓ They have a seat at leadership tables and are sought out for strategic advice.
- ✓ They are highly visible and collaborative with regular and intentional connections with department teams.
- ✓ They have clear and understood processes and planning / measurement tools.
- ✓ They function like a newsroom with less reliance on news media channels.
- ✓ All communications tools and tactics are audience focused.
- ✓ They have their own budget.
- ✓ Their own teams, and the organization as a whole, embody a growth mindset.
- ✓ The role between corporate and political communications is well defined. These teams focus on corporate messaging but may provide support to the Head of Council as the spokesperson on Council decisions. Political communications are led by individuals in the Mayor's office, outside of corporate communications.



# Analysis: Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Risks

## Internal

Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The current communications specialist is highly valued and recognized for her skills. Township communications are overall more professional and their presence online has improved.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Currently communications are reactive, largely due to capacity constraints. Staffing levels are lean. Issues or emergencies result in the specialist losing all capacity to support other communications needs.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategy Corp identified the need to strengthen communications at the Township as a key priority, including creating and hiring for a new Manager role.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No formal corporate policies exist for Communications to clarify roles, expectations and processes for core functions.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The new structure with Communications reporting to the Director of Corporate Services will help raise its profile and ensure greater oversight of the function.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The instability with the role has made it challenging to establish a solid foundation and approach at the Township.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CAO is relatively new and making positive changes, and laying a stronger foundation for future success inside the organization.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Currently communications are reactive, lacking a strategic approach. Like all other municipal functions, effective communications require skilled professional staff.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The first draft of the corporate communications strategy was overall supported by Council.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There has been a historic fluctuating or lack of investment in communications.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Township's relationships with local media have strengthened significantly under the current specialist.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contracted services have also long been used to help keep up with demands on communications. The contract was terminated in 2025. Since then, the current specialist has had to absorb and manage the extra work.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is confusion related to the level of support Communications should provide corporately vs. politically. It can be a fine line, that needs defining.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decisions about scope of work and investment are needed. When consulted, leaders expressed a strong desire for expanded and more timely communications. There is a need to balance the expectations of Township communications with current capacity and fiscal realities.</li> </ul>

Strengths	Challenges
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The communications landscape is changing rapidly, and communicators must adapt to these trends, adopt new technologies and bring a diverse set of skills.</li> </ul>

## External

Opportunities	Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many community stakeholders are engaged and in the past, have offered to support and help strengthen the Township's communications.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trust in governments is at an all-time low. Reputations are fragile and take more time to rebuild than to lose. Effective communications and engagement are critical pieces to rebuilding trust and confidence. As with any area needing improvement, they take investment and commitment to be successful.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The public recognizes and values staff's commitment to the community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community anger, incivility, the spread of misinformation and the speed of message sharing all create risks for municipalities. Having effective communications strategies and sufficient skilled resources are needed to address these issues.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a strong sense of community involvement and volunteerism.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High participation in local Facebook groups can contribute to the spread of misinformation.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiple print newspapers provide options for reaching different audiences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective messaging needs to be highly visual to meet community expectations. The Township has limited local photos and limited graphic design and video capacity to meet this best practice, which risks audiences scanning by content, not seeing nor engaging with the Township's content.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social media is an effective tool (esp. Facebook); significant opportunity to strengthen presence, improve storytelling and increase value.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategy Corp identified many current staff operate above their current capacity. There is risk to the Township if it continues to rely on and over leverage existing staff to take on more work to fill gaps.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to leverage the Township's new website, which is a significant improvement and a central communications tool.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The current CAO is in an interim position. A new CAO may establish different expectations and priorities for communications.</li> </ul>

Opportunities	Risks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The expectations and scope of work for the one position far exceed capacity, which will likely lead to early burnout that will be exacerbated over time.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Current communications and messaging tend to be reactive, and unplanned project/department specific, missing strategic opportunities to tell a cohesive, quality Township story that builds greater community trust.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Township's engagement platform was established without a clear strategy or proper resourcing to maintain it. The community is aware it exists and, if not used effectively, it risks being seen as a waste of taxpayer dollars.</li> </ul>

# Redbrick Municipal Communications Maturity Index©

Redbrick has developed a maturity index customized to use as an assessment tool for municipal communications. The Index assesses the organization as a whole and their approach to communications, since all staff and departments play a role in its success.

Maturity models offer a non-biased approach to measuring an organization’s current state against a best practice state. As such, they are used for continuous improvement and can provide a roadmap to growth and greater effectiveness.

It is a valuable assessment tool that has informed both this communications strategy and an accompanying business case to hire a communications manager. It is intended to support strategic conversations with decision makers related to their vision for and future investments in communications.

## Township’s Assessment: “Doer”

Given the Township’s current highly tactical and operational approach to communications, the municipality’s model falls within the “Doer” level of maturity. Capacity is limited. Formal policies and protocols are not in place. Work is siloed and department specific, rather than attached to organizational strategic priorities. Investment in communications is at a basic level and not considered as a strategic role, especially when responding to issues that may arise.

There are many opportunities to improve and enhance approaches to become more strategic, efficient and add greater value to the organization and the community. For municipalities of Wilmot’s size and project growth, we recommend investing to elevate efforts to the “Ally” level at a minimum.

Township of Wilmot: Municipal Communications Maturity Index		redbrick COMMUNICATIONS													
	1. Side Hustler			2. Doer			3. Ally			4. Strategist			5. Partner		
<b>Organizational structure and competency</b>	Fractured and off the side of the desk; no dedicated communications staff or under resourced, limited skills and/or training; no access to the senior leadership team			Limited dedicated resource(s); emerging training/development; report to manager or director with limited to no access to the senior leadership team			Resourcing for service level expectations; some training/development; either has a duo reporting role with a senior leader and CAO or reports to leader with access to the CAO			Strong alignment to service objectives; sufficient resources and varied skillsets to meet needs; development plans in place; report to CAO with seat at senior table			Sufficient complement for entire organization’s communications needs; multidisciplinary; function is equal partner and integrated at senior table; embedded continuous improvement		
<b>Strategic Business Purpose</b>	No Corporate Communications (CC) strategy (internal or external); tactical, ad hoc, reactive focus			Minimal involvement in digital** and business strategies, customer service and decision making; communications are operationally based			Emerging alignment with digital and business strategies and customer service; consulted for some key decisions; emerging strategic approach to communications			Function aligned with overall digital and business strategies, customer service; CC strategy followed, including for public engagement; stronger corporate storytelling			Value Creator: involved in and advise on all digital and business strategies, integrated with customer service and information technology; strategic, cohesive storytelling approach		
<b>Organizational Accountability and Processes</b>	No communication-focused policies; no processes; no KPIs or use of analytics/data; no standards nor clear roles or confidence in communications			Some standardized processes and service level standards; minimal KPIs, use of analytics and reporting; emerging confidence in communications; some collaboration with departments			Standardized processes, basic service standards in place; some analytics/data and reporting; regular collaboration; monitors trends / best practices; some department feedback on service delivery; some confidence in communications			KPIs tracked; often data driven with regular reporting; continuous improvement embedded across the organization; recommends service improvements based on best practices; expected collaboration and high confidence in communications			Advanced analytics, reporting and KPIs; active continuous improvement; authority to implement service improvements; demonstrated impact to business goals; standardized/streamlined processes; clear roles; embedded collaboration		
<b>Operational Investment and Backing</b>	No budget, tools nor automation; no flexibility to take innovative approaches			Minimal budget, basic tools; limited to no flexibility to take innovative approaches			Some budget and automation; emerging use of communications / marketing tools, some flexibility to take innovative approaches			Centralized budget, more advanced business tools in place for monitoring, automation and efficiency; often innovative			Centrally owned and managed budget for all municipal communications; proactive adoption of new tools; always seek innovative approaches		
<b>Community Building, Accessibility and Inclusivity</b>	Reactive issues management with no communications involvement; no focus on strategic relationship building or on accessible / inclusive communications*			Some involvement in issues management and strategic relationships; some accessible and inclusive communications			Often involved in issues management and strategic relationships; communications are often accessible and inclusive			Always consulted for issues management and guiding strategic relationships; communications are always accessible and inclusive			Communications has influence and guides ethical response and strategic relationships; participates in strategic relationship building; Accessible and inclusive approach across the organization		

\*accessible and inclusive communications mean the use of plain language, visual storytelling, following AGDA guidelines and inclusivity best practices / language demonstrating a welcoming workplace / community  
 \*\*digital strategies include Artificial Intelligence (AI) policies, protocols and approaches

# Strategic Communications Priorities

Based on the most recent research findings, best practice, future trends and analysis, this updated strategy replaces the original six strategic communications priorities with three key priorities that better reflect the Township's current state, and ensure objectives and actions are realistic, practical and achievable.

The strategic priorities form the basis of this Communications Strategy and will guide communications activities from 2026 to 2030. The success of this strategy relies on additional resourcing and capacity within communications, as per Strategy Corp's recommendations for the Township to hire a Manager of Communications and Government Relations as an urgent investment to help stabilize the organization. This recommendation is supported by Redbrick's Business Case for a Communications Manager that accompanies this strategy.

**1 Stabilize the communications function:** First and foremost, the Township should focus its efforts on defining and establishing a stable communications function and approach for the organization. This includes clarifying the expectations of the role, implementing processes to decide on communications priorities, ensuring there is sufficient capacity to meet basic operational needs across the organization and formalizing internal policies.

**2 Protect and enhance what's working:** Since the development of the first draft of this strategy, the current specialist has moved forward with some of the original actions. Based on the analysis, these actions are having a positive effect on the Township's reputation and either need to continue, or be enhanced and better supported, to continue to deliver value.

**3 Strengthen quality and engaging storytelling:** Humans are drawn to stories. They connect and bring us together. They can also mitigate risk, decrease the level of misinformation in the community, and help build trust. The Township has a wealth of positive and relevant content to share with its community to demonstrate quality service delivery and value for taxpayer dollars. Strong storytelling takes planning and a deliberate approach. All departments need to understand their role in both identifying and helping tell these stories.

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. In the upper right, there is a large, brown, tilled field. To its left is a dense forest of evergreen trees. Below the field and forest, a winding river flows through a grassy area. The sky is not visible, and the overall scene is captured from a high angle, showing the textures of the trees, grass, and soil.

## Objectives and Action Plan

To achieve communications objectives and improve Wilmot's communications function, the Township should begin to implement deliberate, measured actions over time. These actions can be phased-in beginning in mid 2026.

The actual implementation plan and timelines will depend on decisions related to capacity and resourcing going forward. With one resource, the actions below will require additional time, with the risk that some will not be achieved.

Each action is assigned a priority level. The levels are based on capacity to inform the implementation plan as to what to achieve first. All actions are important to complete over time.

## Priority 1: Stabilize the communications function

**Objective:** Establish organizational alignment around the priorities, expectations and role of corporate communications

	Action	Rationale	Priority Level
□	Formally clarify the role and scope of work of the current Communications Specialist, focusing on high-priority work that aligns with Wilmot’s Strategic priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearly define expectations for supporting Mayor and Council</li> </ul>	Sets clear expectations	High
□	Implement a framework for communications priority decision making for leadership	Supports a more strategic function	High
□	The Communications Specialist should meet monthly or quarterly with the CLT to review and confirm communications priorities, flag potential upcoming issues and positive story ideas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CAO can share priorities with the Mayor to set clear expectations and alignment with Council</li> </ul>	Ensures leadership collaboration and buy in	High

**Objective:** Invest in additional communications resources and strengthen internal skillsets to support stronger organizational communications

	Action	Rationale	Priority Level
□	Establish a back-up position to cover social media, website posting and to be on call for media inquiries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scope out responsibilities for a back-up resource for Communications</li> <li>Identify the appropriate position</li> <li>Train and set expectations</li> </ul>	Reduce organizational risk, ensure ongoing timely communications, and mitigate burnout of current specialist	High
□	As per the “Horizon 1 Initiatives” in the Service Delivery Review Final Recommendations as approved by Council, hire and onboard a Manager of Communications and Government Relations	<i>Refer to Redbrick’s Business Case for a more detailed rationale</i>	High

	Action	Rationale	Priority Level
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide CLT with training related to media relations and effective strategies to manage community anger and pushback	Responds to the changing landscape and equips leaders and communications to respond effectively based on best practice	High
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide training to staff in a number of key areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plain language writing</li> <li>• Strategic storytelling through council reports</li> <li>• Writing for the web</li> </ul>	Increase efficiency and produce higher quality communications from all employees	Medium
<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify and train department staff to take on select daily, operational communications functions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website and social media posting</li> <li>• Establish a social media channel for Fire to manage</li> <li>• Templated graphic design</li> </ul>	Reduces daily operational pressure on the current specialist	Medium

**Objective:** Develop foundational elements for an efficient and effective organizational communications planning and approach

	Action	Rationale	Priority Level
<input type="checkbox"/>	Roll out a 'communications roadshow' to introduce the strategy once approved, how it will be implemented	Helps keep communications top of mind and clarifies roles and responsibilities	High
<input type="checkbox"/>	As normal practice, establish annual meetings between department leadership and communications following budget approval to identify initiatives that may require communications support	Increases proactive strategic planning and identifies needs for the year ahead to better align communications with business goals and objectives	High

	Action	Rationale	Priority Level
<input type="checkbox"/>	Departments heads to set staff expectations to include communications planning as a step at the outset in project planning processes.	Increases proactive and higher quality communications; helps achieve project goals	High
<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop communications related policies, in order of priority: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media relations</li> <li>• Social media: corporate use and personal use by municipal staff, possible guidelines to Council (see Guelph)</li> <li>• Logo use policy</li> <li>• Paid advertising policy, including promotional items</li> <li>• Use of photography</li> </ul>	Policies provide structure and set clear roles and expectations for how communications functions are managed and under what timelines	Medium
<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop communications channel timelines for departments	Helps set expectations and ensure proper notice from departments to improve quality	Medium
<input type="checkbox"/>	Include branding and communications in staff onboarding. Create a one-page summary about what communications does, why, staff role as a Township ambassador and communicator	Strengthens the Township's brand and professionalism across all departments and ensures consistency and understanding that all staff are communicators for the Township	Medium
<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop a one-page cheat sheet on how to take a good photo and share with identified department staff	Effective communications are visual; increases the quality of photos for use on social media and other channels	Low

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Priority Level</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider adding a Communications and Engagement section to the Council report template	As above, keeps communications top of mind and ensures departments are considering the needs and approaches to communications for their projects	Low

**Objective:** Demonstrate communications impact and opportunities to improve by increasing measurement and evaluation of communications efforts and outcomes

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Priority Level</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	As part of the Roadshow, help departments understand common communications measures to establish methods of measurement and evaluation where possible at the outset of planning new communications campaigns	Ensures a more strategic and measured approach to communications	High
<input type="checkbox"/>	Create a baseline 2026 communications dashboard	Establishes a clear starting point from which to build and assess progress going forward	Medium
<input type="checkbox"/>	Present an annual communications report card to Council (see sample from Northumberland County)	Demonstrate the value of communications and commitment to improvement	Medium
<input type="checkbox"/>	Based on the annual report card and leading into annual business planning, identify opportunities for improvement	Supports a commitment to continuous improvement	Medium

## Priority 2: Protect and enhance what's working

**Objective:** Maintain and continue communications practices that have led to recent improvements

	Action	Rationale	Priority Level
<input type="checkbox"/>	Continue sending press releases to staff and Council before media	Avoids surprises and ensures internal audiences have the information they need before the public	High
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide media relations, issues management and social media orientation training to Council post election	Sets up the new council with a shared foundation and best practices in supporting a positive reputation and trust building with the community	High
<input type="checkbox"/>	Continue providing key messages and suggested social media posts to Council for important projects, when possible	Helps increase consistency and accuracy of messaging, and audience reach	High
<input type="checkbox"/>	Continue proactive media relations and providing graphics and background materials to support media reporting	Helps the media tell factual stories to reduce misinformation	High
<input type="checkbox"/>	Continue to include the Communications Specialist in Council Agenda review	Facilitates early issues mitigation and proactive planning for topics that may have high community profile	High
<input type="checkbox"/>	Continue to promote the new Coming Up @ Council and Key Decisions @ Council posts shared before/after Council meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider elevating to an e-newsletter for subscribers</li> </ul>	Promotes transparency and helps increase reach of decision-making processes	Medium

	Action	Rationale	Priority Level
<input type="checkbox"/>	Continue to monitor and report on media coverage for high-profile initiatives	Demonstrates effectiveness of media relations, how messages are being shared publicly and helps inform future efforts	Medium
<input type="checkbox"/>	Continue to provide access to Canva for staff across the organization	Relieves some pressure from the specialist and helps ensure brand consistency	Medium

**Objective:** Enhance current communications practices to take them to the next level

	Action	Rationale	Priority Level
<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhance annual planning by developing an annual Communications planning calendar and business plan for corporate communications (internal and external) with planned initiatives, include general timing and type of content and possible tactics and roles	Increases proactive planning, creates efficiencies and provides a prompt for communications to check in with departments	Medium
<input type="checkbox"/>	Create a clear Days of Recognition calendar that identifies unique vs. shared posts, and what content will be shared with staff/council and by whom <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure it is reviewed by leadership</li> </ul>	Ensures a more strategic approach to annual days and months of recognition that leadership support; creates greater efficiency for Communications	Low
<input type="checkbox"/>	Assess the effectiveness and usage of current communications templates used by departments; identify and fill any gaps	Measure the success of templates and areas to improve their access and effectiveness	Low

**Objective:** Continue emergency planning and elevate preparedness to communicate about common issues

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Priority Level</b>
□	Continue work to finalize the Emergency Communications Plan	Ensures a proactive and prepared approach in the event of emergencies	Medium
□	Enhance the Township’s photo library with images of common cooling/warming centre locations, first responder vehicles, emergency home kit etc.	Supports efficient emergency response communications	Low
□	Create easy to read visual maps to locations above, for easy posting on social media	As above	Low
□	Continue working with departments to prepare proactive standing key messages for common issues such as for significant weather events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and add additional topics when possible, e.g., watermain breaks</li> </ul>	Ensures a proactive, efficient and prepared approach when issues arise	Low

### Priority 3: Strengthen quality storytelling

**Objective:** Increase the visibility of daily Township work and staff

	Action	Rationale	Priority Level
<input type="checkbox"/>	Leverage annual and ongoing planning and priority setting meetings with department heads to identify positive stories and Township achievements to share with the community	Sharing positive stories demonstrates value for taxpayer dollars	Medium
<input type="checkbox"/>	Look for opportunities to share “behind-the-scenes” stories and footage and showcasing different pieces of municipal equipment: e.g., “Touch a Truck” event or show firefighters in training	Demonstrates value for taxpayer dollars and gives insight into daily work	Medium
<input type="checkbox"/>	Look for easy opportunities to create short videos or photo series of key construction or infrastructure projects, especially at key milestones (e.g., project initiation, half-way through, upon completion) and work with staff to ensure consistent communications	Helps mitigate resistance and misinformation and greater understanding of progress	Medium
<input type="checkbox"/>	Continue to identify and showcase staff across the organization	Helps educate the public on roles and functions of the Township	Low
<input type="checkbox"/>	Humanize staff where possible: use them as storytellers on key projects with media or on social media; show staff at work for the community	As above	Low
<input type="checkbox"/>	Look for opportunities for communications staff to join municipal staff for a ride along – in a plow etc.	Demonstrates value for taxpayer dollars and gives insight into daily work	Low

**Objective:** Increased positive storytelling and strengthen social media presence

	Action	Rationale	Priority Level
<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish a small budget for social media advertising	Increases reach and visibility of important and timely posts (responds to changing social media algorithms)	High
<input type="checkbox"/>	Assess using <a href="#">AI tools</a> to help understand core audiences on social media	Improves content, reach and engagement scores	Medium
<input type="checkbox"/>	Increase the use of video by creating and posting two new videos per year	Responds to how audiences consume content	Low
<input type="checkbox"/>	Create an audience “score sheet” for social media	As above	Low
<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify and, where appropriate, reach out to moderators of community social media groups	Opens the door to conversation and correcting misinformation, builds trust and relationships, helps expand the reach of Township information and establish the Township as a source for factual information	Low

**Objective:** Enhance audience reach and begin to improve public engagement efforts

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Priority Level*</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Engage audiences who may not be online, or those who interact with them (e.g., older adults)	Helps determine best approaches to reach hard-to-reach audiences	Medium
<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop a simple public engagement planning template for staff who initiate engagement projects	Helps create a more consistent and thoughtful approach to public engagement	Low
<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish an organization-wide public engagement calendar to map out efforts and identify opportunities for overlap or to avoid audience outreach duplication	As above	Low
<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop and implement a communications and marketing plan to promote Wilmot’s online engagement hub	Attracts subscribers and improves engagement	Low
<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify one individual at the Township to receive <a href="#">International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)</a> certification to begin to elevate public engagement efforts	This is a first step to taking a more strategic approach to public engagement	Low

\* These actions have a low priority level because the Township is not currently focused on improving public engagement as a key priority.

## Evaluation and Measurement

Evaluation and measurement play a key role in successful implementation of a strategic communications plan. Some initiatives will do a great deal to move the needle toward a more informed and engaged community. Others may fall flat. Regular evaluation and measurement allow staff to take stock of what's working, demonstrate results, and pivot to new tactics when needed.

Each of the priorities and objectives above will be measured using a variety of tactics as identified by the communications specialist in collaboration with department staff, including:

- Social media and website analytics
- Feedback from Council, leadership and staff
- Return on investment for communications spending (e.g., social media advertising)
- Completion of key tasks (e.g., policies in place)
- Community feedback and response
- Brand consistency across all materials
- Improved and enhanced photo and video gallery
- An increase in communications data available
- Reduced level of risk when the specialist is unavailable

