

# Township of Wilmot

## Communications and Engagement Strategy

### Project Status Update

March 6, 2023



**redbrick**  
COMMUNICATIONS

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# Background

- As part of the Phase I consultation on the Prime Ministers Path, the Township recognized the need to revitalize the existing communications processes both internally and externally.
- The Township established an internal communications team and recruited a new Digital Media Coordinator and Website Administrator recruited in late January.
- Council approved the engagement of Redbrick Communications on February 7, 2022, as part of the 2022 Capital Program, to develop a Comprehensive Communications Strategy.
- The overarching goal of the project is to improve community engagement and customer service, in alignment with Township Strategic Priorities and Council's commitment to the community.

# Scope of this report

- Project goals and deliverables
- Methodology
- Summary of anticipated final deliverables
- Key themes from the research
  - Internal
  - Stakeholders
  - Comparable municipalities
  - Council
  - Community
- Analysis of the findings
- High-level recommendations and priorities
- Next steps

# Project Goals and Deliverables

- Develop a communications strategy and phased plan for the Township to guide efforts from 2023 to 2025
- Review current structure and resources
- Develop a public engagement framework and toolkit
- Inform communications policies
- Provide recommendations and priorities to enhance communications in the years to come

# Methodology

- Facilitated conversations with the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT)
- Individual interviews with 10 identified staff (communications leads)
- Online internal survey
- Facilitated discussion with each member of Council
- Four stakeholder meetings
- Online public survey
- Feedback from several comparable municipalities
- Redbrick 20-years' expertise and experience in the municipal sector

# Research findings:

## Internal Survey Results

# Survey demographics

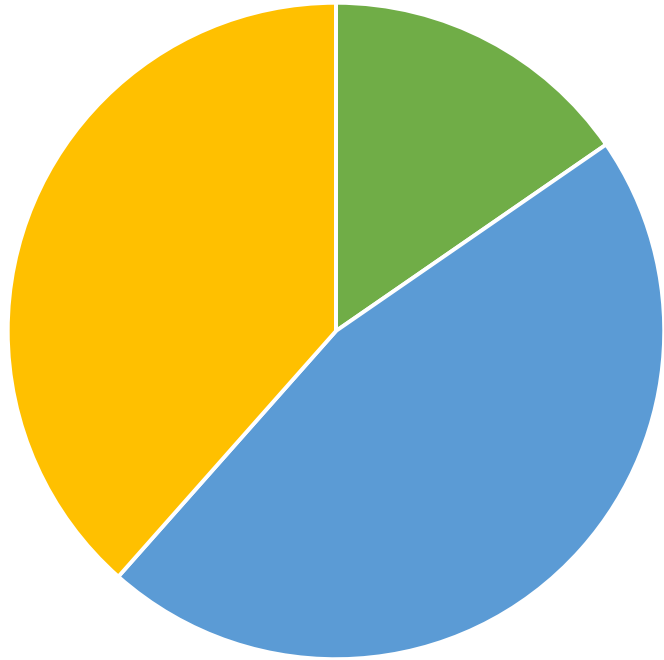
## **Demographics**

- 41 responses
- 13 management
- 27 non-management

# Level of feeling informed

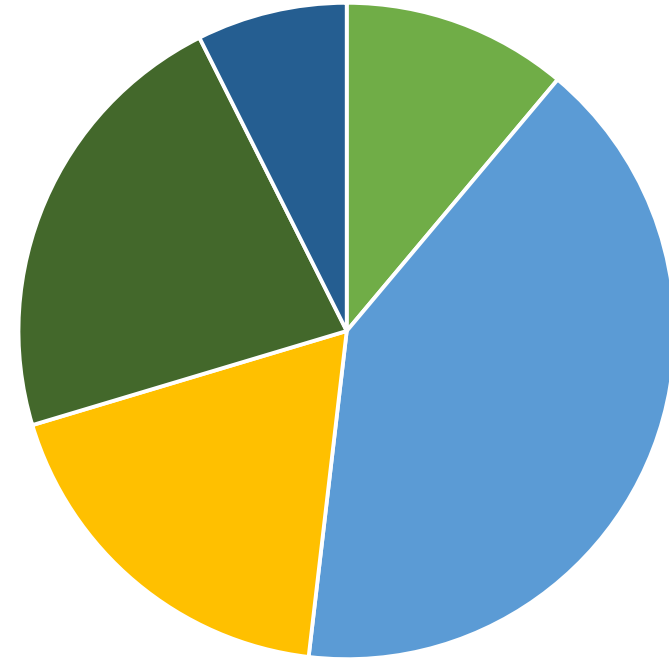
I feel informed about important Township information.

Management



Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Non-management

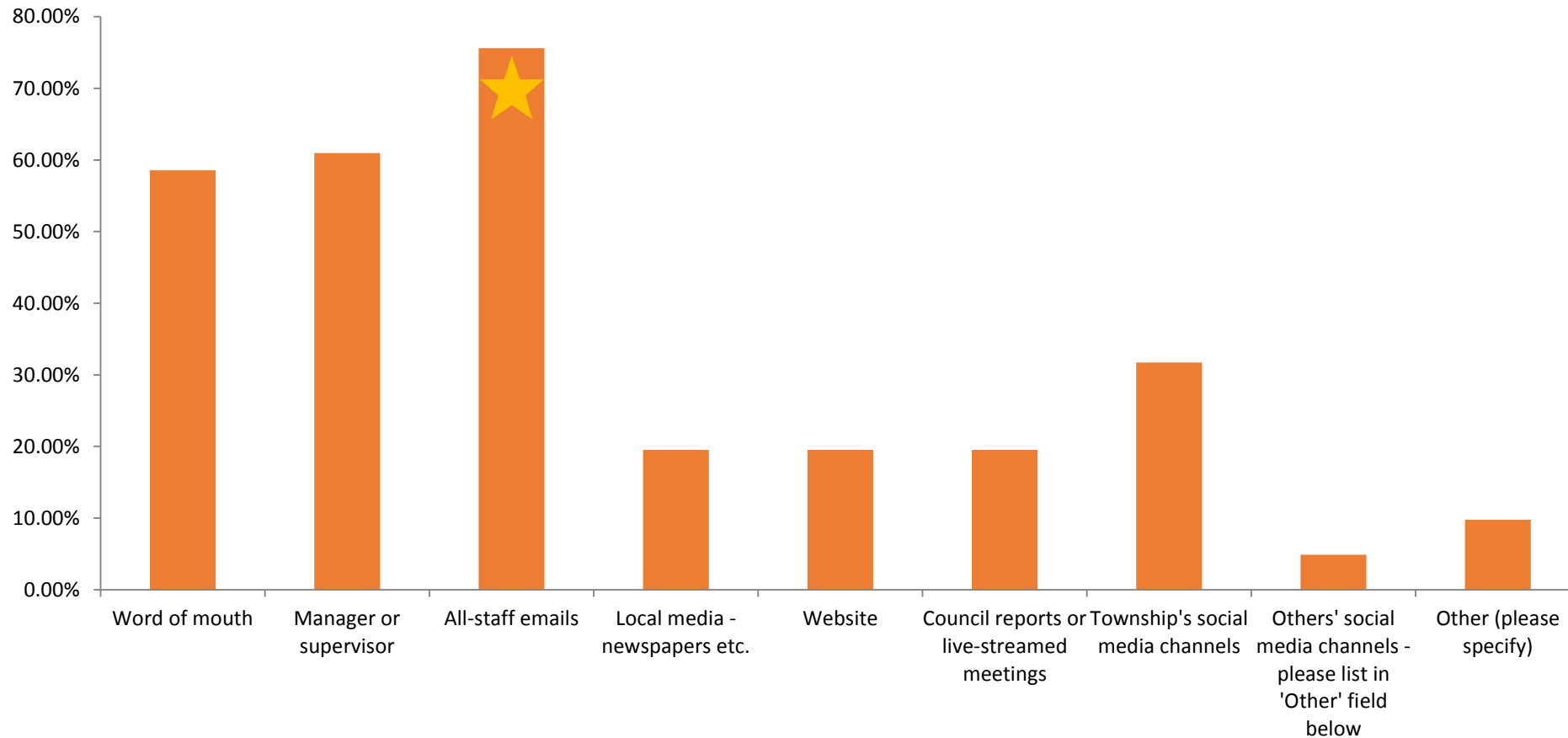


Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree



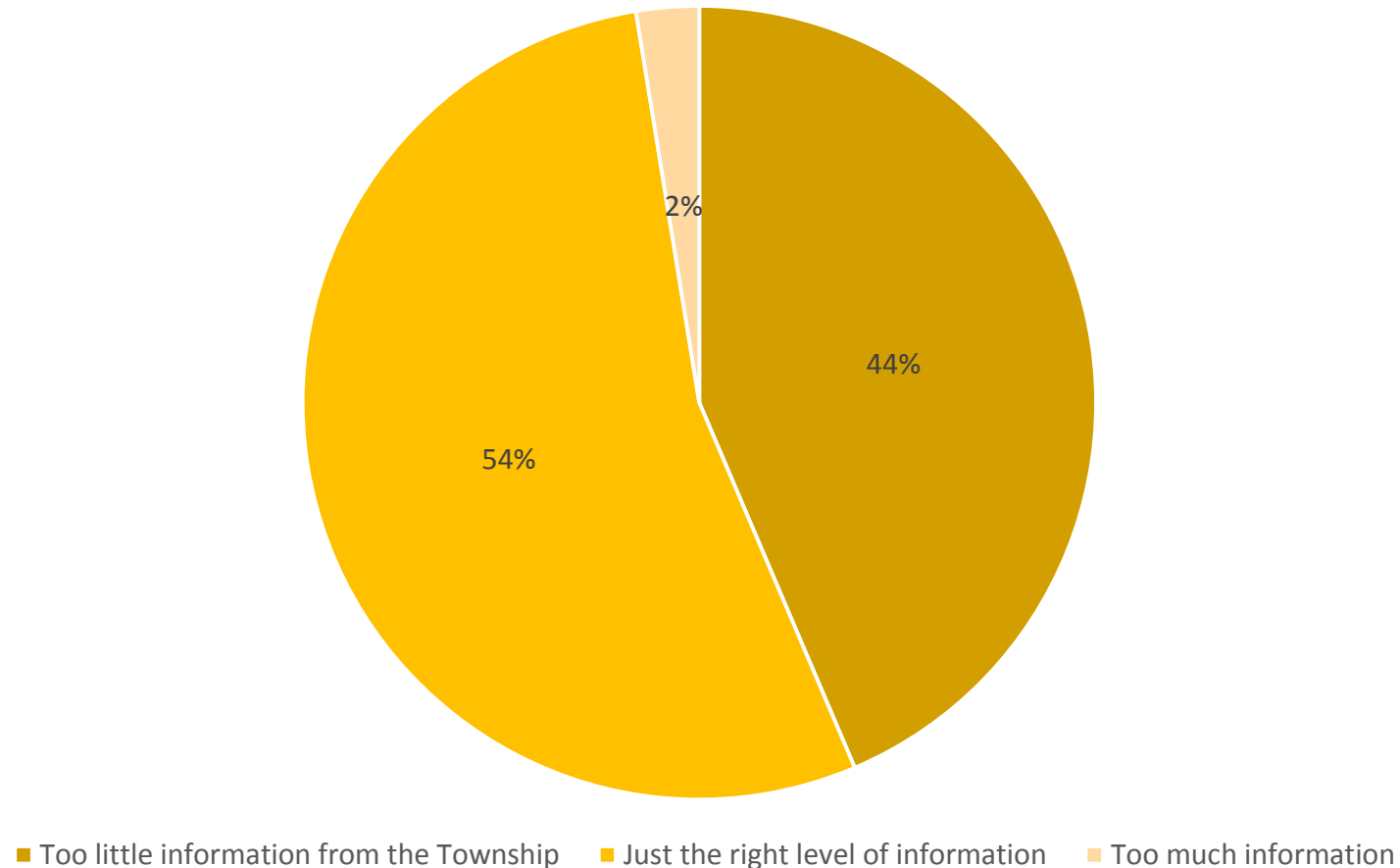
# Vehicles of information

Check the TOP 3 ways that you get most of your information about what is happening at the Township.



# Perception of level of resident information

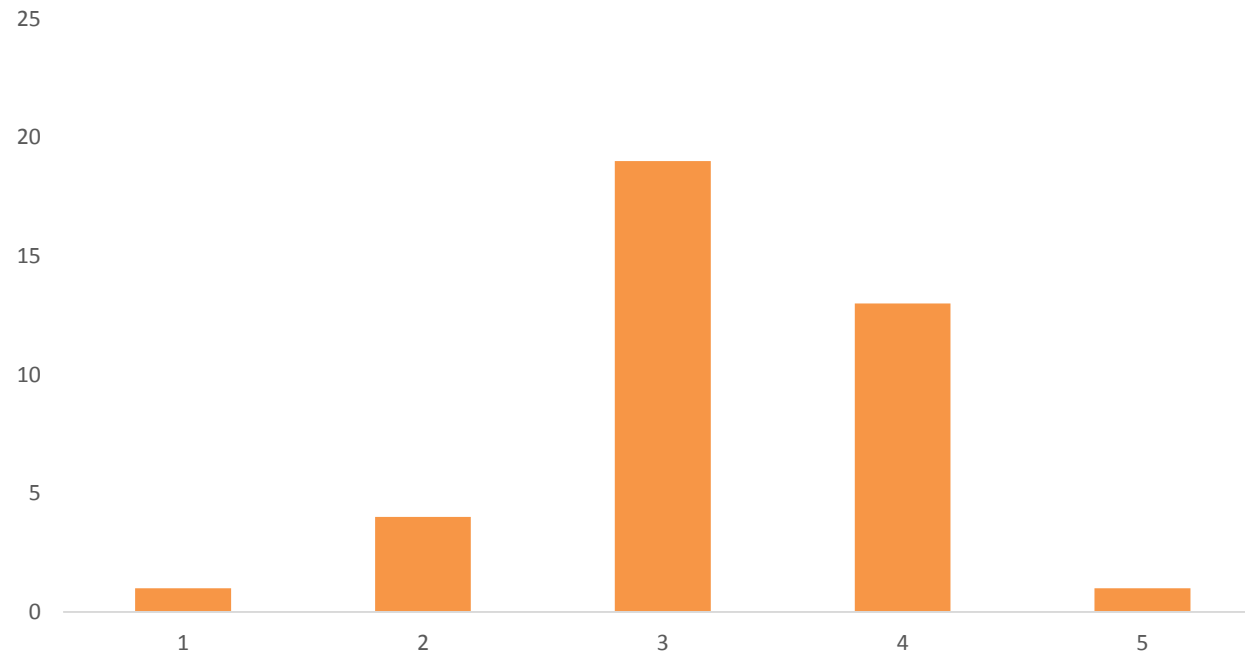
From your perspective, do you think residents get:



# Perception of residents' view of effectiveness

On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being not effective at all), what perception do you think residents have of the Township, overall?

Perception of Overall Effectiveness



# Key themes from internal survey

- Strong desire for regular and consistent communications to all staff, including updates about key decisions at Council and project updates from the Corporate Leadership Team
- Leverage current tools to improve internal communications
- Ensure stronger information sharing from all departments and across departments
- Staff want to have a voice in decisions that impact them
- Staff are not sure if the community gets enough information from the Township
- Consider the community quite highly engaged and that having a voice is important to them, but there are opportunities to better report back how feedback is used

# Key themes from internal survey

- Would like more frequent, transparent communications from the Township to the community
- Perceive that seniors are the hardest to reach population
- Consider that media could cover Township stories more effectively
- A stronger social media presence is critical, and consideration should be given to leverage more channels (e.g., Instagram)
- There are opportunities to strengthen story telling about staff and community accomplishments and contributions

# Research findings:

## **Staff interviews**

# Key themes identified through staff interviews

- Clarity needed on communications processes, roles, priorities and expectations
- Staff capacity and use of tools are limited making it challenging to ensure consistent, quality and timely communications both internally and externally
- Desire for a more strategic and proactive approach
- Stronger and more balanced online presence is critical to combat misinformation and improve Township information sharing and engagement
- Clarity and consistency with the role of Council will support effective communications and help build community confidence in the management of the Township
- Desire to rebuild community trust
- Recognition the community is engaged; Township can do better to demonstrate listening

# Research findings:

# Individual Councillor interviews

(August 2022)



# Key themes identified by Council

- Understanding appropriate roles and responsibilities of staff and elected officials to strengthen staff/council relationship
- Desire for consistent training on policies and procedures for all elected officials
- Council desire more timely information from staff to support informed decision making
- Provide Council with quality and timely information to support issues management and their interactions with constituents

# Key themes identified by Council

- Encouraged by the direction being set by new leadership
- Priority for a more planned and strategic approach to communications to achieve a broader reach
- Desire for increased public communications and engagement to help strengthen community trust and confidence in local government
- Improved website – more user friendly and easier to find information
- Stronger social media presence with a consistent brand and messaging, and to mitigate misinformation from other sites

# Research findings:

## Community survey results

# Survey demographics

- 89 responses
- Top three age brackets: 35-54 (53%), 55+ (35%), 18-34 (12%)
- 65% female
- 55% are long-time residents (16+ years), 30% lived in Wilmot 6-15 years, 15% five years or less

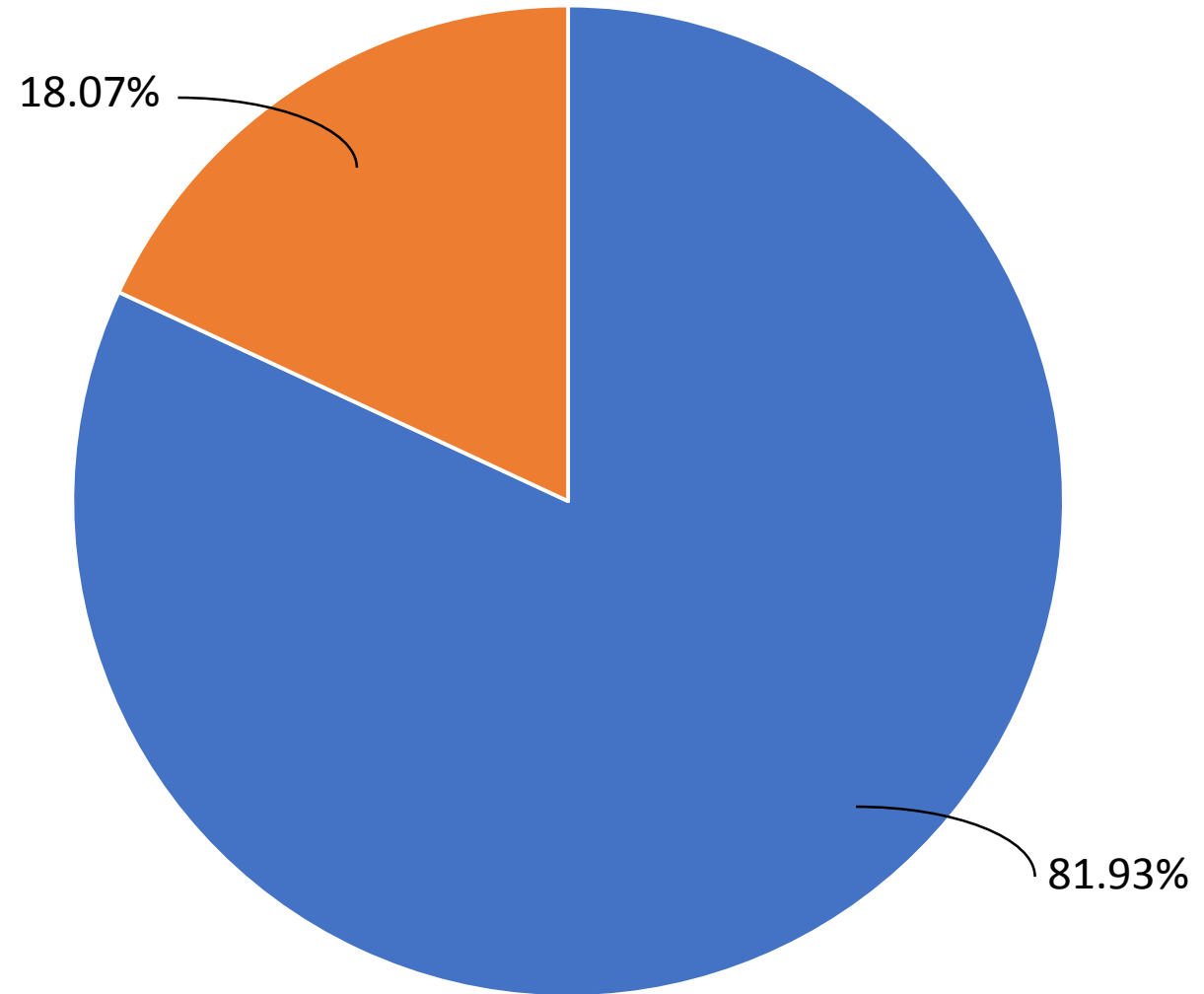
# Level of information received

When it comes to Township programs and services, are you receiving:

Too little information ■

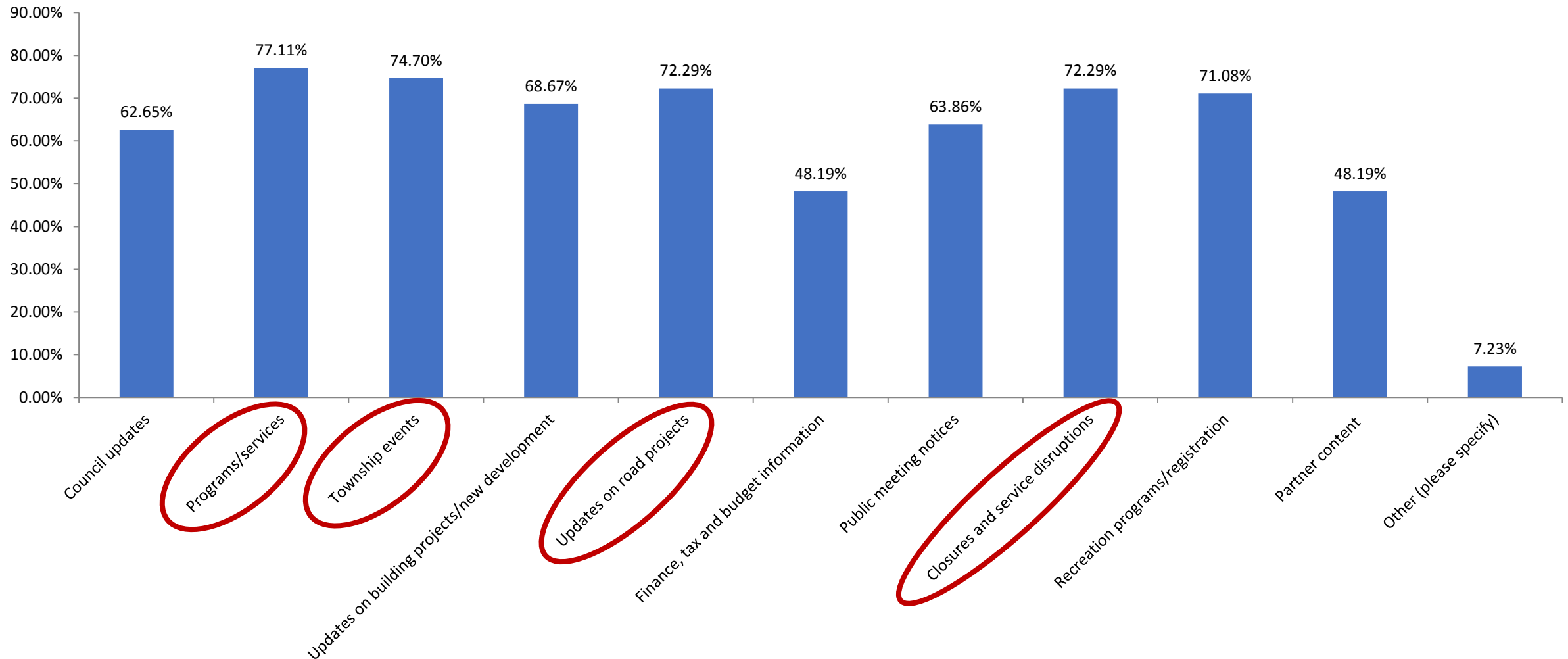
Just the right amount of information ■

Too much information (no responses)



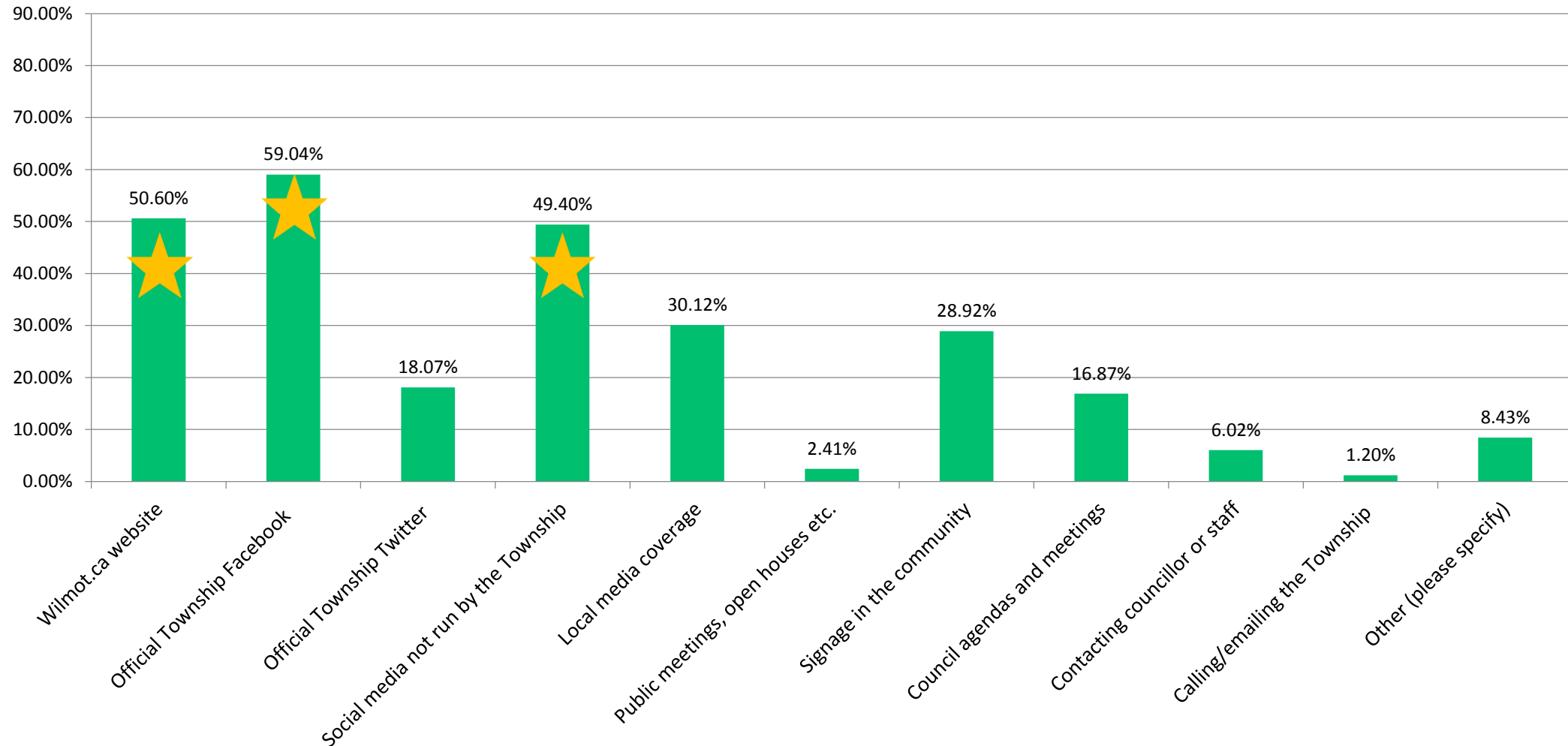
# Results from public survey

What specific information do you like to receive from the Township? (Select all that apply.)



# Results from public survey

How do you stay informed about Township matters? (Please check your top 3)



# Feedback on Township website

- 94% of respondents visit the website, wilmot.ca
- Most visit “from time to time” (62%)
- 60% of respondents report that information is “sometimes easy to find”, 35% say “not very easy to find”
- Top three reasons for visiting the website:
  1. Recreation programs and services
  2. Recent news or public notices (including road closures)
  3. Council meeting information

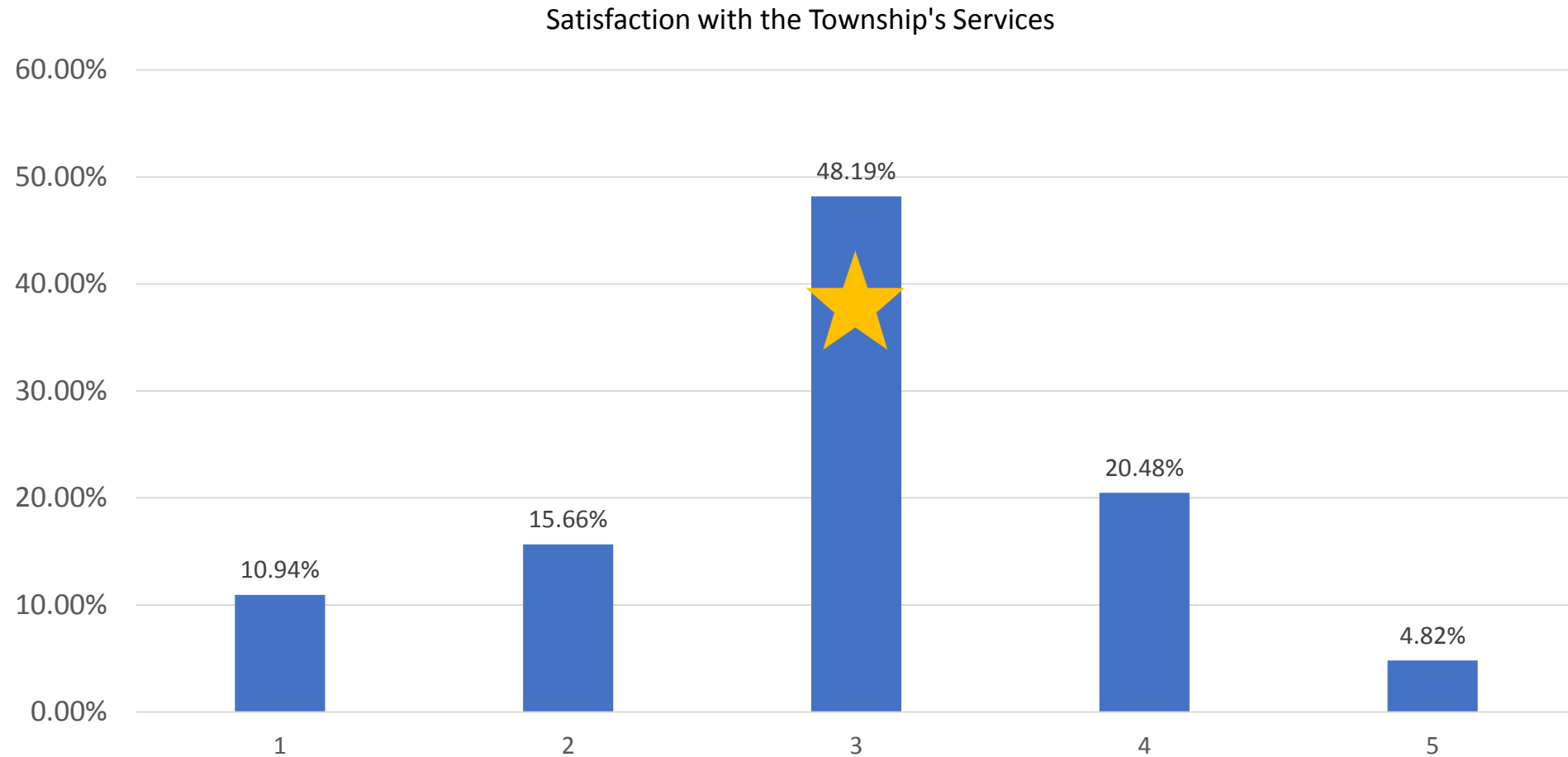


# Feedback about social media

- 77% are active on social media, 20% “a little bit” active
- Most used platform(s): Facebook (84%), Instagram (49%), Twitter (29%), LinkedIn (23%)
- For those that follow the Township on social media, Facebook is most popular (72% said they follow on Facebook, 35% follow on Twitter)
- Respondents are looking for a range of information on social media:
  - Events run by the Township
  - Programs and services
  - Recreation programs and registration
  - Closures and service disruptions

# Public input

Overall, how effective do you think the Township is at providing opportunities for the community to give input into local programs, services and decisions? (1 = not at all satisfied, 5 = very satisfied)



# Public Engagement

- Most respondents will participate when asked (58%)
- 55% believe that it is “very important” to provide input and be engagement, 41% say it is “somewhat important”
- 48% are neutral as to whether past engagement has been meaningful, 27% gave a low score, 25% gave a high score
- 56% of respondents regularly participate in local events, 41% sometimes participate
- Top ways to provide input:
  - Online surveys
  - In-person/virtual meetings, open houses
  - Focus groups
  - Ask questions on social media
  - Calling Mayor or councillor

# Research findings: **Stakeholder Group sessions**

# Groups consulted

New Hamburg Concert Band  
NDWI

New Hamburg Hockey Association  
Wilmot Horticulture Club

Baden Optimists Club

New Hamburg Lions

Interfaith Counselling

The Community Players

Let's Tree Wilmot

Wolverines Hockey Association

Wilmot Softball

SPECTRUM

Paula Whitlow (Director of Truth and Reconciliation, Region)

Trisha Robinson (Wilmot Family Resource Centre)

# Key themes identified through stakeholder focus groups

- Recognize that the Township is moving in a positive direction. Staff are responsive, caring and helpful.
- The Township could do more to celebrate community success, volunteerism, quality of life in Wilmot.
- Key places to get information include official Township Facebook page, Facebook groups not run by the Township, website, word of mouth/other community groups (*note that key stakeholders are already engaged and may rely more on word of mouth than other groups*).
- More consistent and high-quality social media content.

# Key themes identified through stakeholder focus groups

- Many residents and groups are engaged – they want to be involved. Leverage this with more outreach, promoting and participating in community events.
- Recognition of some division on Council.
- Sometimes hear different information from different people (staff and/or Council). Helpful when everyone is on the same page.
- Website can be challenging to navigate, “rabbit hole” of information. Not clear who to contact for what.
- Township sometimes called “Wilnot” – requires a culture shift to move away from this.

# Key themes identified through stakeholder focus groups

- When it comes to equity-seeking groups, establishing and strengthening ongoing relationships with local representatives is critical. (*formalize engagement processes*)
- The Township must demonstrate action behind words and be visible, for the engagement to be authentic and to build trust (e.g., training, effective policies).
- Invite community leaders to participate and provide input in planning initiatives (e.g., for recreation programs, EDI initiatives).
- In-person engagement is highly preferred.
- It is important to seek out diverse voices when seeking community input.



Research findings:  
**Comparator municipalities**

# Key themes - comparator municipalities

- **Centralized approach is most common with strong relationship between communications manager and senior leadership.**
  - At least one dedicated communications practitioner at the management level with additional support provided by communications or digital coordinator.
- **Importance of relationship between senior leadership and Council.**
  - Council should be kept in the loop. They can be a key link to important audiences.
  - Communications managers can provide support that helps elected officials deliver quality, corporate information (and savvy issues management support).
  - Clear roles for staff and elected officials.

# Key themes – comparator municipalities

- **Strategic approach means planning ahead and building trust internally.**
  - Every communications initiative should connect back to the municipality's vision, mission and values.
- **Clear processes for when and how to communicate.**
  - Processes play key role in overall strategic approach.
- **No magic bullet to reach everyone.**
  - Communications must be audience centric and different tactics should be used to reach different groups.

# Communications Resourcing

## – comparator municipalities

Municipality	Population	Communications staff
Orangeville	30,167	3 (manager, coordinator, graphic designer – <i>may turn to digital specialist</i> )
Port Hope	17,294	3 (manager, coordinator, web and graphic designer)
Saugeen Shores	15,908	2 (manager and coordinator)
Midland	17,817	2 (manager of customer experience and communications coordinator)
Georgina	47,642	4 (manager plus 3 others)
Oro-Medonte	23,017	3
Niagara-on-the-Lake	19,088	2.5 (looking for third full-time)

# Research analysis

# Internal: Strengths and Challenges

## Strengths

- CAO making positive changes.
- Management overall feel informed.
- Investment being made in strategic planning, internal culture, including development of a communications strategy.
- Digital Media Coordinator is effective with strong skillset.
- New Council is keen to improve communications and engagement with the community

## Challenges

- Lack of role clarity as well as policies/procedures around communications makes it hard to be consistent.
- Historic lack of investment in communications.
- Will take time to move beyond previous workplace culture.
- Existing culture of reactive communications.
- Staff want to be more engaged / feel involved.
- Additional resources required to improve quality and consistency of communications.

# External: Opportunities and Threats

## Opportunities

- Robust group of existing community stakeholders are engaged, ready to participate
- Public recognizes and values staff commitment to the community.
- Strong sense of community involvement and volunteerism.
- Multiple print newspapers provide options for reaching different audiences.
- Social media is an effective tool (esp. Facebook); significant opportunity to strengthen presence and increase value.
- Opportunity to adopt online engagement platform through the Region of Waterloo.

## Challenges

- Residents feel they get too little information from the Township and that communications is inconsistent.
- Multiple media outlets can make traditional media relations more challenging.
- 10+ Township social media channels – dilutes information and unclear what is/is not official Township information.
- Difficult to navigate Township website.
- Community stakeholders misunderstand some policies and procedures.
- High participation in local Facebook groups can contribute to spread of misinformation.
- Long history of negative reputation (“Wilnot”).
- Relationship building with equity-seeking groups will take time and commitment.

# Municipal Benefits of Effective Communications

- ✓ Increased community trust in local government
- ✓ Save taxpayer dollars
- ✓ Inspire behaviour change
- ✓ Improved service delivery
- ✓ Improved staff morale
- ✓ Increased trust with elected officials (internally and with community)
- ✓ Improve staff and council decision making



Next steps

# Next steps





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