



CAO

**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF  
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**  
*Staff Report*

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REPORT NO: CAO-2023-11  
TO: Council  
SUBMITTED BY: Sharon Chambers, CAO  
PREPARED BY: Sharon Chambers, CAO  
REVIEWED BY: Corporate Leadership Team  
DATE: September 25, 2023  
SUBJECT: Draft Corporate Communications Strategy 2024 - 2027

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

THAT Report CAO-2023-11 Draft Corporate Communications Strategy 2024-2027 be received for information.

**SUMMARY:**

The purpose of this report is to present the draft Corporate Communications Strategy prepared by Redbrick Communications.

Staff and Redbrick are presenting the draft strategy to Council for information purposes only and will bring back the final document at a future Council meeting. This will allow time for Council and the public to provide feedback into the strategy before it is adopted by Council.

**BACKGROUND:**

Corporate communication has undergone significant transformation over time due to rapid changes in technology and communication methods. The widespread adoption of digital tools and the emergence of social media have revolutionized the way organizations interact with stakeholders. In recent years, Municipalities have recognized the importance of establishing effective two-way communication that is more targeted, interactive, informative, and effective.

The traditional approach of treating corporate communications as a corner-of-the-desk activity for senior leadership and departmental staff is no longer sufficient. With the increasing demands of day-to-day responsibilities, dedicated resources with appropriate professional and technical skills are required to build an effective communications function.

To keep pace with the evolving landscape of corporate communication, organizations need to embrace the changing dynamics and invest in resources that can effectively navigate the digital realm. By doing so, they can establish a robust communications function that enables them to engage with stakeholders in a more targeted, interactive, and informative manner.

The Township's communications function has been slow to evolve. A part-time Communications Specialist role was introduced in 2019 within the Information and Legislative Services department, marking the organization's first dedicated communications position. In 2020, the role was upgraded to full-time status. The primary responsibilities of this position included managing social media platforms and handling basic communications. The website was primarily managed by staff from both the Information and Legislative Services and Development Services departments.

In 2021, the position became vacant and underwent further restructuring. It was transformed into a Digital Media Coordinator/Website Administrator role, with the intention of hiring another communications position to address broader corporate communication needs.

Subsequently, to develop a comprehensive communications strategy and establish priorities, the Township enlisted the services of Redbrick Communications in 2022. The draft Corporate Communications Strategy was near completion before the October 2022 municipal election. However, the project was temporarily halted to accommodate input from the incoming Council. Redbrick Communications conducted interviews with each member of the new Council and incorporated their feedback into the draft plan, which is appended to this report.

At this time, staff are not seeking approval of the draft strategy. Instead, the draft document is presented for informational purposes and to solicit feedback from both Council and the public before final adoption. The Manager of Communications and Strategic Initiatives will also play a key role in prioritizing activities within the plan.

## REPORT:

The draft Corporate Communication Strategy was developed by Redbrick Communications and was informed through engagement with Council, staff and community stakeholders, as well as investigating municipal communication best practices.

Based on the research, findings, best practice, future trends and analysis, this strategy identifies the following six strategic communications priorities for the Township.

1. **Invest in communications:** Effective communications and public engagement can only be achieved with sufficient resourcing and setting it as a strategic priority across the

organization. Investment in communications means skilled staff are in place with the appropriate tools at their disposal to proactively plan and implement strategies, reach audiences, monitor attitudes and reactions and measure success. To meet the growing needs at the Township, additional staff resources should be considered to support the manager once in place.

2. **Establish a strong proactive and strategic function:** Building a strong communications culture at the Township starts from the inside out. The communications manager will need to establish effective processes, policies and tools to build and strengthen a communications mindset across the organization and communicate more efficiently and quickly with key audiences, especially when issues arise. Everyone has a role to play. Goal setting with departments and communications calendars play a key role in focusing communications efforts so that the Township can engage effectively with its audience and build a stronger relationship with residents.
3. **Improve alignment with Council:** Elected officials are important influencers in the community. They engage with constituents daily and can be leveraged as a key channel to share information broadly. They can also be a conduit to share information back to staff. Establishing effective processes for Council to stay informed, including between Council meetings, is critical to success. It also builds trust and helps ensure consistency of messages and helps mitigate misinformation in the community.
4. **Strengthen positive story telling:** We engage people and build trust and understanding by sharing authentic, human stories that resonate. Strengthening storytelling will help draw people in, demonstrate value for taxpayers' dollars and build a captive audience when the Township needs to share information. Storytelling includes both the narrative aspect as well as visual elements and celebrates what makes the municipality unique. This includes strengthening the Township's social media presence, showing progress on key projects and profiling staff working to improve the quality of life in Wilmot everyday.
5. **Increase the Township's visibility in the community:** Effective communications are easy to find, understand and share. Effective community engagement ensures there are opportunities for everyone to have a voice. The Township needs to be seen through all its channels, and leverage community influencers, like the media or community groups, to help tell its story.
6. **Enhance public engagement efforts:** Wilmot is rich with stakeholder groups that want to have a say in Township matters. Committing to guiding principles for engagement, developing an overarching framework and toolkit for staff, and closing then loop with the community following engagement will help streamline the Township's approach and improve its engagement efforts with residents

These strategic priorities form the basis of this Communications Plan and will guide communications activities from late 2023 to 2027. Each priority includes objectives and actions to achieve them, with high-level timelines to ensure progress.

The first priority, to invest in communications, has already been committed to by Council. In addition to the established Digital Media Coordinator/Website Administrator position (currently vacant), Council approved a Manager of Communications and Strategic Initiatives role in the 2023 budget. Recruitment for this position has recently been completed, and Donna Kell will join the Township on October 2<sup>nd</sup>. The Digital Media Coordinator/Website Administrator role will be reviewed prior to commencing the recruitment process to ensure that the position description reflects the skills, competencies and job duties required to advance the Township's strategic communications priorities.

The incoming Manager of Communications and Strategic Initiatives will play a pivotal role in advancing priorities two through six. In this regard, it is recommended that the final plan be brought back before Council after Ms. Kell has an opportunity to review and have input into the strategy and prioritization of activities within the action plan. It is expected that a number of the actions will proceed sooner than identified in the plan, as the plan was developed at a time when both of the Township's communications roles were vacant.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE TOWNSHIP OF WILMOT STRATEGIC PLAN: The Corporate Communications Strategy supports the goals of Responsible Governance and Quality of Life by engaging residents in decision making

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Pages 27 to 29 of the draft strategy identify potential costs for various communication tools that could be considered. The Manager of Communications and Strategic Initiatives will be responsible for developing the annual communications budget for consideration by Council each year.

ATTACHMENTS:

Corporate Communications Strategy 2024-2027.