



Municipality of Trent Lakes Communications Review Report

Doug MacMillan, President
doug@letterm.ca

Stacey McCarthy, Sr. Account Manager
stacey@letterm.ca

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Executive Summary

“Strengthen public engagement activities and improve communications” was identified as a key priority action by the Council of the Municipality of Trent Lakes in its 2019-2021 Strategic Priorities. Subsequently, the Municipality sought an expert audit and review of its communications and engagement activities. The Letter M (Guelph, ON) was selected in December 2019 to lead this review.

The Letter M is a consulting agency in the fields of marketing, branding and communications. The company has specialized expertise gained from 25+ years of experience working with more than 100 public sector organizations (including more than 20 municipal governments) to create efficient, forward-thinking community-focused communications. This project was led by the agency’s two senior-most ranking consultants.

Between January and April 2020, research was completed to understand current activities by the Municipality of Trent Lakes, identify opportunities, establish community goals and expectations, define current best practices in comparable public organizations, analyze and provide focused recommendations that will inform the creation of a strategic communications plan.

Research activities included:

- Materials and online communications audit, and media review
- Brand audit – look, feel, voice
- Best practices interviews (4) and additional research
- One-on-one interviews in-person or by telephone (Council, staff, residents and non-residents) - 30
- Focus groups – 2 totaling 17 individuals (residents, staff)
- Consulting team experience with similar projects

Based on findings and analysis, **key recommendations are:**

1. Implement a staffing resource model including recruiting a full-time specialist responsible for a portfolio to encompass communications, community engagement, brand, marketing, tourism and economic development.
2. Strengthen communication partnerships with external community organizations to enrich ability to reach seasonal residents.
3. Lead a community identity and branding exercise to establish unity across the Municipality, compete effectively and have a common look, feel and voice across all communications and marketing.
4. Significantly enhance primary electronic communications media – website, email and social media – while also renewing focus on creative in-person engagement.

The above-noted findings and recommendations are detailed further in this report.

Respectfully submitted,



Doug MacMillan
President



Stacey McCarthy
Sr. Account Manager

SCOT Summary

*Observations after our team's review and analysis of all research and engagement activities are captured in the following SCOT (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats) summary with essential 'top 3' observations noted in **bold**:*

Strengths

- **There is a clear commitment to and evidence of proactive communications across the organization: Strong governance, leadership and policies along with effective oversight and consistency in tone and look**
- **Vested and engaged Mayor and Council (5 Council members) with some participants leading their own communications efforts; Councillor Armstrong's newsletter is well-received (two pages every 2-3 months) – an indicator of community interest in traditional communications**
- **Consistent leadership commitment to community engagement and informed decision-making**
- Staff with multiple roles and knowledge in their subject areas, with a united commitment to communications and understanding of its importance in municipal government
- Committees driven by community (EcDev; Parks, Rec and Culture) with Council representation set a base of transparency and effective communication
- Number of facilities and sites for community gathering (although these are not all owned by municipality) with some in-person communication opportunities (i.e. locations to allow for connection like transfer stations)
- Internal communications are usually effective and streamlined: small staff group demonstrates culture of trust
- Strong commitment to and interest in email communications (albeit with low participation rates, irregular newsletters/briefs that do not follow best practices, and without an email communications plan)
- Well-written content throughout materials is professional although highly formal and densely presented, reinforcing 'sterile' and bureaucratic government persona
- Department head meeting after every Council meeting to determine solution with which to approach Council is ready structure for communications alignment with key issues
- Templates (Word) for Agenda, Letterhead, Memo, Minutes, Policies and Report lead to consistency in look and approach
- Generally strong and reliable media relationships, objective and timely coverage
- Tax Infographic – right idea (if too much information)

Challenges

- **No dedicated communications role with proper training/credentials: staff stretched too thin over multiple responsibilities, and without formal commitment to skills development**
- **No clear brand, marketing, communications, or strategies leads to standard issue or reactive communication, limited issues management process or activity, unable to respond quickly across multiple channels**
- **60% of ratepayers are seasonal residents, difficult to reach and engage with different expectations, modest disinterest in 'different ways' and polarization with permanent resident on select issues**
- Feeling of disconnection since amalgamation – low sense of "community" as many areas of the Municipality feel isolated or considered not-as-important as others (Bobcaygeon, Buckhorn, Burleigh Falls, Cavendish, Kinmount and Lakehurst) resulting in a lack of shared identity or community brand as in Muskoka, Haliburton, even other areas in Kawartha
- Website is dated, poor design and accessibility, high amount of content and poor user organization or navigation structure, minimal analytic analysis and adjustment

- Visual brand is low quality ‘amateur’ and dated municipal logo, which doesn’t connote strong tourism or economic development brand; graphic design cluttered and inconsistent, does not follow design principals to encourage user to engage in content
- Survey overload as the primary means of engagement, long and often unengaging with inconsistent rates of participation
- Communicating regarding behavioural issues (i.e. beer/butts) may strike offense as heavy handed and require more community based social marketing campaign approaches
- Information overload with busy staff who are fragmented in locations across the municipality and infrequently all together
- Broadband coverage: most centres are okay, although select spots in municipality have of reliable Internet access
- Aging population in community is growing at fastest rate; least able to adopt or be comfortable with digital communication
- Low awareness and usage of facilities and sites
- Lack of stakeholder awareness as to why some decisions are made
- Signage overload; losing people
- Lack of clarity around roles of government in area, who does what and what to expect; Municipality cannot offer the same services/resources as a large urban centre (i.e. Toronto)
- Densely presented content: lack of ‘layered’ approach to messaging: too much information creates unnecessary questions or complaints (i.e. see dense newsletter)
- Low subscription and participation in email newsletter, uninspiring content, inconsistent
- Often inexperienced Council may not be up to speed on regulations of Municipal Act
- Geographic spread is vast for population making in-person engagement more challenging

Opportunities

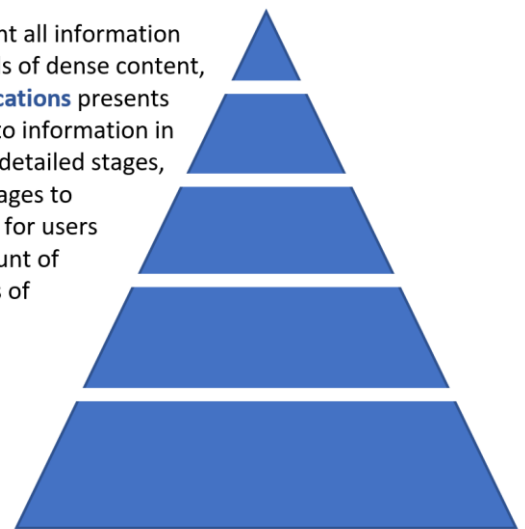
- **Establish a professional Marketing/Communications/Engagement position and develop a strategic communications plan; limit time spent on communications by other staff and streamline decision-making and approvals**
- **Develop a fresh, bold and inclusive community brand that celebrates an overarching and distinctive identity; show how each part of the Municipality is connected; demonstrate commonalities; establish a campaign to promote community pride**
- **Maintain and build on engagement with seasonal residents through cottagers’ and land association groups, including 2-3 annual meetings of all groups, sustained telephone touchpoints with presidents, and agreements to distribute key communications via email lists, social media channels and other tactics as identified**
- Create a user-focused, expansive and comprehensive website presence that is responsive to inquiries
- Create a significant campaign to increase email newsletter participation, establish an email communications plan that follows best practices; measure and recalibrate based on data analysis
- Develop a new, professional and compelling visual brand and guidelines document for types/quality of imagery and fonts, colour palette, accessible layout templates
- Education of residents on municipal operations and decisions
- Develop an issues management protocol
- Focus on key issues to encourage engagement: taxes, environment/water quality, quarry, transfer stations/waste, capital planning, roads, mining/logging, facilities Master Plan
- Communicate the benefits of “small-town” rural, cottage living over large urban centre to balance expectations
- Seek a more personable, relatable tone in messaging; less municipal, more storytelling

- Layer communications to provide succinct, condensed versions of data and avoid overwhelming audiences while still accommodating full transparency and the needs of some users (see infographic below)
- More unique, memorable engagement that builds on surveys: rethink social media – now a Municipality digital ad depository – engagement tool
- Not intranet but rather a dedicated staff server
- Municipal Communications Committee
- Create a memorable mobile Town Hall or traveling kiosk for events, special days at community centres and at transfer stations

Threats

- **Polarizing and divisive issues amongst permanent and seasonal residents and difficulty reaching and engaging with seasonal residents; further division between these groups due to pandemic may require time to heal**
- **Consistent population growth possible by urban people moving to more affordable or desirable areas (many retirees) will challenge ability to instill strong community pride, coupled with influx of weekenders with little brand loyalty or commitment to understanding ‘the rules’**
- **Economic circumstances and budget restrictions, particularly post-COVID, may limit ability to implement key recommendations including hiring dedicated role, implementing branding strategy and rebuilding website**
- Mayor/Council engagement expectations may be unreasonable until a fuller engagement framework is created and given general levels of engagement ‘fatigue’ in municipalities
- Strong, vocal members of the community may overwhelm ‘silent majority’ and use municipal communications channels and governance practices as a platform, requiring diligence and one:one engagement with said community members
- Many comparable municipal regions boasting similar advantages – natural environment, lower cost, close to urban amenities – will be investing in sophisticated marketing and branding activities to lure contributing residents, businesses and tourists
- Long wait until high speed internet access for all residents
- Extremely limited local media coverage and reach is likely to decline further as local media struggles to remain viable

Rather than present all information in one or two levels of dense content, **layered communications** presents users with access to information in increasingly more detailed stages, allowing key messages to resonate first, and for users to access the amount of information that is of interest to them.



Directions

Communications Goals

1. Represent a high quality, professional and accountable municipal government
2. Communicate critical information and emergencies efficiently and effectively to the full community
3. Consistently reach as many ratepayers as possible in communications activity
4. Promote openness and accountability from the Municipality and encourage citizen engagement
5. Collect viable, representative input from community to guide planning and decisions, as well as feedback on existing issues or activities
6. Build a strong, united brand and synergy of community identity across the Municipality
7. Establish professional and consistent visual identity and look/feel
8. Encourage easy access to information and promote same to streamline demands on staff
9. Communicate budget and tax requirements, and encourage participation in same

Imperative for Structured Communications

Effective communications help the organization meet three critical objectives:

- 1. Fosters Governance Excellence**
 - a. Accountability and transparency
 - b. Evidence-based decision-making
 - c. Alignment and integration of strategic priorities
- 2. Promotes Service Excellence**
 - a. Citizen-centred service delivery
 - b. Clarity and understanding
 - c. Operational efficiency
- 3. Fosters Organizational Readiness**
 - a. Internal efficiencies support growing capacity needs
 - b. Culture of communications with increased morale, attraction and retention
 - c. Issues management, preparedness and response
 - d. Economic development attraction

Communication Resource Model

Presently the Communications function is significantly underserved. Given the complexity of skill and growing public expectations, increasingly, even smaller municipal governments have a dedicated communications/marketing practitioner on staff. While only one of Peterborough County’s lower-tier municipalities currently employs a communications lead, we see this as an opportunity for Trent Lakes to get “ahead of the curve” in this regard. Given the breadth of requirements and fast-changing world of communications, this expertise and commitment is necessary to meet stakeholder expectations and fulfill the goals of this strategy. The following resource model is recommended:

- Centralize communications function and remove communications tactical responsibilities from other positions (except Fire Department)
- Establish a full-time **Communications, Engagement and Economic Development/Tourism Specialist** position to centralize these requirements in one role; recruit experienced professional with these skills/training
 - *Why? More consistent, more strategic – more dedicated resources for campaigns and outreach; less ad hoc; opportunity for measurement and analysis – which should be done yearly at minimum and discoveries should recalibrate next steps. Student support for special projects identified in annual planning; spring cottagers’ meetings, etc.*
- Back-up from existing staff: with one lead, ensure processes are in place amongst senior staff for absence/vacation/overtime backups
- Outsource graphic design requirements until a rebrand and development of professional templates for internal use by communications lead and select staff
- Allocate time and resources on a cyclical basis that reflects the seasonal resident cycle: This may include **Seasonal Ambassadors**: summer interns in communications and community engagement, as an example
- Fire: remains independent and specialized communications, work in cohesion with Specialist
- Recruit a community communications committee meeting twice/year to provide external input and ideas



First Priorities – Communications Specialist

- Develop a Three-Year Corporate Communications Plan
 - Supervisor in each department: key connection to staff under them; work with them to create annual department communications plans that dovetail with corporate plan
- Develop issues management protocol to quickly provide information, manage staff expectations and meet audience expectations: i.e. boil water advisory – template will define process, deliverables such as Q&A, key spokesperson, role of Council, etc.
- Establish relationships, communications process and distribution channels with community influencers: see page 8, and with relevant media

Overarching Strategic Directions

Tactics tend to come and go, while strategic directions remain longer term. The following overarching strategic directions are intended to guide all specific communication activities:

1. **Ensure sustained, strategic and proactive communications** through realistic and thorough planning: Corporate communications plan, and a greater focus on issues management planning throughout departments to anticipate and stay ahead of communication needs.
2. **Present content based on user themes and communicate in layers**: Organize and consistently deliver content around easy-to-recognize themes that are relatable to the majority of residents. In all instances, organize and ‘tag’ website content within these themes. Provide layers of content to allow more for audiences to control their information.
3. **Minimize heavy and formal copy in favour of clean, strong visuals**: Introduce audiences to, connect them with, and integrate them into, the Municipality and its services through clean visuals, ‘infographics’ and photography. Reduce copy-heavy communications. Visuals will catch attention and get recipients looking, are preferred by most audience groups and are more memorable.
4. **Broaden engagement tactics and develop an engagement strategy**: Explore in-person engagement via ambassadors at a kiosk or “city hall bus” at seasonal community events, gatherings and popular destinations; introduce a standing ‘one minute survey’ in email blasts to encourage ongoing input in accessible ways; encourage interest and engagement through unique opportunities and gamification: contests/rewards. Demonstrate appreciation of citizen and staff engagement, and the value of it, through updates.
5. **Build strong community channels with partners and influencers**: Establish relationships, communications process and distribution channels with key community influencers: primarily landowner and cottage owner associations, business associations, library system, and other groups.
6. **Create and promote a community brand, identity and voice**: Lead a strategic branding exercise to define a distinctive, overarching persona and purpose for the community to establish unity, professionalism and marketing purpose. Adopt a more welcoming, collaborative (“we”) and “charming” tone to engage and entice readers. Ensure proactive and consistent communications using professionally created templates.
7. **Let actions inform tactics and content**: Introduce processes to draw on inbound phone inquiries, casual conversations, emails and website traffic patterns – as well as emerging issues and behaviour adjustment goals – to organically influence content choices for website landing page, email and newsletter communications and social media posts.

Communication Tactics

INTERNAL

- Implement a digital communications app-based solution such as Microsoft Teams, What's App or Facebook Teams
- Appoint a communications liaison for each department – not necessarily the manager but a conduit between manager and staff
- Training: Implement ongoing communications training and Team building sessions including Council
- Continue to hold department head meeting after every Council meeting and issue follow-up communications to all staff highlighting key issues and decisions
- Create graphic design standards/guidelines and strong templates for staff use: Rigidly oversee
- Ensuring communications and issues management are a standing item on most if not all agendas
- Internal campaign: *These are our customers* profiles of 15-20 community member personas to help connect staff to their community and individuals needs/goals

EXTERNAL

Non-Digital

- Design a Council Strategic Priorities 'report card' style update flyer; this (and waste cards) is all that should go in the tax notices
- Introduce Mobile/Remote Town Hall "on wheels" that can make its way around the Municipality at key events and activities with information and engagement themes
- Transfer stations: Everyone needs to go there – information board or handout but it needs to be easy/simple for staff – don't overpopulate handout
- Implement a signage strategy with professional designs focusing on information communications
- Newspapers/radio: Explore costs for one-page ad in each 507 Express for "Trent Lakes Update" and regular radio appearance by Communications Manager to discuss important community matters
- Surveys: Limit these or shift strategy, shorter and frequent surveys, "one-minute survey", etc. (see website); introduce other forms of engagement including telephone polls, in-community discussions; workshops with key stakeholders
- Newsletter: Revamp, update to be more readable, engaging; special editions for garbage and new owners; available twice a year (Fall and Spring); explore publishing a Spring magazine including advertising to distribute across region
- Annual Report to the Community printed bulletin distributed via community centres, Library and other central outlets, and online via link

Digital

- Explore use of SMS (mobile text) subscriptions to communicate critical issues, reminders and occasional news to participating residents
- Website: Rebuild to modernize, make accessible and responsive; seek to introduce timely, seasonal data; sustain analysis of traffic patterns
 - Establish process for frontline staff to address key issues they're hearing/noticing via a home page bulletin board (of sorts)
 - Introduce a "one-minute survey" feature on home page; change monthly
 - Explore using the site pages where people go most often to 'advertise' or include a bulletin board of news and information, ie: paying taxes online, purchasing or registers

- Social media: Increase frequency of posts; develop a fulsome engagement strategy for Facebook (both municipality and community groups) and Instagram; less so Twitter
- MailChimp email newsletter: Implement a significant campaign or reward-driving promotion to push online subscriptions; lean on relationships with cottage associations and other organizations to promote sign up; significantly revamp newsletter structure and design
- Record and provide online access to Council meetings (as opposed to streaming meetings)
- Host virtual Town Hall meetings twice yearly, promote heavily; use Facebook or similar service

KPIs to Measure Success

The full communications plan should include reasonable, accessible metrics to measure success and continue to organically evolve the communications plan. Reported at least biannually, these may include:

- Growth in email subscriptions, open rates and click-through rates
- Growth in website traffic and length of stay
- Social media participation and engagement
- Media mentions and nature of same
- Increased participation in surveys, and overall growth in engagement reach
- Notable changes in behaviours following purposeful communications
- Reduction in volume, tone and/or nature of complaints

APPENDICES

Interview participants

Audit intake and research notes

Best practices interviews and research

Examples: Mobile town hall

Council priorities 'report card'

Municipality of Trent Lakes Interviews

(FG) DENOTES FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS; ALL OTHERS WERE IN-PERSON OR TELEPHONE ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

1. CAROL ARMSTRONG	COUNCIL
2. BRUCE AVERIL	CATCHACOMA COTTAGERS' ASSOCIATION
3. DEREK BERTRAM	STAFF - BUILDING/PLANNING (FG)
4. BILL BOATH	STAFF - TRANSFER FOREMAN (FG)
5. DON BOWLES	STAFF - TRANSFER STATION (FG)
6. CHRISTINE BRICKMAN	CRYSTAL LAKE COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION
7. STEVE BROCKBANK	FIRE CHIEF
8. JESSIE CLARK	CLERK
9. JANET CLARKSON	MAYOR
10. LESLIE CLARKSON	BUSINESS OWNER
11. MARNIE CLEMENT	RESIDENT (FG)
12. IVAN COUMBS	MANAGER, PUBLIC WORKS
13. DYLAN COSH	MANAGER, REC AND FACILITIES
14. BIANCA DRAGICEVIC	CUSTOMER SERVICE
15. TABITHA DEAN	BIG BALD COTTAGERS ASSOCIATION
16. WARREN DUNLOP	NORTH PIGEON LAKE ASSOCIATION
17. ADRI EASTMAN	RESIDENT (FG)
18. JOHN EISINGA	MANAGER, BUILDING AND PLANNING
19. MARK EVELEIGH	BUSINESS OWNER, THE CATCH RESTAURANT
20. DOUG FISHBURN	PICARD LAKE COTTAGER'S ASSOCIATION
21. GREG HARPER	GOLD LAKE ROAD
22. LYNN HOLT	PROJECTS COORDINATOR
23. SUE JACKETT	STAFF - FIRE (FG)
24. GARY JAROSZ	CAVENDISH COMMUNITY RATEPAYERS ASSOCIATION
25. ENDRIT KARAJ	BUSINESS OWNER, PIZZA ALLORO RESTAURANT
26. BILL KENT	BUCKHORN COMMUNITY CENTRE
27. MARLYS KERKMAN	RESIDENT (FG)
28. TERRY LAMBSHEAD	COUNCIL
29. SUZANNE LEAN	STAFF - WASTE (FG)
30. KIM LETTO	COUNCIL; BIG BALD LAKE COTTAGERS ASSN
31. TIFFANY LY	STAFF - PLANNING ADMIN (FG)
32. SARAH MACAULEY	TAX CLERK
33. HEATHER MCCRINDLE	STAFF - TRANSFER STATION (FG)
34. STEPHANIE MCPHERSON	LIBRARIAN
35. ED NELLIGAN	MISSISSAUGA DISTRICT COTTAGER'S ASSOCIATION
36. MATT PERKINS	STAFF - MAINTENANCE SUPERVISOR (FG)
37. PETER RAYMOND	RESIDENT (FG)
38. CHASTITY ROBERTSON	STAFF - DEPUTY TREASURER (FG)
39. ANN ROTH	STAFF - DEPUTY CLERK (FG)
40. GARY ROUND	GALWAY AREA RATEPAYERS
41. GRANT RUBERT	STAFF - PUBLIC WORKS (FG)
42. DAVE REID	RESIDENT (FG)
43. DONNA TEGGART	FINANCE/CAO
44. SHERRY WHITEWAY	GALWAY AREA RATEPAYERS
45. DARREN WILCOX	GREENS LAKE COTTAGERS ASSOC.
46. MARIE WINDOVER	RESIDENT (FG)
47. RON WINDOVER	DEPUTY MAYOR

Municipality of Trent Lakes Audit – Rough Notes

Materials Review

Client notes (other)

- Committees:
 - o Economic Development Advisory Committee (2 Council and 5 Citizen members; representation from Peterborough & The Kawarthas Economic Development)
 - o Parks, Recreation and Culture Advisory Committee (2 Council and 4 Citizen members; 1 member of the Buckhorn Community Centre and Athletic Association)
- Approx. 5,397-12,435 residents; 50% seasonal (April-October)
- Key communities: Bobcaygeon, Buckhorn, Burleigh Falls, Cavendish, Kinmount and Lakehurst
- 100+ staff (includes 50 volunteer firefighters) public works, admin, etc.
- There are no seasonal vs. full-time resident communications; they all should get everything
- How do we reach all residents? Guaranteed through tax bill in February and July (only those who own property; what about renters?)
- Highspeed accessibility issues; consider SMS (most have cell phones)
- Non-municipal facilities exist: Buckhorn Community Centre (not for profit) and Oak Shores Estates Community Centre (Trent Lakes)
- There are 20 cottager associations that hold June meetings on happenings/changes, etc.; they have mailing lists; explore adding Town items to their agenda and helping them to become channel or conduit
- Budgeting is managed by each department (each has its own budget/costs); firm expenses include job postings and MailChimp and web hosting expenses (paid for from admin – office supplies)
- Facilities
 1. transfer stations
 2. community centres
 3. parks, beaches, etc.
 4. municipal offices
 5. libraries
 6. medical centres
- Current communications strategy:
 - o no “communications” lead; between Lynn and Jessie; was Lynn and now Jessie
 - o hold department head meeting after every Council meeting (5 Council members) to determine solution with which to approach Council
 - o department head meeting identifies needs and seeks volunteers to tackle (small but mighty team)
 - o use work plans; seek to add “communications” to that plan
 - o residents complain they don’t get communications (via FB, MailChimp, etc.); current method is passive or done when statutorily obligated; consider push marketing
- Audiences
 - o other municipalities (bordering projects)
 - o Council
 - o province
 - o public
- Key issues currently include:
 - o aggregate (OMB hearing to block application)
 - o centralized waste depot (want/need to be built)
 - o seasonal waste card to access stations/reduced bags

Current communications, plan, strategies, job descriptions and recent engagement (surveys, etc.)

- Department communications are developed by that department and may be viewed by Jessie or make the rounds (10-12 people)
- Policies: strong oversight here and consistency in tone/look (from web to training and smoking to social)
- Templates (Word) for Agenda, Letterhead, Memo, Minutes, Policies and Report; this is going in the RIGHT WAY! Arial fonts; varying margins, changing size, placement of logo/absence of
- Tax Infographic – right idea; too much information
- Public meetings (for permit fees increase, development charges) that are promoted via social, newspapers and website); help in Council chambers; also hold Council meetings; must be seasonal to include all residents, but summer residents often don't want to attend; consider a virtual town hall
- Sent out Level of Services questionnaire (promotion via tax bill and online) that received 600+ responses; Council was not impressed with results; consider better educating Council on expectations; raise percentage using same tools alongside an engagement plan:
 - o seasonal: key spending want is waste then roads; least is halls (improvement) and CIP grant
 - o permanent: roads then waste; least is septic
- Sent out budget survey that received 0 responses; also sent out survey for election and facility master plan:
 - o Post-Election: 70% of 359 responses were 61+ (fairly equal on full/part-time residents); sent with tax bill and available online
 - o Master Plan (November 2019): approx. 141 responses; Trent Lakes should prioritize Roads and Maintenance, Primary Care Health Services, and Public Works; 43% of respondents were Permanent; 14% Seasonal
- "Discover Trent Lakes" promotion – passport at municipal location to encourage destination visiting with prize entry (May 18-Oct 31 in 2018; May 20-Oct 9 in 2017; 2015/2016); included 6-9 location boxes/hole punches; encourage image sharing on social
- Live Council streaming
- Tax insert (2017-2019): includes a interim tax insert and final tax insert (2 per year); 4-colour, 8.5x11, 2-sided; HEAVY copy; approximately 25% tax and 75% other (contact, address changes, garbage, adopt-a-road, waste card, cottage kits, permits, animal control, etc.); font is Arial
- AMP: plain; copy-heavy; images are inserted as afterthought; content alignment varies (centre/left); use of low-quality (clipart?) graphics; this is a plan
- Energy Conservation: different cover to AMP (logo relegated to bottom); much simpler/no images/many tables; this is a report
- Messaging and most copywriting done by Jessie
- Mailchimp; low subscribers; separate lists for water management, SWP, OPP costing, comprehensive zoning by-law, public notices, tax sales, municipal grants, election 2018
- Mailouts: newsletters twice a year (at transfer stations) and posted at website
- PP template: standard; not widescreen; colour palette non-complementary (bright against logo); non-templated; HEAVY copy; Lucinda Sans (headline) and Arial (body)
- Strategic Priorities (2019-2021): specifically note "strengthen public engagement opportunities and improve communications"; communications are inherent in delivering and reporting on the four priority themes:
 - o Healthy, Active Living
 - o Resilient and Sustainable Economy
 - o Responsible, Accountable Government
 - o Environmentally Sustainable Policies and Practices
- Newsletter (online)
 - o Special editions for garbage and new owners
 - o Available twice a year (Fall and Spring)

- Some printed (200 or so; can be a lot of waste) and left at transfer/waste stations (Bobcaygeon, Crystal Lake, Cavendish and Buckhorn), libraries (Main branch in Buckhorn and Helen Bowen Branch in Cavendish), community centres (Cavendish Community Centre, Galway Community Centre, Lakehurst Hall) and outdoor arenas (Buckhorn Community Sports Complex)
- Dense, modular design w/o borders; imagery type mixed; design varies year/year
- Content-wise it is created by admin who look for variety (no set columns); too dense however:
 - Trent Lakes Libraries (update; hours)
 - Contact and Information (Council/municipal)
 - Seasonal (fires/burning)
 - Permits
 - Municipal Halls/community centres
 - Closures
 - Building permits
 - Food waste/recycling tips
 - Waste diversion/transfer station hours
 - Notes: website, roads, engagement, applications, tax bill, budget, celebratory days, etc.
 - Mayor's message
 - Council meetings

Brand consistency, voice, tone and accessibility throughout materials

- Copy heavy, crowded layouts with narrow margins (increase margins, white space and size contrast)
- No clear, consistent supporting brand elements or "feel" (i.e. PPT has patterned footer, brochure has outdoorsy, grungy feel, etc.)
- Colour palette is consistent (leans most often to blue, green, black, orange, teal); use blue/black copy for accessibility and/or a passable green; use variety of the brighter, secondary colours together for vibrancy in pieces (the brochure does this) and use them in blocks of colour; don't overuse one secondary colour too much (i.e. the newsletter overuses orange)
- Logo placement/version is often inconsistent (leans most often to upper-left)
- Most pieces have short, snappy headlines (except PPT)
- Brochure uses photos and icons, but newsletter only uses clip-art and no photos; use more photos of Trent Lakes scenery (gallery?)
- Use curved lines/shapes instead of angled geometric shapes used on a few pieces (would reflect the logo better)
- Font: sans serif (Arial) in three of four pieces, serif and grunge in brochure piece
- Newsletter: good strategy to break up text into boxes and areas

Website and key sub-sites

trentlakeslibrary.ca

- highly modular (lots of boxes/separation, etc.)
- clean/simple design
- data is largely year-round; core content does not appear to be seasonally-changed (i.e. groups and programs)
- times are off for buckhorn branch (<http://www.trentlakeslibrary.ca/> versus <http://www.trentlakeslibrary.ca/contact-us/>)

trentlakes.ca

- Website updates managed predominantly by Lynn Holtz (Project Coordinator), but each department can also go in to update information too:
 - Accessibility
 - Administration

- By-Laws & Enforcement
- Building & Planning
- Economic Development
- Finance
- Human Resources
- Parks & Recreation
- Public Works
- Taxes
- Waste & Recycling
- Generally cluttered and difficult to navigate
- Doesn't appear modern or as professional more current municipal sites
- Significant wasted real estate with decorative photo/logo
- Not intuitive to user needs
- Links to several PDFs – not best practice
- AODA report failing grade (24 identified problems)
-

Social media channels

- Content overseen by Lynn Holt as project coordinator; mirrors what is placed on website
- Not much engagement (aside from the “usual suspects”); other administrators are the CAO, Clerk, Customer Service Clerk, Executive Assistance to the CAO, Department Heads as identified
- Preferred keywords are the community names (as per the social media policy)
- Facebook
- Twitter

Local media (including both online and traditional coverage)

- Larger list of media partners only for wide broadcast; declaring an emergency (likely out-of-date)
 - 507 Express
 - 90.5 Radio
 - CBC - Canadian Broadcasting Centre Toronto
 - CHEX TV
 - Classical 96 & 103 FM - Community Events
 - Cottage Country Connection Newspaper
 - Drummer News
 - Energy 99.7/Bob FM/Country 105
 - Lakefield Herald
 - Moose FM
 - Oldies 96.7
 - Peterborough Examiner
 - Peterborough This Week
 - The Millbrook Times
 - The Promoter <laura@thepromoter.ca>
- If we were to place an advertisement in print for something legislated (i.e. disposal of land, comprehensive zoning by-law, development charges) or to promote something, see Lakefield Herald (East Kawartha) and Metroland Media (Peterborough Examiner and Kawartha Lakes This Week)
- The Mayor (Janet Clarkson) is the Municipality's emergency contact
- On releases, the owner of the story is the contact name (so not always Jessie or the Mayor)
- Generally reliable media coverage although few local media resources: Lakefield and Peterborough are the best sources, however Trent Lakes is a small part of coverage

Municipality of Trent Lakes Audit

Best Practices Review

Comparable municipalities after a quick scan with full or part-time dedicated roles in communications, community engagement and/or marketing/economic development

- Meaford
- Wilmot
- Selwyn
- Erin
- Minto
- Centre-Wellington
- Mapleton
- Arran-Elderslie

The majority of same-size communities do not have a dedicated position but rely on Clerk

Heather Kepran, Communications Coordinator

Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority

6+ years in role

try to get as much done each before I go each day (no one to cover when she is off/vaca); lots of other CAs have no person and use admin staff

Challenge to work alone; reach out to other CAs; our municipalities may have comms people – may have a meeting to discuss issues and talk; good relationship with smaller (Barrie is in ours)

Need to notify municipalities; nice to send it to their municipal communication person; that is my approach to cc them on things. Lots of transitions at smaller – they often move up/out; young people transitioning

Communications plan a while ago; had a director that liked them; challenge – had strategy and bus plan and every box had comms listed – but we have limited resources; work independently; like plans – implementing and measuring even if it's just a poster

currently report to CAO; used to be director of corporate services; made sense since it supports the whole vision

Overlap with stewardship and lands teams – they write their own article and I edit it. But I'm not a subject matter expert; write my idea – send it back and collaborate.

Everyone has an opinion on comms; would not tell a water quality expert how to test. Have to learn how to pick your battles – what do you have time for?

People here are happy with the support I offer them; they want advice and direction.

Do social media/web tracking; every board meeting two months there is a comms update. Challenging to get media coverage.

Goal is to talk about organizational achievements that are more public facing. Try to keep my ear to the ground; note these down and follow-up with the appropriate department.

Have communication committee: 1 person from each department; all junior people to gather information; meet once a month; take notes and this serves as newsletter content

Intranet – do news piece on there but the IT oversees mostly; works well: use that content to generate board reports and internal newsletter; new staff can get in on programs and be better integrated

Does not sit on management or SMT (sore spot)

Jealous of positive coverage; we've had negative/but I saw it as balanced. Good news stories on funding; and volunteering

Priorities are changeable throughout the year; annual events/annual report; no capacity to add something extra;

Start with a yearly calendar, knowing the seasons and when departments are busy. Some want to be better served and use their young staff to do comms; love idea – but things go missing: active voice, etc. These materials might find their way through me from the department sending.

Goal: change people's expectations. Ask why are we printing and not doing this digitally? Make people understand that if comms is in a proposal, you need to know the real cost. Get me involved earlier – I am better resourced to deliver projects; make it a partnership

Lots of tech – Eventbrite; summer students for engagement pieces as long as they have guidance; event scenario planner; have and provide them – educating role

We also share/steal from other CAs, but we always acknowledge.

Hailey Thomson, Communications Coordinator

Municipality of Meaford

5 years+; fulltime role- was CAO exec assistant. Previous CAO left – decided to make me interim coord and then fulltime. Carved my own niche. Facebook and have now expanded – direct mail and website

Was very decentralized; people do their own stuff – now centralized; more consistent; more proactive on social – didn't do much before; Instagram; twitter; Facebook; some still outlying – just the process; not resistant.

Working on communications strategy; going to be doing audit. Give people extra support.

1. Mandate

Did coms policy and social policy in 2018. Our job is to make their things easier. Was reactive with comms; with strategy; internal service – but really, we are here for the public to access info; support the mayor with statements or media.

Get info from people; process is to stop by Hailey's desk – that is as formal as it; do the copy writing and some design; have graphic design and marketing coord for Meaford hall who helps with rec and tourism; she is now part of the communications team. Revenue is her focus and less so for me.

Admin office, council asset and road staff; rec is separate, library. Fire hall. People feel siloed and not knowing what is happening; started a year/half ago: monthly meeting for frontline staff/admin from each area: talk about what is going on, projects going on – comms gaps and how to solve or big issue coming and how to answer. Really helpful.

Constant contact for eternal last year. Clerk and HR and management for staff newsletter may be coming?

2. strategic focus

tend to focus on website (like she did at York); it's on my mind; news releases, lot of surveys, constant with staff. We use google analytics – trying to enhance presence; lot of seniors in or community; lot of direct mail.

Policy is that we have large senior and large rural.

Have to duplicate everything.

3. Prioritization

Once a week for urgent – timeline or deadline or public comment or repercussions.

4. Challenges

Public trust is a big issue – all time low for government: very suspicious on all that we do; don't know that we are real people; lived here forever; public consultation gets derailed.

Excited on park improvements – how do you want to spend; negative; created citizen action group. Can't even predict.

Few community pages that are popular that I keep my eyes on it.

5. organizational structure and policies (internal/external)

4-month student contract; was EcDev – now is ours.

6. training and tools

Hootsuite but have clawed back the functionality; video editing software; design software; do regular video with clerk (formal); couple of minutes long – good feedback. New website – subscribe to updates with lots of functionality; app for waste services (recollect) to sign up for notifications; waste mailing but it's expensive.

Community wide as directed by council with quarterly newsletter; budget and brief - 8 pages

Do some social advertising

Odd newspaper – did biweekly full-page ad and they closed. Now only do ads when needed. express closed – not the independent; Bayshore broadcasting is still really popular.

7. budget and resourcing

we have a direct aill budget; department specific guide – they have their own budget; salaries are paid into communications budget; \$20,000 ad; \$7,000 is mailing (4)

OTHER: one-man operation; take advantage of regional comms groups; anyone in grey county can come to meeting and share expertise. Also attend regional communications conference.

Christine Fraser-McDonald, Acting Clerk

Municipality of Arran-Elderslie

Our comms has couple different people; all under new ecdev girl fresh out of school; Facebook and electronic signs. Process of new website by may.

Letting her run with it; we each do our own pages; esolutions; may 1 she started; good and we only have 12 people and tiny; young and enthusiastic

1. Mandate

We try and put everything we can on our website; own local paper – new CAO – media release; don't have strategic plan

We do have newsletter – 6 times a year printed; mail it out; every one helps to put blurbs in; some in tax and some mailed out on own

Community guide is yearly (printed) with everything in it; sponsored with advertising; recreation programmer does all that – gathers ads and articles; rec/water/recycling/garbage

Media relations is me; we try and lay it out in-house. We have a giant printer so we look after banners for boards and areas. Own logos for vehicles.

2. strategic focus

3. Prioritization

We're just so small; limited in what we are putting out; not a ton of releases and information; release for CAO I haven't just done in a while; 6,800 people

4. Challenges

We try and get everything we can on our website; send Council materials; never enough money; not a whole lot of complaints; send it to council or put up on website. Council meetings are through the day – maybe doing two meetings at night.

5. organizational structure and policies (internal/external)

next on list to do; we don't have anything in place to complete

6. training and tools

if we get one person, I'm happy; new website (Laura ecdev girl) put out call for photos from locals; take those and put them up in front lobby to pay taxes and garbage tags; three community halls; community guide.

7. budget and resourcing

Tracy would know

OTHER: emergency management on Facebook; twitter would be nice if a tornado; still put stuff on the radio

New website might have eblasts

Big Bruce – bull; part of the Bruce county passport

Access to high-speed; all of Chesney will have vibe from Bruce telecom; some do struggle

Emergency management centre; still have electronic signs;

Not sure about twitter – or why

Laura Fullerton is the Community Development Coordinator. Laura can be reached at ecdev@arran-elderslie.ca or 519-363-3039 ext 116.

The Community Development Coordinator's role is to work with businesses and committees to facilitate growth and plan for the success of Arran-Elderslie into the future. Overall, it is the Economic Development Department's purpose to help businesses thrive, downtowns to flourish, and to promote the Municipality of Arran-Elderslie as an attractive place to live, shop and own a business. The Community Development Coordinator's role is categorized into two sections: working with business owners and Municipal or community-wide programming. The Community Development Coordinator provides and promotes grant opportunities to business owners, supplies information on available training and tools, assists with business expansions, location and relocation, acts as a liaison between businesses and other departments within the Municipality and is an overall resource for businesses in Arran-Elderslie. The Community Development Coordinator is the lead on downtown revitalization projects, attracting new businesses, workforce development, branding of the communities and working with business and community organizations on projects related to economic development.

Informal inquiry with cottage owners: re: communications with municipalities

- There is a mailer we get from the municipality. I think it's quarterly. It comes to our permanent address. Everything from the municipality does.
- We get some additional information sent to us when there is any kind of election and they make voting easy to be done on line.
- I have to admit, most of our information comes from informal sources. There are Facebook groups, we talk with our neighbors up there and we have family who live nearby that keeps us up to date.
- A good facebook page and I go to the website if I need to know something, plus there is usually some kind of print package waiting for us
- Email signup and I get emails every few months I think

Municipality of Trent Lakes

Examples

(Below)

Town of Caledon created a mobile engagement trailer to take its engagement activities into the community. It helped generate brand awareness and participation in the Town's Official Plan renewal process. (Fall 2019)



Guelph-Eramosa Township creates an annual 'report card' to update its community on Council's progress with its Strategic Plan. The document is provided online, in pick-up spots and mailed to select residents.

(Full 4 page PDF follows)





STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

2015-2018

MISSION STATEMENT

As stewards of our community, we advance the quality of life in Guelph/Eramosa, foster civic engagement, and use taxes wisely to effectively deliver essential services.

VISION STATEMENT

We aim to deliver excellent services in support of a prosperous, healthy and growing community, with expanded economic viability and protection of our natural assets.



The Township of Guelph/Eramosa is pleased to present 2015-2017 strategic achievements and 2018 priorities that support our Mission and Vision.

FISCAL/BUSINESS PLANNING: Supports Strategic Decision-Making



2015-2017 Activities

- **Increased Transparency:** budget documents published for operating costs, capital costs, revenue sources and reserve funds
- **Reliable Service:** *Water and Wastewater Rate Study and Financial Plan* approved to inform water and sewer rates that allow for system operating, testing, maintenance and upgrades

2018 Activities

- **Cost Recovery:** complete *Development Application Approvals Process* to recover costs related to development applications and inspections
- **Manage Growth:** update *Development Charges Study* to ensure new development covers the costs of any supporting infrastructure that is needed

ASSET MANAGEMENT: Informs Business Planning to Achieve Goals



2015-2017 Activities

- **Energy Savings:** streetlight inventory completed and 565 lights replaced with low-energy LED bulbs
- **Strategic Planning:** Township stormwater facilities and pipes inventoried to identify repair and replacement needs
- **Risk Reduction:** Township trees inventoried to identify areas of damage

2018 Activities

- **Asset Regulation:** create policies that guide the quality and frequency of maintenance, repair and replacement of Township assets

ECONOMIC READINESS AND DEVELOPMENT: Supports Community Prosperity

2015-2017 Activities

- **Optimized Operations:** new *Comprehensive Zoning By-law* approved to align with best practices and streamline planning processes
- **Business Strengthening:** participated in Wellington County Business Retention and Expansion project to identify needs and opportunities
- **Destination Promotion:** “*Explore Downtown*” map created to provide one-stop directory for visitors and residents

2018 Activities

- **Cost Recovery:** complete *Development Application Approvals Process* to recover costs related to development applications and inspections
- **Economic Diversity:** promote availability of prime industrial Township lands in order to reduce the residential tax burden
- **Investment Attraction:** further explore a *Community Improvement Plan* for continued development of industrial lands



CAPITAL INVESTMENTS AND SERVICES PRIORITIZATION: Uses Resources Effectively

2015-2017 Activities

- **Long-Term Planning:** *Capital Forecast* discussed during approval of each annual budget, identifying Township capital needs
- **Infrastructure Renewal:** 15 kilometres of road paved or surfaced, 2 bridges rehabilitated and 500 metres of sidewalk replaced
- **Rockmosa Visioning:** *Rockmosa Park Master Plan* completed to ensure readiness to take advantage of federal, provincial or private funding opportunities

2018 Activities

- **Asset Planning:** complete Phase 2 of the *Asset Management Plan*, to support long-term financial planning, continuous improvement and adoption of best practices
- **Infrastructure Investment:** 6 kilometres of road to be paved or surfaced, 2 bridges to be replaced and 50 metres of sidewalk to be replaced



COMMUNICATION, ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE ENHANCEMENT: Working to Make Improvements



2015-2017 Activities

- **Public Engagement:** extensive public input sought during the *Rockmosa Park Master Plan*, including online discussion and voting, open houses and phone survey
- **Community Involvement:** feedback and comments sought for new *Comprehensive Zoning By-law* with open houses, surveys and direct contact with property owners
- **Wayfinding Signage:** corporate signage strategy implemented for branded signage at all Township entrances, parks and facilities

2018 Activities

- **Community Safety:** installation of traffic signals at MacLennan Street and Highway 7 to improve safety for students crossing the provincial highway
- **Building Trusted Communications:** implement communications strategy for the *2018 Municipal and School Board Elections* to provide clear and concise information for electors and candidates

OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS:

- **Constructed Rockmosa Skate Park and held Grand Opening**
- **Developed social and recreational programs for older adults**
- **Accessibility upgrades to various facilities**
- **Efforts to preserve heritage**
- **Established a Community Safety Zone on Highway 7**

The Guelph/Eramosa Council, in collaboration Township staff, created this Strategic Priorities framework to measure successes against planned goals and to guide future Township activities in Guelph/Eramosa.

