

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of dots is positioned above the main title. It features three rows of dots: the top row has three green dots, the middle row has five blue dots, and the bottom row has three green dots.

**External Communications
Strategy**

Municipality of Trent Lakes



Executive Summary

The Municipality of Trent Lakes identified the need to improve its communications in 2019 as a key priority action out of its 2019-2021 Strategic Plan.

The Municipality hired the consulting agency The Letter M to complete a Communications Review Report, which includes key recommendations, communication goals, tactics and overarching strategic directions.

The first priorities out of this report were:

- Establish and fill a full-time Communications, Engagement, and Economic Development Specialist position.
- Have the Specialist complete a communications plan.

An Internal Communications Strategy was created in 2023 as a first step to ensure the Municipality's internal communication practices would become more effective, relevant, clear and engaging between all levels of employees and Council.

To follow, this External Communications Strategy will serve as a guiding document to improve external communications over the next 3 years, to be implemented in unison with the Communications Review Report and Internal Communications Strategy.

The Strategy includes research and findings, an audit of external communication methods and target audiences of the Municipality, and goals and proposed actions.

The implementation plan is to be a living document as action items are carried out over the next 3 years. Its actions will achieve the following goals:

INFORM- The Municipality of Trent Lakes will proactively inform its audience through methods that are easily accessible, consistent, transparent, and of high quality.

ENGAGE- The Municipality of Trent Lakes will seek new ways to engage its audience that are accessible and convenient.

PROMOTE- The Municipality of Trent Lakes will promote Trent Lakes to its audience as a great place to live, work and play.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction.....	4
Purpose	5
Scope.....	5
Research and Findings.....	6
Public Input	6
Current Communications	9
Target Audience.....	12
Communications Review Report.....	14
Communication Goals and Proposed Actions.....	15
Appendix A- Example Annual Communications Calendar	23
Appendix B – Implementation Plan	28

Introduction

The Municipality of Trent Lakes is a small community located in the northwest corner of Peterborough County. As of 2021, its population stands at 6,439, and is estimated to have over 125,000 visitors annually.

The area is largely rural, with an abundance of forest and lakes, making the Municipality primarily a cottage and tourism-based area. However, in recent years with its population growth, many residents are now living in Trent Lakes full-time.

One of the main factors that make communication challenging in Trent Lakes is its geography. As a rural landscape, the core of the Municipality remains forested with an abundance of lakes and properties clustered throughout the area in small communities, mostly on fire routes. The main roads border the Municipality and pass along various economically developed areas, including Kinmount, Bobcaygeon, Burleigh Falls and Buckhorn. No main road passes through the center of the Municipality. Due to this geography, residents tend to be siloed within their area of residence and closest developed business area. Driving to the other side of the Municipality usually takes around 45 minutes. Various associations and groups have been created for the concentrated communities and are utilized to communicate for the particular area. There are currently no media publications located in Trent Lakes, so the public must rely on publications in surrounding communities to cover important news. Also, internet and cell service are not reliable in some areas of the Municipality.

The Municipality's aging population is another challenge for achieving successful communication. As of 2021, 33.7% of Trent Lakes' population are 65+, with the average age being 52 years. A large amount of this population group do not use the internet and/or social media, so they must rely on communications through printed materials, mail, signs, traditional advertising, or direct conversation.

These factors have previously created barriers to the Municipality achieving successful communication.

The Municipality of Trent Lakes did not previously have a strategy in place for external communications and identified the need to revitalize its communications in 2019. The Municipality hired the agency The Letter M to create a Communications Review Report. Using this research, strategic directions and

communication tactics were created, to be implemented once the Municipality hired an employee with communications experience.

In October 2022, the new position of Economic Development and Marketing Coordinator was created and filled. The task of creating a communications strategy that would incorporate the report's findings and suggestions was prioritized.

An internal communications strategy was first created to solidify communication skills within the Municipality, with this external communications strategy to be implemented alongside it.

Purpose

The purpose of the Municipality of Trent Lakes External Communications Strategy is to be a guiding document that will support, identify, and develop external communications practices, policies, and procedures.

The plan will ensure that the Municipality of Trent Lakes' communication practices will become more effective, relevant, clear, and engaging between the public and Municipal staff/Council.

The plan reviews current communication initiatives and provides goals and objectives to guide the growth of future external communications.

Scope

This plan applies to all forms of external communications created by the Municipality. The plan applies to electronic, printed, and verbal communications.

Research and Findings

The following resources were used during the research phase of this plan:

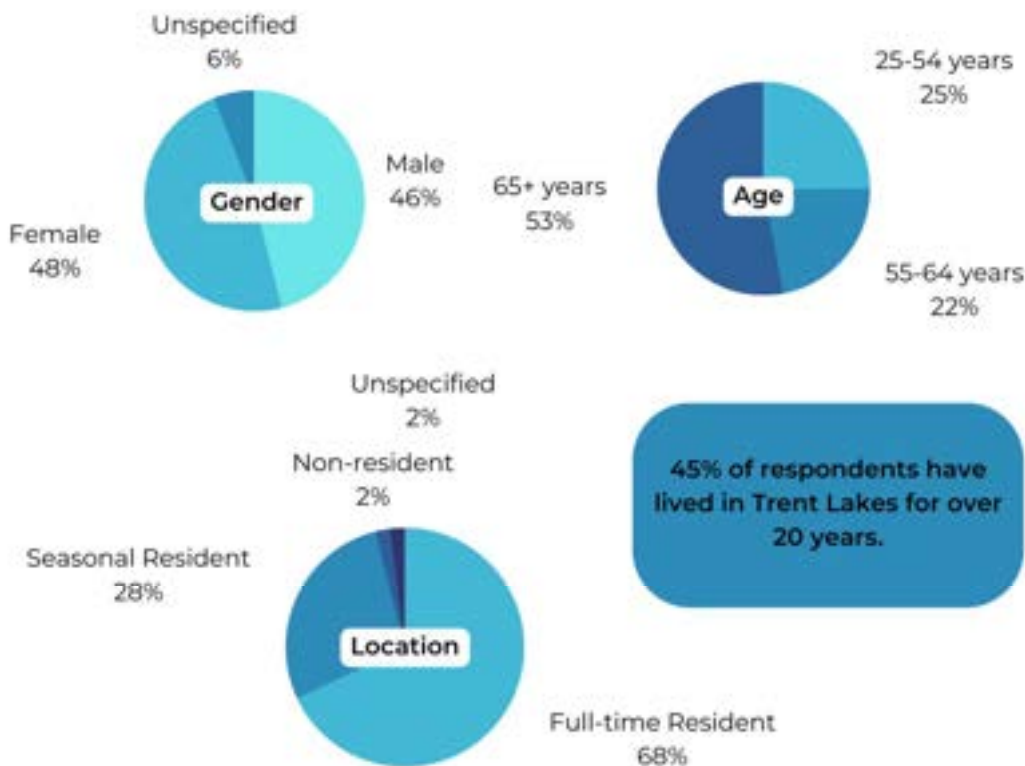
- Communications Review Report by The Letter M
- Department Head interviews
- Staff survey
- Public survey
- Councillor interviews
- Remote staff visits
- Public Notice Policy
- Review of other External Communications Plans by Municipalities

Public Input

The public had the opportunity to fill out an online survey anonymously to answer questions regarding external communications. 109 people filled the survey out.

In summary:

Who responded?



Social Media

Social Media ranked by most used:

- | | |
|-------------|------------|
| 1 Facebook | 4 Twitter |
| 2 Instagram | 5 LinkedIn |
| 3 YouTube | |

83% of respondents find Facebook the easiest social media platform to obtain information on.

What respondents are most interested in seeing on social media:

Community Events
Waste and Recycling News
Council Decisions
By-law Updates

On average, our social media followers see our posts once a week on their timeline.

Our social media followers are on social media mostly in the morning and evenings.

Website Navigation



The Municipal website ranked 68/100 for ease of navigation.

Website Pages

Most Satisfied

- Waste/Recycling
- Fire
- Tax Billings

Least Satisfied

- By-law Enforcement
- Building and Planning
- Road Work Notices

Most Searched For

- Waste/Recycling
- Building, Planning and By-law
- News

Staying Informed

Residents Feel Most Informed About

- Fire Bans/Current Index
- Waste/Recycling News
- Municipal Elections

Residents Feel Least Informed About

- Council Decisions
- By-law Updates
- Community Outreach

Methods of Communication

Respondent's Most Preferred Methods of Communication

- Website
- Email Notices
- Tax Bill Newsletters

84% of respondents would like to receive a monthly newsletter from the Municipality.

Resident Needs

Respondent's Top Ranked Priorities

- Infrastructure and Roads
- Quality of Life
- Environment

Majority of respondents would like to know about Municipal events at least 1 month in advance.

Current Communications

The following chart outlines communication methods currently used by the Municipality of Trent Lakes to reach the public:

External Communications Method	Details
Contact at Municipal Office	Daily in-person contact with members of the public and other stakeholders.
On Site Inspections, Meetings, Daily Interactions, By-Law Enforcement	<p>On-site inspections by Building Inspectors.</p> <p>On-site meetings by Planners.</p> <p>Maintenance projects by Public Works.</p> <p>Investigations by By-Law Enforcement.</p> <p>Meetings between staff and public as needed.</p>
Telephone	Discussions between staff and the public over office telephones or mobile telephones.
Email	Discussions between staff and the public over email.
Letters	<p>Tax billing with an information newsletter of key news (delivered twice a year).</p> <p>Letters of recommendation or support to other establishments.</p> <p>By-law notices.</p>
Public Meeting Notices	Public meeting notices sent under the Planning Act for Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-law Amendment and Minor Variance topics.

Committee/Board Meetings	<p>Committee meetings regarding specific initiatives for the Municipality, led by members of the public with staff and Council members either as a member or liaison.</p> <p>Staff and/or Council may sit in on board meetings as either a member or liaison.</p>
Council/Town Hall Meetings	<p>Council meetings (usually twice a month) to discuss topics between Council and staff. Meetings are open to the public and provide an opportunity for the public to delegate.</p> <p>Meetings are held in-person in the Council Chambers, streamed live online and are recorded and rebroadcasted on RogersTV and on the RogersTV website and Municipal YouTube channel.</p>
Special Council Meetings	<p>Special Council Meetings to discuss specific topics between Council and staff. Meetings are open to the public and provide an opportunity for the public to delegate.</p>
Joint Council Meetings	<p>Annual meeting between Trent Lakes, Selwyn Township, Curve Lake First Nation and North Kawartha Councils.</p>
Ratepayer/Community Association Meetings	<p>Annual meetings for staff to update the public on key news and initiatives. The public has an opportunity to discuss any news and concerns.</p>

<p>Press Releases and Public Notices</p>	<p>Press releases sent via email to a local media list for urgent or important news.</p> <p>Public notices with brief messaging posted to the website’s news page and social media channels.</p>
<p>Newspaper</p>	<p>Advertisements placed in local newspapers to announce important and urgent information, including employment opportunities, request for feedback, etc.</p>
<p>Interviews</p>	<p>Staff or Council discussing important news with media outlets for print and broadcast publications.</p>
<p>Signs and Printed Materials</p>	<p>Digital sign at Municipal office shows a slideshow of upcoming events, news and opportunities.</p> <p>Fire Danger Index signs placed across Municipality.</p> <p>Marquee letter signs placed in the summer to promote waste events or Public Works news.</p> <p>Flyers posted to bulletin boards at front of Municipal office, outside of Council chambers, and at transfer station sites.</p>
<p>Municipal Website</p>	<p>The website is the main source for information on Municipal departments, services and programs.</p>
<p>Website Subscriptions</p>	<p>The website provides email subscriptions for the community calendar, council calendar, news and individual pages.</p>

<p>Social Media</p>	<p>The Municipality runs social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter.</p> <p>Posts are made daily to promote Municipal news.</p> <p>The Municipality shares local events and news from other channels to promote the area and inform the community.</p>
---------------------	--

Target Audience

This plan focuses on the external audience of the Municipality.

Target Audience	Audience Needs
<p>Residents (both permanent and seasonal)</p>	<p>Information including but not limited to: taxes, bylaw enforcement, building and planning, recreation programs, services, public engagement and input, opportunities, etc.</p>
<p>Businesses</p>	<p>Resources, support, networking, and funding.</p>
<p>Property Owners</p>	<p>Development and planning services, tax inquiries, property standards, etc.</p>
<p>Organizations, Associations and Community Groups</p>	<p>Access to information that affects the groups.</p> <p>Collaboration, partnership, and feedback opportunities.</p>

<p>Media - Online, print and broadcast.</p> <p>Local (within Peterborough County), national, international)</p> <p>Targeted media depends on type of news.</p>	<p>Notice of timely, relevant news to inform the public.</p> <p>Clarification on Council and Municipal activities.</p>
<p>Developers/Builders/Investors</p>	<p>Availability of residential and industrial lands, tax rates, development charges, zoning and planning issues, economic development initiatives.</p>
<p>Visitors/Tourists/Potential Newcomers</p>	<p>Information regarding local events, attractions, accommodations, directions, transportation and activities.</p>
<p>Consultants/Contractors/Service Providers</p>	<p>Support, collaboration and/or information sharing on projects and services.</p> <p>Information on procurement policy and processes.</p>
<p>Upper Tier Government (County, Provincial, Federal)</p>	<p>Support/collaboration on joint initiatives and shared services.</p> <p>Information sharing, requests for information, grant and funding applications and status.</p>
<p>Surrounding local government</p>	<p>Support and collaboration on joint initiatives and shared services.</p> <p>Information sharing.</p>

Communications Review Report

After the Municipality received a Communications Review Report by The Letter M in 2020, staff and Council have taken initiatives to better communication, including:

- Utilizing the mailouts of tax bills, such as a Good Neighbour Approach flyer and Recycling Guide.
- Creation of a new website.
- Creation of quarterly reporting including operations of each department, financials, etc.
- Using layered communications.
- Increase in surveys for public feedback.
- Growing contact list of stakeholders.
- Increase in email communications with website subscribers.
- Creation of an internal communications strategy.
- Hosting town hall meetings throughout all areas of Trent Lakes.
- Hosting annual ratepayer meetings.
- Creation and growth of a media contact list.
- Increase in press releases sent and media pickup.
- Creation of high-quality graphics and greater use of images for content.
- Hiring staff in a newly created position that focuses on communications.

The action items to be implemented in this plan were created while ensuring the plan will also complete the tactics listed in the Report. The Communications Review Report is to be referenced in unison with the External Communications Strategy.

Communication Goals and Proposed Actions

Goals





INFORM - The Municipality of Trent Lakes will proactively inform its audience through methods that are easily accessible, consistent, transparent, and of high quality.





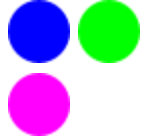
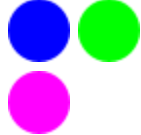
ENGAGE - The Municipality of Trent Lakes will seek new ways to engage its audience that are accessible and convenient.






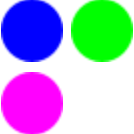


PROMOTE - The Municipality of Trent Lakes will promote Trent Lakes to its audience as a great place to live, work and play.





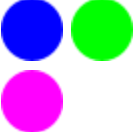
GOALS THE ACTION ACHIEVES	ACTION ITEM	TARGET AUDIENCE	COMMUNICATION METHOD	FREQUENCY	SUCCESS MEASUREMENT
	Introduce plain language across all communications when possible.	Entire target audience (refer to table)	All methods (refer to table)	On-going Have a lead in each department review content monthly.	Reduction in confusion by residents, most notably in the Administration and Building, Planning and By-Law departments.
	Make FAQ's easily accessible online and in print. Promote individual FAQ's on social media.	Residents (all) Businesses Property Owners Organizations, Associations and Community Groups Developers, Builders and Investors Visitors and Tourists	Website Printed Materials Social Media E-Newsletter	Communications staff will follow up with department leads every 6 months to discuss new FAQ's. Communications staff will update FAQ content as needed.	Reduction in confusion by residents. Decrease in FAQ's through phone calls, emails, social media, in-person, website form, etc.

GOALS THE ACTION ACHIEVES	ACTION ITEM	TARGET AUDIENCE	COMMUNICATION METHOD	FREQUENCY	SUCCESS MEASUREMENT
	<p>List what services each department provides on the website.</p>	<p>Residents (all)</p> <p>Businesses</p> <p>Property Owners</p> <p>Organizations, Associations and Community Groups</p> <p>Media</p> <p>Developers, Builders and Investors</p>	<p>Website</p> <p>Social Media</p>	<p>Update webpage as needed.</p> <p>Periodically promote the page on social media.</p>	<p>Increase in direct calls to the correct department.</p> <p>Greater and broader use of services delivered.</p>
	<p>Utilize community billboards to advertise print materials.</p> <p>Ensure transfer station staff have print materials to hand out.</p>	<p>Residents (all)</p> <p>Visitors and Tourists</p> <p>Businesses</p> <p>Organizations, Associations and Community Groups</p>	<p>Signs and Printed Materials</p>	<p>Continue as needed.</p>	<p>Greater engagement/attendance for feedback, events, meetings, etc.</p>

GOALS THE ACTION ACHIEVES	ACTION ITEM	TARGET AUDIENCE	COMMUNICATION METHOD	FREQUENCY	SUCCESS MEASUREMENT
	<p>Create an online public engagement platform, listing all major projects.</p> <p>Each project will be updated to show completion milestones and current status of the project.</p> <p>Have the applicable department monitor.</p> <p>Promote.</p>	<p>Residents (all)</p> <p>Businesses</p> <p>Property Owners</p> <p>Organizations, Associations and Community Groups</p> <p>Developers, Builders and Investors</p>	<p>Website</p> <p>Social Media</p> <p>Media</p> <p>Signs and Printed Materials</p>	<p>Update projects weekly or monthly, depending on stage of planning.</p>	<p>Greater resident awareness of current initiatives by the Municipality.</p> <p>Greater participation for surveys.</p>
	<p>Create an e-newsletter highlighting the most important news.</p>	<p>Residents (all)</p> <p>Businesses</p>	<p>E-Newsletter</p>	<p>Monthly for regular editions.</p> <p>Special events, breaking news etc. may need its own email.</p>	<p>Email-open rates</p> <p>Email click-through rates</p> <p>Sign ups to the email list vs unsubscribes</p> <p>Greater awareness of Municipal initiatives</p>

GOALS THE ACTION ACHIEVES	ACTION ITEM	TARGET AUDIENCE	COMMUNICATION METHOD	FREQUENCY	SUCCESS MEASUREMENT
	<p>Actively promote signing up for the e-newsletter and website subscriptions.</p> <p>Launch a contest to win a local gift basket for signing up.</p>	<p>Residents (all)</p> <p>Businesses</p> <p>Property Owners</p> <p>Organizations, Associations and Community Groups</p>	<p>Website</p> <p>Website Subscriptions</p> <p>E-Newsletter</p> <p>Social Media</p> <p>Printed Materials</p> <p>Media</p>	<p>Consider repeating a similar campaign each year to bring awareness to new members of the target audience.</p>	<p>Amount of subscriptions</p>
	<p>Promote the dates of Council meetings and link to the agenda (when possible).</p>	<p>Residents (all)</p> <p>Businesses</p> <p>Property Owners</p> <p>Organizations, Associations and Community Groups</p> <p>Media</p> <p>Developers, Builders and Investors</p>	<p>Website</p> <p>Website Subscriptions</p> <p>Social Media</p> <p>E-Newsletter</p>	<p>Continuous basis.</p>	<p>Greater awareness of Council discussions/decisions.</p> <p>Greater discussion around Council decisions.</p>

GOALS THE ACTION ACHIEVES	ACTION ITEM	TARGET AUDIENCE	COMMUNICATION METHOD	FREQUENCY	SUCCESS MEASUREMENT
	Utilize stakeholder connections and Council's network to reach those without access to the internet and/or social media.	Residents (all) Organizations, Associations and Community Groups	Email In-person	Continuous basis.	Less uninformed residents. Less reliance on only tax bill newsletter.
	Review and adjust the yearly budget for marketing and communications to support the action items in ongoing plans.	N/A	N/A	Yearly	Dependent on action items.
	Complete a comprehensive website audit to ensure information is up-to-date. Revise the website, prioritizing pages with the most traffic.	Residents (all) Visitors and Tourists Property Owners Organizations, Associations and Community Groups Developers, Builders and Investors	Website	Monitor which pages have the most traffic each month and update as needed. Complete a website review yearly.	Less reports of information not up-to-date on website. Increase in positive feedback for the website. Increase in visitors for the website.
	Ensure all content has a professional, relatable and friendly voice.	Entire target audience (refer to table)	All communication methods (refer to table)	Continuous basis.	Increase in positive feedback for created content.

GOALS THE ACTION ACHIEVES	ACTION ITEM	TARGET AUDIENCE	COMMUNICATION METHOD	FREQUENCY	SUCCESS MEASUREMENT
	Create a social media best practices toolkit aligned with the rebrand. Provide training to staff.	Entire target audience (refer to table)	Social Media	Provide training to new employees as needed.	Consistency in posts on social media. Decrease in mistakes made on social media posts.
	Create a website best practices toolkit aligned with the rebrand. Provide training to staff.	Entire target audience (refer to table)	Website	Provide training to new employees as needed.	Consistency in website content. Decrease in mistakes made on website.
	Create a crisis communications plan. Include templates for urgent communication.	Dependent on the type of crisis.	Dependent on the type of crisis.	Refine as needed based on the success of last crisis communications.	Decrease in confusion from the audience. Increase in trust in Municipality from the audience.
	Create an annual table that lists external communications, detailing type of communication, target audience, objective, frequency and setting.	Entire target audience (refer to table).	All communication methods (refer to table)	Annually.	Increase in desired results, such as number of survey responses, meeting attendance, etc.
	Track analytics of online communications to understand what works best. Refine strategies as needed.	N/A	Website Social Media Website Subscriptions E-Newsletter	Monthly tracking.	Increase in visitors, clicks, subscriptions, engagement, etc.

GOALS THE ACTION ACHIEVES	ACTION ITEM	TARGET AUDIENCE	COMMUNICATION METHOD	FREQUENCY	SUCCESS MEASUREMENT
	Create recognition opportunities for special occasions.	Residents (all) Businesses Organizations, Associations and Community Groups	Printed Materials	Continuous basis.	Level of participation in recognition opportunities.
	Create a media relations policy and media relations procedure.	Media	Press releases Interviews	Provide training to new staff as needed.	Increase in media pickup and mentions.

Appendix A -
Example Annual Communications Calendar

Department	Event	Placement	Date(s)
JANUARY			
Administration	Website updates with new dates, hours, etc.	Website pages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tax Information - Budget Information - Committees and Boards 	3
Administration	Website calendar updates with new events	Events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Council Meetings - Committees and Board Meetings - Ratepayer/Community Association Meeting - Town Hall Meetings 	3
Administration	Community Grant Opened: November 24 Closed: January 13	Website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alert - Email Subscription Social Media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Apply now" Signs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Digital sign 	1-13 3 3,5,8
FEBRUARY			
Finance	Interim Tax Newsletter	Print <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mailed out Signs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Digital sign Website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - News article - Alert - Email Subscriptions - Update "Tax Information" webpage Social Media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Watch for your newsletter in the mail. Didn't receive it? Reach out" 	5 5-29 5 5 - 29 5 5 5,12,19,26

		Newsletter	1
MARCH			
Finance	Next tax instalment due March 24	Website - Alert - Calendar Social Media - "Next tax instalment due..." Newsletter Signs - Digital sign	1-24 1 1,4,11,18,22 1 1-24
APRIL			
Public Works	Transfer Station Summer Hour Announcement (April 15 – September 15)	Website - Alert - Calendar Social Media Monthly Newsletter	1-15 1 1,8,15,22,29 1
Fire	Firefighter recruitment	Website - Alert - News - Email Subscription Social Media Newsletter Signs - Digital sign	1-30 1 1,15 1,8,15,22,29 1 1-30
MAY			
Finance	Next tax instalment due May 24	Website - Alert - Calendar Social Media - "Next tax instalment due..." Newsletter	1-24 1 1,8,15,22 1

Council	June Town Hall Meetings	Print - Flyer with full list - community billboards - Handed out at transfer stations	1-31
		Social Media	3,10,17,24
		Newsletter	1
		Signs - Digital sign	1-24
Administration/ Council	Ratepayer/Community Association Meeting July 13	Website - News Article - Email Subscription	4 4
		Social Media "Join us"	4,18,30
		Email to C.A list	4
		JUNE	
Council	June Town Hall Meetings	Website - Alert - News - Email subscription - Calendar	1-30 1 1 1
		Social Media	18,15,22, 29
		Newsletter	1
		Administration	Canada Day
Social Media	30		
Signs - Digital sign	30-31		
JULY			
Administration	Canada Day	Website - Alert	1
		Signs - Digital sign	1
Administration/ Council	Ratepayer/Community Association Meeting July 13	Website - News Article - Email Subscription	1 1

		Social Media "Join us"	1, 5, 9
		Email to C.A list	1
AUGUST			
Finance	Next tax instalment due August 25	Website - Alert - Calendar Social Media - "Next tax instalment due..." Newsletter Signs - Digital sign	1-25 1 2,9,16,23 1 1-25
SEPTEMBER			
Public Works	Transfer Station Summer Hour Announcement September 16 – April 14	Website - Alert - Calendar Social Media Monthly Newsletter	1-16 1 1,6,16 1
OCTOBER			
Finance	Final tax instalment due October 25	Website - Alert - Calendar Social Media - "Final tax instalment due..." Newsletter Signs - Digital sign	1-25 1 1,4,11,18 1 1-25
NOVEMBER			
Administration	Community Grant Opened: November 24 Closed: January 13	Website - Alert - News Article - Email Subscription Social Media	24 24 24

		- "Apply now"	24
		Signs - Digital sign	24-30
DECEMBER			
Administration	Holiday Hours December 23 - January 2	Website - Alert - Email subscription Social Media "Office Closed" Signs - Digital sign	20 20 20 20-31
Administration	Community Grant Opened: November 24 Closed: January 13	Website - Alert Social Media - "Apply now" Signs - Digital sign	1-31 2,9,16,23 1-31