

Policy: Corporate Communications

Section: Community Development

Policy #2017-04

Resolution #338-17

Effective Date: October 24, 2017

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this communication strategy is to ensure that communication across the Gilbert Plains Municipality is well coordinated, effectively managed, proactive and responsive to the information needs of council, municipal employees, the public and potential investors.

TARGET GROUPS

1. Council
2. Municipal staff
3. Community groups
4. Stakeholders
5. Business owners
6. Citizens/ratepayers
7. Upper tier levels of provincial and federal government
8. Visitors (including part-time residents)
9. Regional partners
10. Potential investors

CORE COMPONENTS

1. Internal communications
2. External communications
3. Social media
4. Media relations
5. Advertising

1. INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

All organizations aspire to create better work places with open employee communications, high morale and retention rates. The contribution that clear and effective communications can make to the realization of a positive work environment is substantial. Through effective communications, employees are better able to understand, appreciate, contribute to and support Council's goals and objectives, and be motivated to achieve maximum performance and superior customer service.

Communication between Council, the Senior Management Team (CAO and Public Works Manager) and other staff members must be open, timely and collaborative to achieve municipal goals and to ensure quality communication to the public.

Inform staff of matters before informing the public enhances employee morale, strengthens the "team" approach and provides for a better level of customer service.

The following elements need to be incorporated and/or improved upon:

- Quarterly staff meetings – review policy, provide up-to-date information, an emphasis on face-to-face communication, opportunities for immediate feedback and encourage a common understanding.
- Meetings with council and staff – on a quarterly basis, members of Council will meet with staff to provide updates on council decisions and municipal matters.
- Internal email communication – the CAO will distribute updates or information to staff on matters that they feel staff should be informed on or made aware of.

2. EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

External communications are central to the success of the Gilbert Plains Municipality and the well being of its citizens. As a function of good government, open and proactive communications ensure that the public receives clear, relevant and timely information from the municipality regarding:

- a) What must be known (i.e. by-laws and regulations)
- b) What should be known (i.e. municipal information- includes contacts, planning)
- c) What is nice to know (schedule of community events)

Co-operation and co-ordination between committees is also necessary to better serve and inform the public. This ensures that municipal themes and priorities are consistently reflected in the information and messages communicated to the public.

The newly redesigned municipal website should be the main source of municipal information; however, it is important to use many channels of communication including email, direct mail, print and broadcast media, and the internet. Emails will be sent to the public acknowledging their feedback has been received via email. When a submission is made online, the public will receive a notice of confirmation.

It is recommended that each municipal committee be responsible for ensuring that internet published information on policies, programs, services and initiatives is regularly updated, accurate, easily understood and accessible in multiple formats. The CDO is assigned to ensure accurate and timely information is posted on the website regularly and is monitored and updated.

Printed material should always be published concurrently on www.gilbertplains.com

3. SOCIAL MEDIA

As much as the Gilbert Plains website www.gilbertplains.com is and should be the municipality's primary tool for sharing information in the foreseeable future, it is not enough. There are a number of online communication tools that could assist us in reaching stakeholders that have been traditionally hard to reach, such as youth, new Canadians, and potential visitors and investors far beyond the borders of Gilbert Plains.

Traditional methods of communication still have their role, however social media – engaged conversation supported by on-line tools - has fundamentally changed the way our citizens discover and share information and it has enabled millions of people and organizations worldwide to connect and communicate in new and innovative ways.

We are in the age of social media and it is dramatically altering the way we communicate. It has created a new world in which government must learn to participate in a conversation with its audiences who demand transparency and immediate responses. Social media is not just a rich source of information; it enables municipalities to become proactive, influence perceptions, and address the needs and interests of their audiences.

Social media is a nebulous term to define, but basically refers to online communication tools that have more to do with networking and conversations than they do with traditional marketing. Examples of social media sites include Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter to name a few. An added benefit of social media in comparison to traditional media is that it is easily measured and provides a mechanism for response. Social networks provide a focus group of sorts for free and responses are often more honest and spontaneous. However, the municipality must be prepared to listen and respond accordingly.

It is important to note that this strategy is about better balancing and integrating all of the communication tools used by the municipality for maximum benefit and result. The social media strategy takes the approach of starting small, doing a few things well, and growing from there. Because social media is still so new to municipal governments, no specific methods for measuring its effectiveness have been developed, though best practices do exist and will be implemented. Used correctly, social media can greatly enhance our municipal brand and can facilitate business development, job growth and community pride.

Participation Guidelines

We want to ensure that comments contribute to a productive conversation for everyone participating. We understand that sometimes you may have concerns or issues, but please ensure that you keep things polite and considerate. We'll try to answer all questions but we cannot commit to replying to every comment posted. You're fully responsible for your comments posted on any of our social media channels. We do not endorse any of the views posted by users, and we reserve the right to remove any comments that are:

1. racist, hateful, sexist, homophobic, slanderous, insulting, or life-threatening,
2. serious, unproven, unsupported or inaccurate accusations against individuals or organizations,
3. abusive, aggressive, coarse, explicit, vulgar, violent, obscene or pornographic,

4. personal attacks and/or defamatory statements,
5. encourage or suggest illegal activity,
6. solicitations, advertisements or endorsements of any financial, commercial or non-governmental agency. Similarly, we do not allow attempts to defame or defraud any financial, commercial or non-governmental agency,
7. not sent by the author and/or posted by anonymous or robot accounts,
8. repetitive posts copied and pasted by multiple users,
9. too far off-topic, and
10. any other message the channel managers believe is inappropriate or does not add to the conversation.

Users who continually disregard our guidelines will be warned and/or banned from our channels.

A Gilbert Plains Municipal Facebook page has been established and is maintained and monitored by the Community Development Officer (CDO). In order to ensure that Gilbert Plains Municipality's social media presence is effectively monitored and maintained, it is recommended that the CDO serve as the centralized source for the overseeing, content creation, monitoring and evaluation of all online communication tools. It is the intent to have the Municipal promotional videos downloaded onto YouTube with connections on Facebook as well as www.gilbertplains.com

The CDO will monitor public comments on Facebook and respond appropriately or alternatively, delete any inappropriate comments and communicate to council and CAO through direct communication or during the committee as a whole meeting.

4. MEDIA RELATIONS

Purpose

1. To ensure all communication with the media is consistent, well-informed, timely and appropriate.
2. To clearly indicate authorized spokespersons.
3. To maintain positive relations with the media by providing them with accurate, timely information.
4. To improve communication with internal and external stakeholders and enhance Gilbert Plains Municipality's public image.
5. To establish protocols and consistent methods of managing communications to the media to ensure relevant and approved comments.
6. To limit the possibility of miscommunication and to maximize the effectiveness of staff by ensuring that comments to the media are made only through authorized staff.
7. To establish guidelines for effectively communicating and publicizing news about the Gilbert Plains Municipality with the media.

The Gilbert Plains Municipality recognizes that the media is one of the most effective ways of publicizing information on municipal issues, programs and events to residents. Newspaper, radio, television and the internet are, in many cases, the key sources of information for our residents on municipal issues and events.

Definition of “media”:

The Municipality will communicate with:

- Local, regional and national publications, such as daily and weekly newspapers, professional and commercial magazines and trade publications
- Radio, broadcast television and cable television
- Internet based news sites
- Wire services
- Freelance writers- often working for news services, magazines or book publishers

Reactive Media Relations

News media enquiries, whether by phone, email, letter, or in person, should be addressed promptly to accommodate publication, posting or broadcast deadlines, wherever possible. Staff members should ensure that news media requests, particularly for interviews or technical information, are directed to a designated spokesperson(s) to ensure accuracy and consistency of information.

Authorized Spokespersons

The Reeve, Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and the CDO are council’s official spokespersons on all matters. The CAO may designate other staff to act as spokespeople for the municipality. It is essential that authorized spokespeople for the municipality employ best practices to ensure that the organization speaks with one voice and presents clear and concise information.

Municipal councillors shall be spokespersons on events or issues that are of interest to them. It is understood that comments or communications from a councillor represent the views of the individual councillor and not necessarily the formal position of the Gilbert Plains Municipality. As outlined in the municipal Code of Conduct, once a decision has been made by a majority of council, no individual councillor may communicate against the decision.

Media Representation at Council Meetings

Council meetings are open to all members of the public, except for those proceedings that take place in-camera. Every effort should be made to encourage accurate news coverage of council and committee meetings and the decisions of council.

Proactive Media Relations

Media releases, news conferences and media advisories are issued and arranged by the CDO in conjunction with the Reeve and the CAO and the appropriate department. The CDO is responsible for issuing media releases about council’s activities, decisions and plans. All staff is required to pass on important information to the CDO which could be used as a basis for a press release. The CDO, in consultation with the CAO and appropriate department head will decide if the event warrants a media release and/or photo.

Crisis and Emergency Communications

The Media relations portion of this strategy does not apply to crisis communication during emergency situations. In such cases, The Gilbert Plains Municipality's Emergency Management Plan details the protocol for emergency media relations.

5. ADVERTISING

The CDO, in conjunction with the Economic Development Board, will be responsible for marketing and promoting the Municipality.

An integrated marketing plan will be developed incorporating the municipal logo and tag line. A set of professional, practical and integrated marketing tools will support the marketing strategy produced.

Examples of marketing materials include:

- Display advertising – print, web and outdoor
- Radio advertising
- Community profile
- Kit folders
- Newsletters
- Quarterly/Annual reports
- Testimonials/business profiles
- Brochures
- Banners/Trade show displays
- Municipal and way finding signage

Corporate Identity/Branding Guidelines

The Gilbert Plains Municipality and all facilities owned and operated by the Municipality should be identified in a distinct way the public can identify with in all circumstances. A corporate identity and branding program should encompass vehicles and equipment, employee uniforms, signs, advertisements, correspondence, email signatures, publications, business cards, as well as water and tax bills.

The logo will be phased in and will only be added to printed forms and other materials after current supplies are deleted. It will also be gradually introduced on municipal vehicles, corporate signage and promotional items.

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