



Staff Report

Administration – Communications

Report To: Council Meeting
Meeting Date: May 9, 2022
Report Number: FAF.22.101
Title: Update to Social Media Strategy and Policy
Prepared by: Tim Hendry, Manager of Communications and Economic Development

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report FAF.22.101, entitled "Update to Social Media Strategy and Policy";

AND THAT Council selects option one or option two as listed below regarding public comments on the Town's Facebook page:

Option 1: Allow Comments

AND THAT Council approves a three-month trial of allowing public comments to be posted on the Town's Facebook page;

AND THAT Council acknowledges that the Town's Facebook page will only be monitored and that questions will only be responded to during regular business hours, being Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.;

AND THAT Council approves that public comments will be disabled on all posts related to the 2022 Municipal Election;

AND THAT Council directs staff to track all time related to managing and responding to public comments on the Town's Facebook page and to provide a report back to Council at the end of the 3-month trial.

OR

Option 2: Disable Comments

AND THAT Council approves a three-month trial of disabling public comments on the Town Facebook page;

AND THAT Council directs staff to track all time related to managing the Facebook page and to provide a report back to Council at the end of the 3-month trial.

B. Overview

This report provides Council with additional detail regarding the options to allow or disable comments on the Town's Facebook page.

C. Background

At the April 26, 2022 Committee of the Whole Meeting, staff presented [Staff Report FAF.22.059 Social Media Strategy and Policy Update](#) to Council for consideration. Through the discussion, Council provided direction for staff to bring a subsequent report forward to the May 9, 2022 Council meeting to address the discussion around public comments with a focus on minimizing legal and other implications on the Town's Facebook page.

D. Analysis

Following the discussion at the Committee of the Whole meeting, Town staff met to review the direction of Council regarding maximizing conversations on the Town's Facebook page while minimizing legal and other considerations.

Of interest, at the April 16, 2022 Committee of the Whole meeting, the Director of Legislative Services provided Council with an overview of the legal considerations regarding public comments. If Council wishes to have a detailed legal opinion provided beyond what was originally discussed for the purposes of the three month pilot project, staff can bring forward a detailed legal opinion report at a future meeting date.

Public Commenting Options for Consideration

At the Committee of the Whole meeting, four primary options were discussed being:

- Option 1: Allow public comments
- Option 2: Disable public comments
- Option 3: Only allow public comments to be made on certain posts
- Option 4: Only allow comments during business hours

Through analysis, Town staff do not recommend proceeding with option three or option four based on the following rationale:

Option 3: Only allow public comments to be made on certain posts

- Staff consider this approach to be problematic as there is no clearly defined manner to select which posts would be open/closed for public comment. This would create ambiguity and have the potential to cause further issues.

Option 4: Only allow comments during business hours

- Due to technical limitations of Facebook settings, there is no feasible way to turn public comments on/off on a daily basis to align with business hours. To do so, the settings of each post would need to be changed individually and manually at the beginning and end of each day. This would require a significant amount of staff time and is not a sustainable solution.

With options three and four excluded, the following section details considerations for options one (allowing public comments) and option two (disabling public comments):

Option 1: Allow Public Comments

This option would allow public comments to be posted to the Town's Facebook page 24/7. Allowing public comments would promote two-way discussion with members of the public and would allow for questions and answers to be viewed by other Facebook users. Allowing comments would also increase the customer service offering available to members of the public.

Public comments posted to the Town Facebook page will be moderated according to the provisions of the Social Media Policy.

Considerations:

- Allowing public comments will require dedicated staff time to moderate and answer questions posted by members of the public.
- Public comments posted outside of regular business hours will not be monitored or responded to until the next business day, which in the case of a statutory holiday may be three full days.
- If the Social Media Policy needs to be enforced, the Town will be in a position to issue warnings, delete posts, ban and/or block users, which may pose further public engagement challenges.

Option 2: Disable Public Comments

This option would disable public comments on the Town's Facebook page. Members of the public would still have the ability to like, share and react (using emojis) to posts made by the Town. In addition, members of the public would have the ability to private message (direct message) the Town to ask a question.

Considerations:

- Disabling public comments will reduce the amount of staff time required to manage the Town's Facebook page and would remove all legal risks associated with unmonitored public comments.
- Disabling public comments would ensure that public comments continue to be submitted through official methods that become part of the public record (deputations,

correspondence, public comment period, public meetings, public information centres and Town surveys), rather than a member of the public posting a comment with the assumption that their comment will be taken into consideration by Council.

E. Strategic Priorities

1. Communication and Engagement

We will enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders.

2. Organizational Excellence

We will continually seek out ways to improve the internal organization of Town Staff and the management of Town assets.

F. Environmental Impacts

No environmental impacts are anticipated as a result of this report.

G. Financial Impacts

No direct financial impacts are anticipated as a result of this report. As detailed in the motion, staff time will be tracked accordingly, with a report provided back to Council.

H. In Consultation With

Shawn Everitt, Chief Administrative Officer

Will Thomson, Director of Legal Services

I. Public Engagement

The topic of this Staff Report has not been the subject of a Public Meeting and/or a Public Information Centre as neither a Public Meeting nor a Public Information Centre are required. However, any comments regarding this report should be submitted to Tim Hendry, Manager of Communications & Economic Development communications@thebluemountains.ca.

J. Attached

N/A

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Hendry
Manager of Communications & Economic Development

For more information, please contact:
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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	FAF.22.101 Update to Social Media Strategy and Policy.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	May 5, 2022

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Shawn Everitt - May 5, 2022 - 11:47 AM