



# Staff Report

## Administration – Chief Administrative Officer

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**Report To:** Committee of the Whole Meeting  
**Meeting Date:** September 27, 2022  
**Report Number:** FAF.22.143  
**Title:** Tools for Clarification of Information Provided at Council  
**Prepared by:** Shawn Everitt, Chief Administrative Officer

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### A. Recommendations

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THAT Council receive Staff Report FAF.22.143, entitled “Tools for Clarification of Information Provided at Council” for information purposes.

### B. Overview

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Council directed staff to bring forward a staff report outlining the tools available to assist Council and Town staff with correcting information provided, during Council and Committee of the Whole meetings and other public forums, that may be incorrect, inaccurate, or misinformed.

### C. Background

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Council identified that it would be beneficial to have more clarity regarding how to provide more context or detail related to information shared in a public forum or to correct incorrect, or inaccurate information.

With direction from Council, staff reviewed existing Town policies and procedures, including the Town’s existing [Procedural By-law](#), to identify ways in which information could be clarified or corrected efficiently and respectfully.

First and foremost, staff believe that those providing information at Council and Committee of the Whole meetings or other public forums, including social media, do not intentionally provide incorrect, inaccurate, or misleading information. Staff also believe that the provision of inaccurate or misleading information is limited in occurrences.

Having an engaged and well-informed community is a high priority for Council and staff. The continued commitment and investment provided for communication efforts supports this priority and we take great pride in the improvements made to date.

The Town's Community Communications Advisory Committee (CCAC) led the development of the Town's first [Communications Strategy](#). This Strategy was approved by Council and is the guiding document outlining how the Town will communicate with our community.

### **Procedural By-law**

Staff strongly believe that the Town's [Procedural By-law](#) provides the necessary tools to offer clarification and factual information through respectful communications and interactions with our community members and stakeholders. The key is that these interactions remain respectful, stay on point and, if additional information is required, that staff be directed, and given an opportunity, to provide follow up information through a formal report to Council. Spontaneous debate on new subject matter sometimes, in itself, generates misinformation. Staff suggest that permitting staff the time to listen to the comments, gain an understanding of the themes, and/or questions posed and then to perform the necessary research before the informal Council debate is very helpful in ensuring that well researched, and factual information is shared with the public.

The Procedural By-law provides the opportunity, through the management of the meeting, for clarity to be provided where possible and also allows Council to ask or direct staff to provide follow up information.

Staff also have the opportunity to provide information to Council that may provide clarity or correct misinformation through a staff report. As Chief Administrative Officer, my expectation of staff is that the appropriate staff reach out to the individuals who provided the original information to make them aware of the staff report being brought forward to Council.

### **Social Media**

In 2022, Council considered options for updating the Town's [Social Media Policy](#) which resulted in Council directing staff to utilize a Town Facebook account for one-way information sharing with the public. Town information would be shared via Facebook, but social media users would not be permitted to provide comments on the [Town's Facebook page](#). Background research into municipal use of social media platforms supported the decision to use Facebook as a means of information sharing rather than a two-way communication platform.

The Town is proud of the community engagement opportunities that our community and stakeholders have been provided with over the past number of years which include the following:

- [Town Website](#) (specific information on projects and developments)
- Ability to subscribe to Town Website pages and receive live updated information regarding development and projects that are of personal interest
- [Online Service Request Portal](#) on the Town's Website
- Public Comment Period at Committee of the Whole and Council Meetings
- Formal Deputations to Council

- Ability to submit formal correspondence to Council for their consideration
- Circulation of information via newsletters and roadside signage
- Social Media Accounts: [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#), and [Facebook](#)

While reviewing Social Media Policies from other municipalities, it was identified that the Town of Wasaga Beach implemented a “[Truth Corner](#)” page on its website. Town of The Blue Mountains staff met with Wasaga Beach staff for insights into the program. The “Truth Corner” provides the municipality, via the CAO, an opportunity to clarify and provide factual information through written messaging with regard to misinformation being shared within the community.

### **Public Meetings**

Public Meetings are an essential communication opportunity governed by a very formal process with regards to how they are advertised, facilitated, and managed. Depending on the subject matter, the length of time a Public Meeting shall be advertised is determined through the Town’s [Provision of Notice and Manner of Giving Notice to the Public Policy POL.COR.07.03](#).

A Public Meeting is an opportunity for members of the public to provide formal comments to Council and staff. The comments brought forward through the Public Meeting process become part of the public record, and staff are responsible for considering and providing a thoughtful review of each of the comments provided. It is standard practice for staff to provide a Follow Up Staff Report to Council after a Public Meeting that outlines the verbal and written comments brought forward through the Public Meeting process.

Staff have identified that Council can often spend a significant amount of time at the beginning of Public Meetings engaging in dialogue, asking questions, and providing thoughts and perspectives on the Public Meeting subject matter.

Public Meetings may benefit by providing the forum for hearing from the public rather than beginning with a fulsome Council discussion of the subject matter as it would provide staff time to gather the necessary follow up information to answer questions, address concerns, and correct any misconceptions or misunderstandings about the subject matter within the Follow Up Staff Report at a subsequent Council meeting. This would better prepare staff to more adequately respond to questions and could ultimately lead to more meaningful Council debate regarding the subject matter.

### **D. Analysis**

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Based on the review completed by staff, the key finding is that sufficient tools currently exist via Town endorsed conduits and media platforms to effectively correct information provided during Council and Committee of the Whole meetings and other public forums that may be incorrect, inaccurate, or misinformed.

Staff suggest that the key to using these tools effectively is based on the principle of respect towards the public and towards one another while trying to provide information to the community.

The Town's Corporate Strategic Plan identifies Corporate Vision and Mission statements that support the importance of effectively engaging and communicating with our community.

## **VISION**

"An approachable Council and Staff serving an engaged and well informed community."

## **MISSION**

"Council and staff together foster the trust of our community and support our region's diverse cultural and natural heritage through thoughtful consultation and organizational excellence."

The first priority identified in the [Town's Strategic Plan](#) is completely centered around public engagement and effective communication. All of these points support the fact that the Town has the existing tools required to effectively communicate information to the public.

### **Priority 1: Communications and Engagement are in our Nature**

- 1.1 Adopt a "Plan to Execute" Mindset
- 1.2 Communicate Early and Often
- 1.3 Ask our Community to expect us to gather information
- 1.4 Ask our Community to acknowledge that there will be times of tension
- 1.5 Communicate how we arrive at Recommendations or Decisions
- 1.6 Build Trust with Consistency
- 1.7 Ask our Community to be willing to listen
- 1.8 Strengthen relationships within the community

We serve an exceptional community of residents and stakeholders that are facing changing and challenging times and the community deserves to be well informed through easily sourced, factual information that is provided proactively. Staff believe that the Town is best positioned to provide this factual information through consistent, accessible, and respectful methods currently at its disposal.

## **E. Strategic Priorities**

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### **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.

### **3. Community**

We will protect and enhance the community feel and the character of the Town, while ensuring the responsible use of resources and restoration of nature.

### **4. Quality of Life**

We will foster a high quality of life for full-time and part-time residents of all ages and stages, while welcoming visitors.

## **F. Environmental Impacts**

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None.

## **G. Financial Impacts**

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None.

## **H. In Consultation With**

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Senior Management Team

Communications and Economic Development Team

## **I. Public Engagement**

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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 Shawn Everitt, Chief Administrative Officer [cao@thebluemountains.ca](mailto:cao@thebluemountains.ca).

## **J. Attached**

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None

Respectfully submitted,

Shawn Everitt  
Chief Administrative Officer

For more information, please contact:  
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### Report Approval Details

Document Title:	FAF.22.143 Tools for Clarification of Information Provided at Council.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Sep 13, 2022

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

**Shawn Everitt - Sep 13, 2022 - 8:39 AM**