



Staff Report

Administration – Communications

Report To: COW-Finance, Admin, Fire, Legal, Community Services
Meeting Date: August 14, 2023
Report Number: FAF.23.123
Title: Consideration of Town Facebook Page Comments
Prepared by: Allan Gibbons, Communications and Economic Development Coordinator

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report FAF.23.123, entitled "Consideration of Town Facebook Page Comments";

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

OR

Option 1: Continue To Disable Public Comments

AND THAT Council directs staff to continue to disable public comments on the Town's Facebook page.

OR

Option 2: Allow Comments

AND THAT Council approves 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 and comments will only be responded to during regular business hours, being Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

B. Overview

This report provides Council with additional detail regarding allowing or disabling comments on the Town's Facebook page.

C. Background

The Town launched its official Facebook page in August 2022. At the May 9, 2022, Council Meeting, Council approved disabling public comments on the Town's Facebook page upon

launch. Staff were directed to track time spent managing the Town's social media channels and to report back to Council after a trial period to reevaluate the decision to disable comments on Facebook.

D. Analysis

The Town's official Facebook page has grown quickly with over 550 followers since its launch in August 2022. From the inception of the Town's Facebook page, and following the decision of Council, public comments have been turned off on all Facebook posts. Town staff currently spends approximately one hour per day creating content and monitoring the Town's social media channels.

The launch of the official Facebook page was an action item as part of the Town's 2022 Corporate Social Media Strategy. Three goals have been completed or are successfully ongoing:

1. Create a Corporate Facebook account to diversify the Town's social media audiences.
2. Build authority as an official news source for all Town happenings and projects.
3. Drive traffic to the Town's official website and relevant partner and Town project websites.

A fourth goal, "Foster two-way dialogue with our online audiences through content sharing," is currently possible only through private messages on the Town's Facebook page.

The following section details considerations for option one (allowing public comments) and option two (continuing to disable public comments).

Option 1: Continue to Disable Public Comments

This option would continue the Town's practice of disabling 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 are still able to private message the Town to ask a question.

Considerations:

- The continuation of disabling comments will maintain the current time allocation spent by staff to manage the Town's Facebook page and removes all legal risks associated with unmonitored public comments.
- Disabling public comments ensures 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.
- Posts that do not receive engagement are not shown to as many users.

Option 2: 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 offerings available to members of the public.

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

Considerations:

- Allowing public comments will increase engagement on the Town's Facebook page, improving its reach and visibility to those not already following the page.
- Public comments will receive public answers from the Town, ensuring transparent communication from the Town to members of the public.
- Allowing public comments will require additional 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.
- Public comments could present a legal risk to the Town as comments would not be monitored outside of regular business hours.
- Public comments could present a legal risk to the Town as comments that do not rise to the level of needing to enforce the Social Media Policy may still contain sensitive or discretionary information.
- 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.

Additional information:

- At this time, there have been no formal requests from the public to allow commenting on the Town's Facebook page. Town posts can not be commented on, but can be shared by users onto personal accounts, groups, or public pages where they can receive comments and generate discussion.

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

To help determine staffing considerations, staff have previously reached out to Municipal Communication Officers throughout Grey County and Simcoe County. On average, each municipality spends 1.5 – 2 hours per day managing their social media profiles. The time spent includes content planning, information gathering, scheduling posts, and responding to comments. This would represent approximately five additional staff hours per week.

H. In Consultation With

Tim Hendry, Manager of Communications and Economic Development

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 Allan Gibbons, Communications and Economic Development Coordinator
communications@thebluemountains.ca.

J. Attached

N/A

Respectfully submitted,

Allan Gibbons
Communications and Economic Development Coordinator

For more information, please contact:
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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	FAF.23.123 Consideration of Town Facebook Page Comments.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Jul 26, 2023

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

No Signature found

Allan Gibbons - Jul 25, 2023 - 3:44 PM

Tim Hendry - Jul 25, 2023 - 3:53 PM

Shawn Everitt - Jul 26, 2023 - 8:51 AM