



# Staff Report

## Administration – Communications

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**Report To:** COW\_Finance\_Admin\_Fire\_Community\_Services  
**Meeting Date:** May 21, 2024  
**Report Number:** FAF.24.062  
**Title:** Amendments to the Public Notice Policy  
**Prepared by:** Tim Hendry, Manager of Communications and Economic Development

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### A. Recommendations

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THAT Council receive Staff Report FAF.24.062, entitled “Amendments to the Public Notice Policy”;

AND THAT Council directs staff to proceed with the required Public Meeting in accordance with the requirements of the Municipal Act, 2001, to receive public feedback regarding the amended Public Notice Policy as presented;

AND THAT Council direct staff to schedule a Public Meeting on July 9, 2024 to receive comments from the public regarding the amended Public Notice Policy as presented;

AND THAT Council acknowledges that the provisions of the “Provision of Notice and Manner of Giving Notice to the Public Policy, POL.COR.07.03” requires 21 days’ notice of this Public Meeting, and that the Notice of Public Meeting will be posted to the Town website on June 4, 2024.

### B. Overview

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This report provides an overview of amendments proposed to the Town’s Public Notice Policy. The Town is required to have a Public Notice Policy as per Section 270 of Municipal Act, 2001.

This report provides details on the research conducted by staff with regard to municipal best practices for public notice policies and proposed amendments to the policy.

### C. Background

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Section 270 of the Municipal Act, 2001, requires that all municipalities adopt and maintain a policy with respect to the circumstances in which the municipality shall provide public notice and, if notice is to be provided, the form, manner and times notice shall be given. The Town’s current [Public Notice Policy \(POL.COR.07.03\)](#) was developed and approved in 2008.

The Public Notice Policy contains details regarding the application and administration of the policy, the content to be contained within public notices, and standards to be followed to ensure public engagement opportunities. The Classes identified within the policy are used to categorize matters for which public notice is required as listed in the Municipal Act, and the form and manner in which notice is to be given and the minimum time for providing such notice.

Following the closure of Metroland Media Group and the closure of more than 70 community newspapers throughout Canada, including the Town's former newspaper of record, the Collingwood Connection, staff identified an opportunity to update the Public Notice Policy.

The intent of the Public Notice Policy as required by the Municipal Act, is for each municipality to establish minimum notice requirements, where required. The requirement of the Municipal Act is not intended to cover all matters of municipal businesses, projects or operations. Rather, the intent is for each municipality to set minimum standards for specific matters as outlined within the Municipal Act, 2001.

It's important to highlight that the Public Notice Policy does not prevent staff from providing public notice above and beyond the requirements contained in the policy. It has become standard practice for the Town to provide public notice in a manner consistent with the principles of the Town's Communications Strategy.

In addition, given the importance of the update to the Town's Notice Policy, staff would appreciate any feedback that could be provided from the applicable Committees of Council such as the Accountability and Transparency Committee.

### **Communications Strategy**

In 2021, Council approved the Town's first [Communications Strategy](#). The Strategy was developed in direct consultation and support with the former Community Communications Advisory Committee. The Strategy provides strong principles and a five-year framework to guide and support Town communication and public engagement efforts with a focus on the following objectives, goals and principles:

**Communications Goal** - The Strategy has a single goal that underscores the importance of listening and proactive communication that includes all residents and stakeholders in The Blue Mountains community.

- *An engaged community in which every voice is heard.*

**Communication Objectives** - To engage and listen to all residents and stakeholders, including full-time, part-time, seasonal, rural and urban, through a respectful, informed and ongoing dialogue:

1. Establish a communication baseline.
2. Cultivate communication excellence.

3. Develop creative and multi-platform content that enhances all communication activities.
4. Foster engagement and uphold public trust.

The Town's Communications Strategy is intended to be used a resource to support the minimum notification activities and actions as required within the Public Notice Policy. The Communications Strategy encourages a commitment to engaging and listening to all residents and stakeholders through a respectful, informed and ongoing dialogue. The strategy references that, in all instances, the Town should endeavour to use a number of communication tools and platforms to meet the diverse needs of residents and stakeholders.

## **D. Analysis**

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Since the Town's current Public Notice Policy was approved in 2008, the Town's Communications standards and level of service delivery related to providing public notice have significantly evolved. Additionally, the use and adoption of technology and the consumption of news and media have changed dramatically through the prevalence of smartphones, social media and online news websites. In addition, the Municipal Act and other legislation, such as the Planning Act, have changed over the years, giving municipalities flexibility in terms of the form and manner in which notice is provided.

To help inform the review, staff assessed public notice policies from a number of Ontario municipalities to determine municipal best practices. Municipal policies reviewed include the Town of Amherstburg, Clearview Township, Town of Collingwood, Parry Sound, Bracebridge, Simcoe County, Grey County, Town of Milton, Norfolk County, Northumberland County, North Stormont, Peel Region, Township of South Frontenac, City of Waterloo and City of Whitby.

### **Proposed Amendment – Newspaper Advertising**

A key challenge facing the current Notice Policy is related to the risk of non-compliance that the Town faces where there is a legislative requirement to post notices in a newspaper. Section 87 of the Legislation Act, 2006 defines newspaper as follows: "newspaper", in a provision requiring publication, means a document that:

(a) is printed in sheet form, published at regular intervals of a week or less and circulated to the general public, and

(b) consists primarily of news of current events of general interest;

To eliminate the risk, staff are proposing an amendment to the Policy to reflect the following:

*If there are no newspapers that meet the definition of a newspaper as defined within the Legislation Act, 2006 s. 87, then the Town shall, at the discretion of the Town Clerk, advertise the matter in a newspaper that does not meet the definition but has general circulation within the Municipality.*

Based on the above definition and the definition included in the policy, Communications Staff in consultation with the Town Clerk support that The Blue Mountain Review and Collingwood

Today will serve as the Town's 'newspapers' of record in the absence of a local newspaper that meets the current definition of a newspaper as defined in the Legislation Act. This decision was supported through the [Local Media Review](#) project that was completed by the Town's Communications Staff in 2020 and again reviewed in 2022 through staff report [FAF.22.003](#).

## **Other Proposed Amendments**

### **1. Removal of 'Planned Service Disruption' as a standalone Notice Class**

- In the current policy, Planned Service Disruptions are listed as Class 4 and require a minimum of 30 days' notice required.
- The proposed amendment is for Planned Service Disruptions to be included within Class 2 – Defined or Specific Items/Issues with a minimum of 14 days' notice required.
- This amendment is recommended as planned service disruptions are generally related to a specific geographical area or to a specific Town service. The reduction of notice from 30 to 14 days is to provide greater flexibility in scheduling works to be completed based on staffing availability.

### **2. Addition of Public Meetings as a standalone Notice Class**

- In the current policy, Public Meetings are not included/mentioned within any specific Notice Class.
- The proposed amendment is for Public Meetings to be added as a standalone class (Class 4). If a Public Meeting is held as a legislative requirement, then the provisions of the legislation shall be followed. If the Public Meeting is held at the direction of Town Council or Staff, the policy shall be followed with a minimum of 21 days notice.
- This amendment is recommended as a means to standardize the Town's Public Meeting notice requirements.

### **3. Addition of Public Information Centres**

- A provision for Public Information Centres (PICs) has been added under the 'Application' section of the Policy and included as an option within Class 3 - Broad Community Items/Issues and Class 4 – Public Meetings.
- The proposed amendment is for Public Information Centres to be held at the direction of Council or Town Staff with a required minimum notice period of 14 days and will be advertised following the manners outlined in Class 2 – Defined or Specific Items/Issues.
- It is recommended that this amendment be included to match the Town's current practice related to public notice for Public Information Centres.

### **4. Planning & Development Projects**

- Clarification related to public notice for Planning and Development Projects has been added under the 'Application' section of the Policy.
- The proposed amendment is for public notice related to Planning and Development Projects to adhere and meet the minimum requirements of the *Planning Act* and other applicable legislation. For matters related to planning

and development projects that are outside of the public notice requirements of the *Planning Act* or other applicable legislation, the notice requirements of Class 2 – Defined or Specific Items/Issues shall be followed.

- It is recommended that this amendment be included based on the opportunity for the Town to provide an enhanced level of public notice and communication related to Planning and Development projects.

#### **5. Addition of Social Media**

- Social media has been added as a communication tool. However, exclusive use of any form of Social Media shall not constitute as Public Notice for the purposes of meeting the requirements of the policy.

#### **6. Exclusion of Standalone Operational Notices**

- An addition was added under the “Application” section of the Policy related to the exclusion of operational notices or other matters of Town business that are deemed at the direction of the Communications Department, not to reach the threshold of requiring formal public notice. In these instances, a topic-specific communication plan is created and implemented by the Town’s Communications Department to suit the nature and intent of the matter in keeping with the standards and principles of the Town’s Communications Strategy.

#### **7. General Housekeeping**

- General edits and formatting changes were made throughout the Policy to reflect the Town standard for policy development. This includes a more robust “Definitions” section and greater detail where applicable throughout the Policy.
- A section was added related to the principles of the Town’s Communications Strategy and is intended to be used a resource to support the minimum notification activities and actions as required under the policy.

### **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.

### **F. Environmental Impacts**

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No direct environmental impacts are anticipated as a result of this report. However, the general communication activities of the Town do result in environmental impacts due to the use of print materials, signage, equipment, electricity and other related inputs. In all instances, staff

attempt to source and use recycled and sustainable materials. In addition, greater emphasis has been placed on utilizing the Town website and online presence as a means to reduce printed materials.

## **G. Financial Impacts**

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Costs associated with communications and advertising activities are included in the 2024 Town Budget or are included within project-specific budgets.

## **H. In Consultation With**

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Allan Gibbons, Communications and Economic Development Coordinator  
Corrina Giles, Town Clerk  
Shawn Everitt, Chief Administrative Officer  
Shawn Carey, Former Director of Operations  
Adam Smith, Director of Planning and Development Services  
Service Area Managers  
Senior Management Team

## **I. Public Engagement**

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The topic of this Staff Report will be the subject of a Public Meeting and/or a Public Information Centre in accordance with the following schedule:

- May 21, 2024 Committee of the Whole – Initial staff report FAF.24.062 Amendments to the Public Notice Policy with recommendation to proceed to public consultation;
- June 3, 2024 Council – recommendation from Committee of the Whole considered by Council;
- June 4, 2024 Public Meeting Notice posted to the Town’s website;
- July 9, 2024 Public Meeting;
- August 26, 2024 Committee of the Whole – Follow up report to the Public Meeting, attaching comments received in response to the Public Meeting;
- September 9, 2024 Council – recommendation from Committee of the Whole considered by Council.

Any comments regarding this report should be submitted to Tim Hendry, Manager of Communications & Economic Development Tim Hendry, Manager of Communications & Economic Development, [communications@thebluemountains.ca](mailto:communications@thebluemountains.ca).

## **J. Attached**

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1. Amended Town Notice Policy

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Hendry  
Manager of Communications & Economic Development

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

Document Title:	FAF.24.062 Amendments to the Public Notice Policy.docx
Attachments:	- Attachment-1-Amended-Town-Notice-Policy.pdf
Final Approval Date:	May 2, 2024

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

**Tim Hendry - May 1, 2024 - 10:02 AM**

**Shawn Everitt - May 2, 2024 - 6:31 AM**