



# Committee Report

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## Community Communications Advisory Committee

**Meeting Date:** February 10, 2021  
**Meeting Time:** 5:00 p.m.  
**Location:** Town Hall, Council Chambers  
32 Mill Street, Thornbury, ON

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### Community Communications Committee Recommendations

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**NOTE:** The following are recommendations from the Community Communications Advisory Committee to be considered for adoption by Council

- [Receive Minutes \(February 10, 2021\)](#)

**Recommended** (Move, second)

THAT Council of The Town of The Blue Mountains receives the Special Community Communications Advisory Committee Minutes dated February 10, 2021 as attached, for information purposes.



# Minutes

## The Blue Mountains, Special Community Communications Advisory Committee

**Date:** February 10, 2021  
**Time:** 5:00 p.m.  
**Location:** Town Hall, Council Chambers - Virtual Meeting  
32 Mill Street, Thornbury, ON  
**Prepared by:**  
Sarah Merrifield, Executive Assistant Committees of Council

**Members Present:** Deputy Mayor Rob Potter, Councillor Hope Paula Hope, Lyn Logan, John Milne, Tom Maloney, Jayne Sutherland, and Mary Ferguson following the Call to Order

**Staff Present:** Manager of Communications and Economic Development Tim Hendry, and Communications and Economic Development Coordinator Carling Fee

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### A. Call to Order

#### A.1 Traditional Territory Acknowledgement

We would like to begin our meeting by recognizing the First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples of Canada as traditional stewards of the land. The municipality is located within the boundary of Treaty 18 region of 1818 which is the traditional land of the Anishnaabek, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat-Wyandot-Wyandotte peoples.

#### A.2 Committee Member Attendance

Executive Assistant Committees of Council Sarah Merrifield confirmed all Committee members were present save Mary Ferguson, who joined the meeting following the Call to Order. Mayor Alar Soever was also present.

### **A.3 Approval of Agenda**

Moved by: Jayne Sutherland

Seconded by: Deputy Mayor Potter

THAT the Agenda of February 10, 2021 be approved as circulated, including any additions to the Agenda.

Yay (6): Councillor Hope, Lyn Logan, Tom Maloney, Deputy Mayor Potter, Jayne Sutherland, and John Milne

Absent (1): Mary Ferguson

**The motion is Carried (6 to 0, 1 absent)**

### **A.4 Declaration of Pecuniary Interest and general nature thereof**

NOTE: in accordance with the *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* and the Town Procedural By-law 2019-56, Community Communications Advisory Committee Members must file a written statement of the interest and its general nature with the Clerk for inclusion on the Registry.

None

## **B. Committee-Led, Virtual Public Engagement Session**

Under the authority of the *Municipal Act, 2001* and in accordance with Ontario's *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (MFIPPA), The Corporation of the Town of The Blue Mountains wishes to inform the public that all information including opinions, presentations, reports, and documentation provided for or at a Public Meeting, Public Consultation, or other Public Process are considered part of the public record. This information may be posted on the Town's website and/or made available to the public upon request.

### **B.1 Public Engagement Session - Corporate Communications Survey Highlights & Strategy Planning**

Chair John Milne read the Notice of Public Engagement Session – Corporate Communications Survey Highlights & Strategy Planning. John noted the session was rescheduled from January 13, 2021 and confirmed the Community Communications Advisory Committee (“Committee”) is hosting a virtual Public Engagement Session to discuss highlights of the Corporate Communications Survey Results and to provide an update on the development of the Communications Strategy. John further noted that insights from the Corporate Communications Survey will assist the Committee and staff in preparing the Communications Strategy for Council’s consideration.

John confirmed that in accordance with the Town's Notice Policy, POL.COR.07.03 Notice is hereby provided that the Committee is hosting a Public Engagement Session for the purpose of reviewing with the public the results of the Corporate Communications Survey. John confirmed that the link to the survey results is available for participants. John advised that the Town is developing a Communications Strategy to foster greater public engagement and improve communications with its residents. The Communications Strategy is being developed by the Town's Communications Division with input from the Committee.

John further noted that the first draft of the Communications Strategy was presented to Council on November 16, 2020. Utilizing the feedback received, the Committee and staff are working to prepare a second draft that will be presented to Council in the first quarter of 2021. John confirmed that Committee Meetings and public engagement sessions are currently being held virtually due to COVID-19. The Public Engagement Session will be moderated by the Committee Chair and will cover the following topics: update on Communications Strategy progress and Committee aspirations, Public, written comments provided in advance read by Assistant, and Open-forum discussion between Committee members and public participants. Lastly, John noted that any submitted comments become part of the public record, including names and addresses. The meeting is being livestreamed and recorded.

Executive Assistant Committees of Council Sarah Merrifield advised that no written comments have been received for the Public Engagement Session.

John introduced the members of the Committee and provided an overview of the Committee's Terms of Reference. John emphasized the Committee's role is to listen and relay information, to make suggestions to improve communications, and promote a positive dialogue. John noted that the Committee is developing a Strategic Communications Plan which is a complex and lengthy process. John noted the Town has not had a guiding communications document in the past but once it is in place, the Committee will help to implement the action items within.

John provided an overview of the 2020 Communications Survey. John noted the survey was available from September 3, 2020 to October 26, 2020 and received 264 responses. John noted the results of the survey will be used in conjunction with other sources of feedback and engagement, including Committee and staff expertise, and other research to ultimately inform the Communications Strategy. John reviewed Communications Survey Highlights as well as Communications Survey Verbatims.

John led the Committee and public member attendees through guiding questions and open-forum discussion to gain insight regarding Corporate Communications and “What can be done better?”.

### **How do you want to be engaged?**

John Greer commented on the recent Provincial announcement regarding re-opening and enquired when Council and Committee of the Whole meetings will switch to in-person meetings. Mayor Soever replied that Grey/Bruce Counties are currently straddling the yellow and green classification, but once the Town decides to re-open to in-person meetings, the public will be made aware.

Deputy Mayor Potter enquired whether the public members attending watch the meeting livestreams, and whether there are any improvements the public would suggest. John Greer confirmed that he does watch live stream meetings.

John Greer noted that if he is participating in meetings, either through correspondence or a deputation, he would like clarity on the best method for interacting with Council. Mr. Greer referenced a letter he recently submitted to Council and noted that when the letter was received, there were no comments from anyone present which made it feel unacknowledged. Mr. Greer noted he would like some discussion amongst Council members when he submits correspondence and would like to hear back from members of Council. He heard back from one member of Council when he submitted his previous correspondence. Deputy Mayor Potter requested that in future, if the public would like a response from all members of Council, the correspondence should specify the request. In relation to this discussion, Committee member Jayne Sutherland commented that the Committee recently submitted a letter through Chair Milne regarding timely responses to enquiries for Council’s consideration. Chair Milne noted there will be a detailed staff review undertaken with respect to customer service and response times. Councillor Hope noted that the conversation points to several areas of communication, being: customer service and the public’s relationship with Council. Mayor Soever noted that members of Council try to answer emails and correspondence in a timely manner. Mayor Soever pointed to several impediments to timely responses, including where members of the public have received a response from staff regarding a particular matter but the individual is displeased with the answer so contacts a member of the public, and “frequent fliers”, referring to individuals who send numerous letters on multiple issues which can stagnate the process. Mr. Greer thanked the Committee and Mayor Soever for the conversation, and noted he wants to engage in a way that generates discussion by Council.

Mayor Soever noted that there is a lack of understanding of Council protocol and process. Mayor Soever noted that the Public Comment Period is used when members of the public wish to say a few words about a given topic on the agenda, where correspondence to Council is a more formal manner of providing material to be included in the record. Deputations are used when members of the public would like to initiate a dialogue with Council.

Pamela Spence noted it is preferred if staff could highlight projects/plans in advance of materials being submitted to Council. Pamela explained that when members of the public do not have enough information up-front, debate is sparked. Pamela further commented that website searchability needs to be improved, and pointed specifically to the Planning webpages, and the distinction between Town and County development files. Pamela noted the “Bang the Table” survey platform is a good tool, but limits the number of individuals involved due to the requirement to register. Pamela noted a less onerous survey format would be preferred. To Pamela’s point about proactive communication, Chair Milne noted a key priority is “early and often” communication. Deputy Mayor Potter requested that Pamela develop some suggestions for how to effectively achieve “early and often” communications. Pamela confirmed she will develop a memorandum for the Committee’s consideration, but pointed to The Forum, Business Associations, and The Blue Mountains Ratepayers Association as examples of where information can be advertised to ensure the public is aware.

#### **What do you want to be kept abreast of & how frequently?**

Pamela Spence noted she would like to be kept informed about planning matters, particularly large-scale development, and appreciates early communication.

#### **How can the Town do a better job of soliciting feedback?**

Pamela Spence noted it is important to use the Town website, for example: developing a sidebar with content that the Town is communicating about, and opportunities for public engagement.

Committee member Jayne Sutherland recommended that the Town makes survey use easier with no registration required. Further, Jayne noted that survey results should be prominently displayed on the Town’s website.

Committee member Mary Ferguson noted the question of “How can the Town do a better job of soliciting feedback” must be looked at in terms of what issues being are interested in knowing about. Mary explained that when members of the public are engaged, it’s “issue based”; members of the public are not looking for continuous, 365 days per year communication. As such, the Town needs to use judgement about what is considered to be a “hot topic”. From there, the Town can prioritize the order of importance of Town initiatives, next steps, key decisions, and so on.

Committee member Lyn Logan noted the importance of “getting ahead of the story” by establishing a social media presence through Facebook, as an example.

John Greer commented that politicians at the Provincial and Federal level of government issue newsletters and suggested that perhaps members of Council could issue newsletters regularly to solicit the public’s feedback on key Town issues.

Jim Torrance noted it would be helpful if Council could identify their top priorities, what they are trying to accomplish, and the progress made to date.

Mary Lynn Greer commented that website information needs to be easier to find and content and navigation should be simplified. Deputy Mayor Potter noted it would be helpful for members of the public to provide examples of when they experience issues navigating or finding information on the Town’s website, for example: landfill content. Deputy Mayor Potter further commented that the Town needs to do a better job of formatting information on the website and using less jargon and more plain language. Mayor Soever noted he has experienced similar issues with the website.

### **What do you want to see on the new website?**

It was noted that Hot Topics should be front and center on the new website. John Milne noted that searchability was discussed a great deal during the recent website demonstrations. Manager of Communications and Economic Development Tim Hendry noted the work on the new website should begin shortly and confirmed there are new tools that will assist with website searchability, which also accounts for variances in terminology that different users may use.

Ken Mehi noted that four years ago it was very difficult to navigate a previous version of the website using the Browse Aloud function. The most recent version of the website is improved in terms of accessibility, but there are still problems. Ken provided the example of the circular buttons on the home screen, and advised they are inaccessible using the Browse Aloud feature. Also, the format for the Corporate Communications Survey responses is inaccessible. Ken further noted it is incumbent upon the Town to ensure the website is accessible.

John Greer questioned whether e-blasts are affected by the new website. Tim Hendry noted the new website will offer improvements over the current e-blast system and allow residents to subscribe to individual webpages as opposed to news items only.

Mary Lynn Greer noted the Hot Topic idea is a good one, and recommended using bullet points and sidebars to simplify access to information.

### **How can the Town help you be better informed?**

Pamela Spence noted the format of the Blue Mountain Ratepayer and Forum sessions are very helpful, and further commented her appreciation when members of Council attend to provide additional information.

Mary Lynn Greer commented her preference regarding the manner in which Blue Mountain Ratepayers Association delivers news and information.

Chair John Milne provided verbal comments on behalf of resident Paul Williams, who was unable to access the meeting. Paul's comments as follows: "I think the onus is on the people's representatives, the councillors, to initiate the conversations with their constituents. Without that conversation how can they develop policy? How can they represent their constituents if they don't engage with them? The Mayor does his videos but that's a one-way information flow. I think there needs to be a better understanding of the role of council and councillors. By both the public and the councillors. All the focus on tools such as websites is really not the real issue."

Pamela Spence commented that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, members of Council were going to various areas within the Town to initiate an informal exchange with residents, which was wonderful. It was questioned whether Councillors could be assigned to certain areas of the Town, which could also help direct resident enquiries. Deputy Mayor Potter noted Council is very approachable and its best to email or call directly if a constituent has a particular question or issue to raise. Mayor Soever noted that the "Meet the Mayor" meetings referenced earlier had to be postponed due to COVID-19 but will be reinstated when possible. Further, Mayor Soever noted that the Town does not operate under a Ward system, but Council represents the whole municipality.

Jim Torrance commented it would be interesting to know if issues vary amongst the different regions of The Blue Mountains, understanding that the Town is made up of various communities.

### **What do you see as the Communications priorities?**

Deputy Mayor Potter noted that provision of reliable rural broadband, and internet access across the municipality is a key priority to assist with communications.



Ken Mehi noted that the results of the recent communications survey accounts for less than 1.5% of the Town's population. Further, the Sustainability survey that is currently open has only received 50 responses to date, which is a very low number of respondents. Ken noted the Town needs to gain a better understanding of why people do not engage; namely, ability and willingness. Ken referenced the need to register to complete surveys as an impediment, and further commented that surveys should be set up as easy to access and fill out. Tim Hendry noted these are great points and confirmed that the response rates are low when considered as a proportion of the population. Tim noted that the Leisure Activities Plan survey was one of the highest response rates he has seen, with approximately 10% of the population completing it. Ken noted that when meaningful and representational statistical data cannot be obtained, the Town needs to figure out ways to enhance engagement. It was noted that the results of the Corporate Communication Survey skewed to Thornbury residents and respondents were typically 55+.

Committee member Tom Maloney enquired who individuals should go to if there's an issue, for example: Pickleball Court installation, or the berm on Highway 26. Mayor Soever commented that it would be good for the Town to have a first point of contact who can direct enquiries accordingly. Requests could be logged with a time stamp, and closed out when appropriate response has been provided. Mayor Soever noted the Town has recently developed a Performance Management System where one metric for bonusing could be response time, as an example.

John Greer noted the importance of knowing your audience and questioned whether a digital email list could be maintained for the purpose of digital communication. Chair Milne noted the need to ensure email collection is in accordance with the *Canadian Anti-Spam Legislation* and noted historically, the Town has not had an optimal mechanism for storing email addresses. John Greer further commented this type of session is great as a means for communication and goes a long way.

Committee member Lyn Logan noted that while the Town does not operate under a Ward system, would it be possible for members of Council to be responsible for certain portfolios? Mayor Soever replied that this system is informally in place and used the example of Councillor Sampson being the Chair of Attainable Housing and the Finance, Administration, Fire, and Enforcement Services portion of Committee of the Whole. Similarly, Councillor Bordignon is the Chair for Grants and Donations Committee and Economic Development Advisory Committee, with Councillor Hope also sitting on the Economic Development Advisory Committee. Mayor Soever explained that members' various Committees dictate their areas of expertise and responsibilities are divided out, which allows Council members to have real, in-depth understanding of issues.

**Interested in more sessions like this one?**

Mayor Soever noted there were eighteen people in attendance and noted the session would be more productive if there were additional attendees. Mayor Soever also advised that initially, “Meet the Mayor” events had fewer attendees that gradually grew to approximately 30 individuals. As more sessions are held, people will become aware of them and attendance will increase.

Pamela Spence commented that the informality of the session is excellent with everyone contributing.

**Do you want to hear more from your elected representatives?**

Deputy Mayor Potter wondered if there is an opportunity to provide a weekly article for local media sources by members of Council, while understanding that the Mayor is the one who speaks for Council.

Jim Torrance noted that people are interested in hearing from Council. Mr. Torrance further noted that as we move beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, the weekly updates could broaden the range of subjects and the Town could solicit resident’s feedback to inform content for the weekly updates and other methods of engagement, such as the article noted previously by the Deputy Mayor.

Pamela Spence requested that the “Meet the Mayor” sessions return when possible.

John Greer commented that he would like to hear more about how individual members of Council feel about issues.

**What three things can the Town do better?**

Pamela Spence noted the Town could improve the way resident feedback is provided to Council with respect to planning matters. Ms. Spence commented that residents undertake significant research to provide thoughtful and detailed comments regarding planning applications, which is toned down to a check mark on a topic when it is presented to Council, which does a disservice to the passion and information that residents bring forward.

Deputy Mayor Potter noted he has heard the following from the public: look at issues from a “news point of view”, Committee updates, sidebar summary on the website, website more user-friendly, and accessibility requirements.

Councillor Hope noted a key takeaway for her from the session is that members of the public would like their presentations to Council taken more seriously.

**What do you want to see in the Town’s Communications Plan?**

No feedback provided.

### **What does transparency mean to you?**

Pamela Spence noted her view of transparency is that the topic being raised is coming from a good place, and the request is honest, purposeful, and well-meaning. Trust on both sides allows both parties (the Town and the public) to meet in the middle and provide information exchange or dialogue. Pamela noted that trust and transparency are equated together.

Committee member Lyn Logan noted her view of transparency is to be truthful and forthcoming and ensuring there are no underlying surprises. Lyn agreed that planning communication efforts could be improved, and perhaps weekly updates could be provided.

Jim Torrance spoke to the tone of discourse. Jim noted the Committee and public members present have been discussing that Council and staff need to be customer service focused and responsive. Jim further noted that the public also needs to be respectful in terms of the approach taken with those at Town Hall. Promotion of respectful discourse is something that should be maintained, as it leads to constructive dialogue.

Chair Milne thanked administrative and communications staff for their assistance and efforts, Mayor Soever for his attendance, and members of the public for attending and providing their feedback. Chair Milne confirmed that a great deal of the discussion will be included in the Communications Strategy, website work, and communications efforts going forward. Chair Milne encouraged participants to watch the next Committee meeting where the Committee will consider the points raised in the Public Engagement Session.

Chair Milne closed the Public Engagement Session as no one further wished to speak.

### **C. Notice of Meeting Dates**

February 16, 2021  
Town Hall, Council Chambers (virtual)

### **D. Adjournment**

Moved by: Councillor Hope  
Seconded by: Lyn Logan

THAT the Community Communications Advisory Committee does now adjourn at 6:56 p.m. to meet again at the call of the Chair.

Yay (7): Mary Ferguson, Councillor Hope, Lyn Logan, Tom Maloney, Deputy Mayor Potter, Jayne Sutherland, and John Milne

**The motion is Carried (7 to 0)**