



AGENDA ITEM

Public Engagement & Communications Action Plan

June 11, 2020

BACKGROUND

Lacombe County's *Public Participation Policy* emphasizes the importance of meaningful public participation on different levels between Lacombe County and its stakeholders. In addition to the *Public Participation Policy*, Lacombe County incorporates the use of a Corporate Communications Strategy to ensure meaningful and relevant information is flowing to its stakeholders at all levels.

While the County recognizes that the information generated by the municipality has differing levels of interest to the community. We must ensure there are effective and open channels of communication to offer information and to receive feedback from the residents and ratepayers of the community – regardless of demographic.

In late 2019, we surveyed our ratepayers. The survey gave us a good indication of where we should invest our time and money with radio, newspapers, social media, and topics featured online and/or in the County News. It also detailed how people want to interact with the County and how they want to provide input. Its goal was to provide perspective on the following areas:

- To find out how they want to engage with Lacombe County, and how they want to get involved with public engagement and public participation opportunities.
- To find out where they want to access County content, including news releases, Council decisions, notices, project updates, funding opportunities, videos and pictures, available services, etc.
- To find out how our current information is accessed, used and understood so that we can build on the topics and channels of communication for our ratepayers.

ANALYSIS

For the most part, the feedback we received was quite positive and reiterated that we are on the correct track in terms of public participation and communications at the County.

The areas in need of improvement were in several themes:

Public Participation:



- Not feeling like their input was used or that decisions were already made before public participation activities.
 - Transparency concerns about how information is being used, where it can be found, and how decisions are made.
 - Feeling their input isn't valued/used in decision making.
- Not having the time or not understanding the importance of attending a public event.

Accessing Information:

- Not being able to access information or find information on the website.
 - Mobile access was a big issue, as our website is not mobile-friendly at this time.
 - Better search function, or information not residing in PDFs that isn't currently searchable.
- Some people said they wish the myLacombeCounty app would be expanded to Android platforms.
- Addressing the increased use of Instagram (especially compared to Twitter).

Communications:

- Not knowing or hearing about significant projects.
- More focus on residents on the east and west ends of the County (not just in the Hamlet of Mirror).
- Digitizing the County News.

We have created a matrix that takes these challenges and identifies potential solutions. These solutions were based on the conversations previously had with Senior Management and Council.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Receive Action Plan for information.
2. Adopt Action Plan and direct the County Manager to start implementing action items, with large budget items coming back for Council approval when ready to proceed.
3. Take other action(s) as determined by Council.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

To be determined as needed.

LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Section 3 of the Municipal Government Act (MGA) states the purposes of a municipality are: 1) to provide good government, 2) to provide services, facilities or other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary or desirable for all or



part of the municipality, and 3) to develop and maintain safe and viable communities.

STRATEGIC PLAN

The following elements of the County’s Strategic Plan are relevant to this issue:

Our Vision: “An attractive, balanced and progressive community”.

Our Mission: “To build a safe and vibrant community through leadership, innovation and healthy relationships”.

Key Principles: “Recognizing our history and solid foundation, we approach the role of providing the best possible level of municipal services for our citizens through a base of collaborative and supportive teamwork”.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Lacombe County sees the value in engaging and informing the public/stakeholders through a variety of mediums as outlined in the *Policy AD(40): Public Participation Policy*. The appropriate level of engagement for each public participation opportunity is selected on a project-to-project basis. For this item, the following engagement will take place:

- *Inform*: To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions

Highlights of all County Council meetings are published on the County Website and in the County News.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council approve the following resolution:

That the Public Engagement and Communications Action Plan in Lacombe County be approved; and further, that the County Manager be directed to begin implementing action items, with large budget items coming back for Council approval when ready to proceed, and furthermore, that the Public Engagement & Communications Action Plan be brought back to Council in a year to review the accomplished items and any feedback received from the public on these initiatives.

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