



GRAVENHURST
GATEWAY TO MUSKOKA

TOWN OF GRAVENHURST

CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

(DRAFT v.1)

January 2024

Prepared by

interkom.



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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town of Gravenhurst's Corporate Communications Plan is a comprehensive framework derived from extensive stakeholder consultations, public engagement, and strategic analysis. This plan addresses the diverse needs and expectations of the community while laying the foundation for transparent, accessible, and engaging communication.

Stakeholder Consultation:

The development of the plan began with a thorough stakeholder consultation process involving internal and external entities. Insights from Town officials, residents, local associations, and businesses provided a holistic understanding of communication strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Public Engagement and Feedback:

Public input played a pivotal role in shaping the plan. Through surveys and online platforms, we gathered valuable feedback from residents, addressing their preferences for communication methods and content. This inclusive approach ensured the plan aligns with the community's expectations.

Strategic Objectives:

The strategic communication objectives for the next few years focus on enhancing awareness, improving communication mediums, strengthening public engagement, and promoting transparency. Key goals include empowering council engagement, diversifying communication channels, and fostering effective emergency communication.

Strategy and Implementation Plan:

The plan outlines specific strategies to achieve the objectives, such as implementing an emergency communication plan and establishing regular community engagement opportunities. It emphasizes a diversified communication approach, combining traditional and digital channels to reach all segments of the community.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

A robust monitoring and evaluation framework is integral to the plan's success. Regular surveys, feedback mechanisms, and performance indicators will gauge the effectiveness of communication efforts. The plan is designed to be flexible, allowing for adjustments based on continuous evaluation and changing community needs.

Conclusion:

The Corporate Communications Plan for the Town of Gravenhurst is a dynamic roadmap designed to enhance communication effectiveness, foster community engagement, and build a stronger, more informed community. By prioritizing transparency, inclusivity, and responsiveness, the plan aims to create a communication ecosystem that serves the diverse needs of Gravenhurst residents.

This plan is not just a document; it is a commitment to open, two-way communication that empowers residents, strengthens community ties, and builds a foundation for sustained growth and well-being in the Town of Gravenhurst.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Town of Gravenhurst aims to enhance its communication efforts by developing a comprehensive Corporate Communications Plan. The plan, included in the 2023 Capital Budget, seeks to provide clear direction for effective communication to diverse audiences, including residents, media, stakeholders, staff, and Council. Communication and media relations currently fall under the Legislative Services Division, collaborating with the CAO's office, Mayor and Council's office, and the Senior Leadership Team.

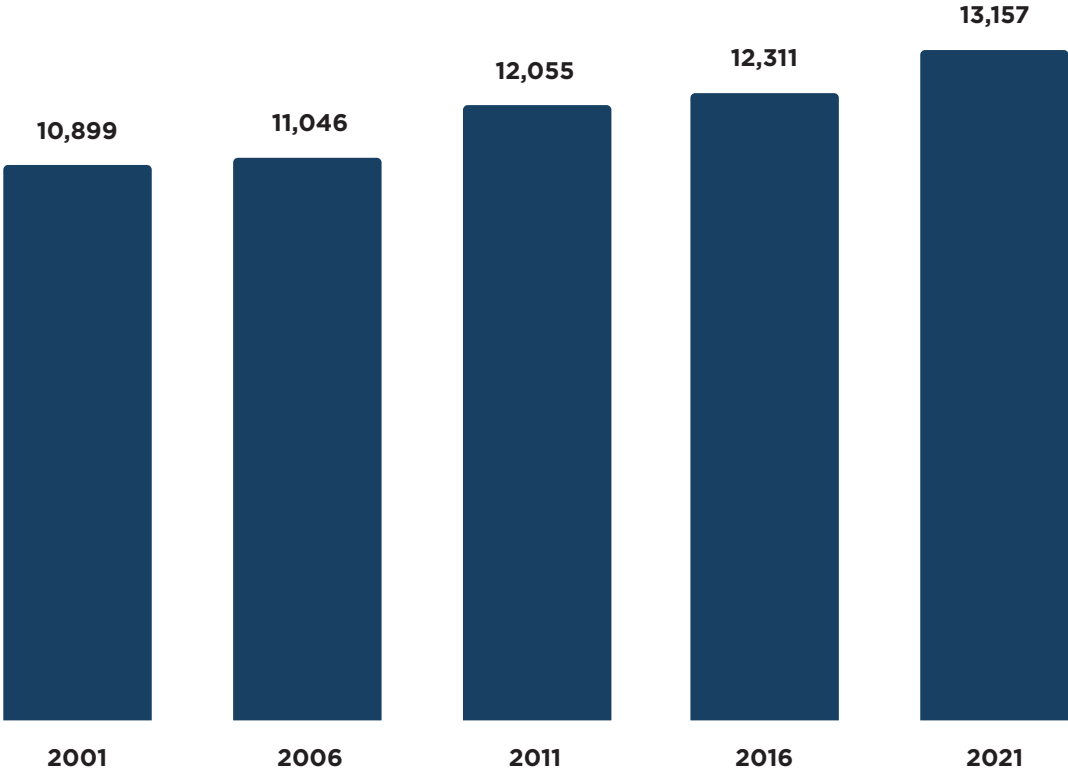
Objectives

- Clear communication with residents, media, stakeholders, staff, and Council
- Enhance transparency and community engagement
- Establish a unified and effective communication strategy

Community Context

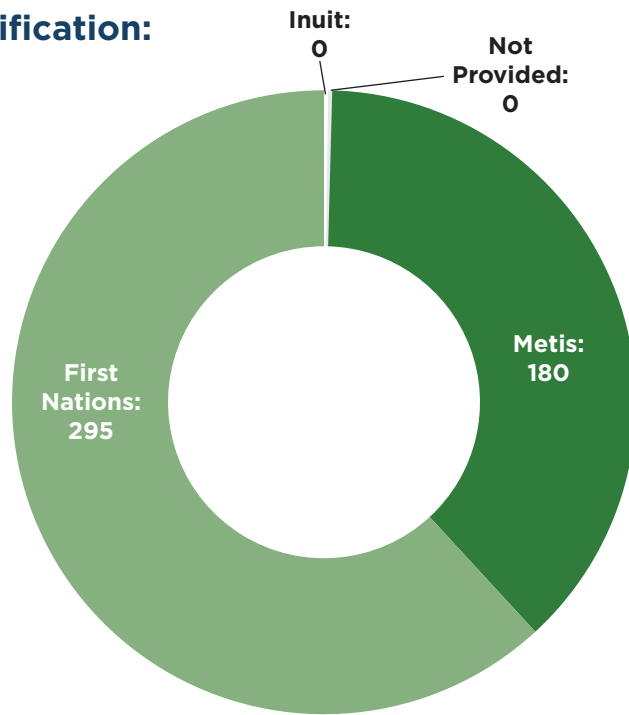
The Town of Gravenhurst, located in the District of Muskoka, is a predominantly rural community with a population of around 13,000, including a substantial number of seasonal residents.

Population:



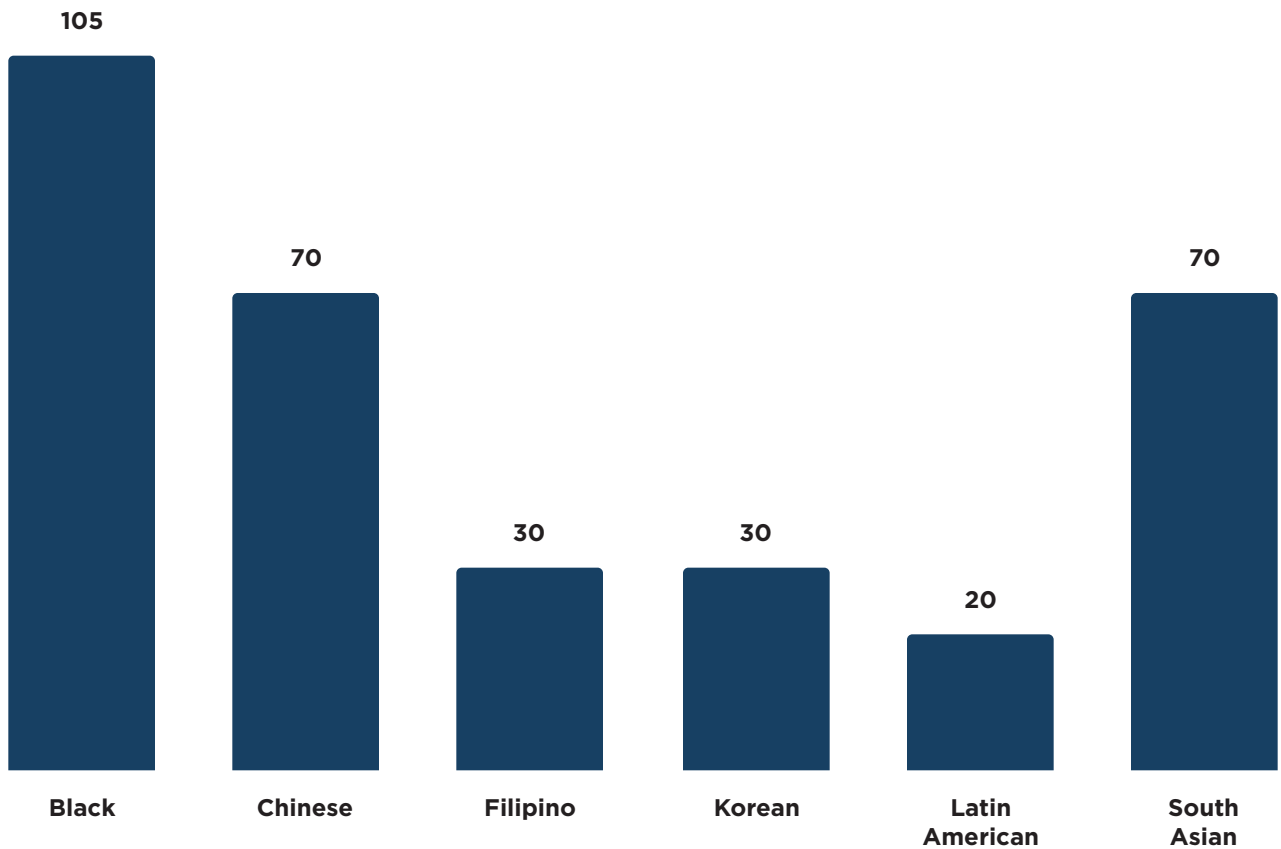
Source: Town of Gravenhurst

Indigenous Identification:



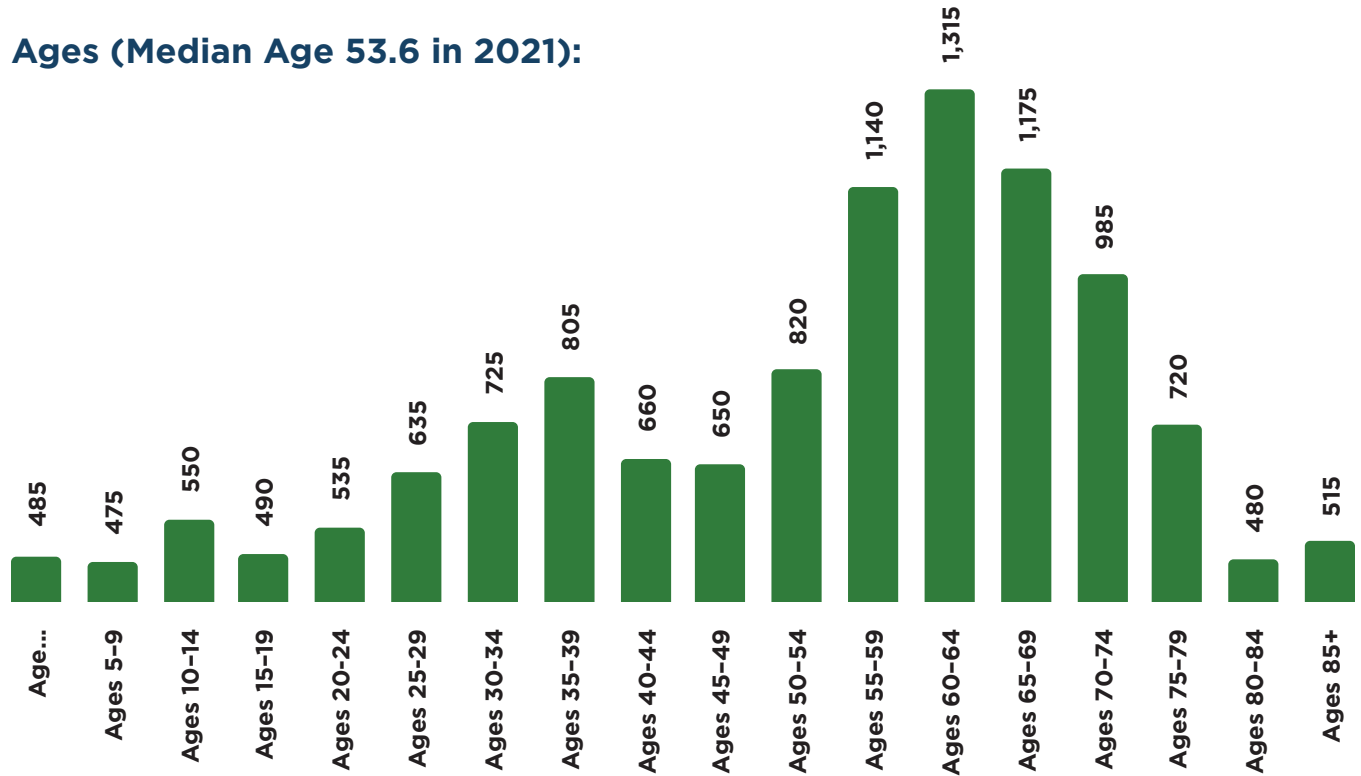
Source: Town of Gravenhurst

Visible Minorities:



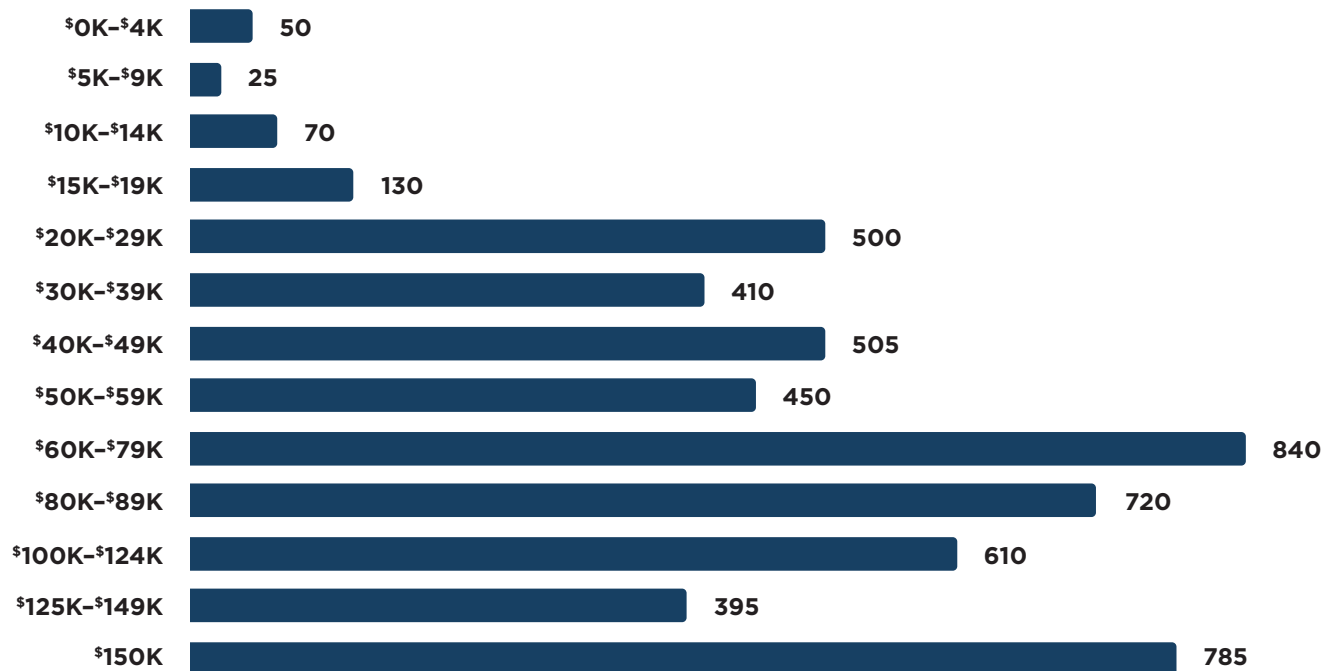
Source: Town of Gravenhurst

Ages (Median Age 53.6 in 2021):



Source: Town of Gravenhurst

Household Income (Median Household Income \$73,500 in 2021):



Source: Statistics Canada. Census.
Last Updated: February 2022

Source: Town of Gravenhurst

COMMUNICATIONS OVERVIEW

The Communications Division at the Town of Gravenhurst plays a pivotal role in facilitating effective communication between the municipality and its residents, stakeholders, and the broader community.

The Town of Gravenhurst's Communications Specialist works closely with media and the public to ensure information is reliable, accurate, and current. The approach is to communicate proactively using a mix of traditional and digital tools to reach a broad audience.

Key functions include:

1. Information Dissemination: The division ensures timely and accurate distribution of important information related to municipal services, events, policies, and initiatives.
2. Media Relations: Building and maintaining positive relationships with media outlets to enhance the town's visibility and ensure accurate reporting on municipal matters.
3. Public Relations: Developing and implementing public relations strategies to promote a positive image of the town and its activities.
4. Social Media Management: Utilizing various social media platforms to engage with the community, share updates, and address inquiries in a transparent and timely manner.
5. Crisis Communication: Developing and implementing communication plans to effectively address and manage crisis situations, ensuring residents are informed and reassured.

Target audiences:

The Communications Division directs its efforts towards several key audiences:

1. Residents: Providing residents with essential information about town services, events, and policies to enhance community engagement and participation.
2. Stakeholders: Engaging with local businesses, community groups, and organizations to foster collaboration and support for shared goals.
3. Media Outlets: Building positive relationships with local and regional media to ensure accurate and fair coverage of town activities.
4. Government Agencies: Coordinating communications with other levels of government to ensure alignment and cooperation on shared initiatives.
5. Prospective Residents/Investors: Showcasing the town's attributes and opportunities to attract new residents and investments.

By performing these core functions and targeting these specific audiences, the Communications Division contributes to the overall success and vibrancy of the Town of Gravenhurst.

III. STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION AND SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

A. Methodology

This strategy is informed by the following research inputs

- Internal interviews and survey
 - Mayor, Council, Senior Leadership Team, Marketing Division input
 - Internal project team collaboration
- Community and Stakeholder Engagement:
 - External consultations with community and stakeholder representatives
 - Online public survey: 168
- Municipal communications best practices – drawn from benchmarking consultation and expertise working in the sector
- Benchmarking municipalities: City of Markham, Town of Aurora, Town of Huntsville, County of Simcoe, and Halton Region



B. SWOT Analysis for the Town of Gravenhurst's Communication Efforts

Strengths

1. **Recent Improvement:** Stakeholders note a significant improvement in communication strategies since the arrival of new staff, indicating a positive change.
2. **Council Highlights:** Appreciation for the Council highlights, including links to agendas and videos, showcasing transparency and engagement.
3. **Media Relations:** Positive feedback on staff responsiveness to media inquiries, demonstrating a proactive approach to external communication.
4. **Newsletter and Email:** Effective use of email newsletters for communication, with stakeholders suggesting a weekly email newsletter to enhance information dissemination.
5. **Engagement at Farmers' Market:** Suggestions to utilize the Farmers' Market as a platform for distributing information, showcasing a community-centered approach.

Weaknesses

1. **Website Navigation:** Stakeholders find the town's website challenging to navigate, indicating a need for user-friendly improvements.
2. **Lack of Radio Ads:** Absence of radio advertisements, with stakeholders questioning the town's reliance on newspapers and advocating for a more diverse advertising approach.
3. **Inadequate Traffic Alerts:** Criticism regarding the perceived ineffectiveness of traffic alerts, especially the lack of advance notice and detailed information.
4. **Limited Social Media Use:** Some residents, particularly seniors, are not active on social media, indicating a gap in reaching this demographic.
5. **Communication Gaps with Seasonal Residents:** Challenges in effectively communicating with seasonal residents, especially during the winter months, suggesting a need for targeted strategies.

Opportunities

1. **Social Media Enhancement:** Opportunities to enhance social media presence, especially through visually engaging platforms like Instagram, targeting a broader audience.
2. **Radio and Spotify Ads:** Utilizing radio and Spotify advertisements to reach different demographics, providing a modern and effective communication channel.
3. **Email Marketing:** Leveraging email as a preferred communication channel, exploring ways to encourage sign-ups and improve content relevance.
4. **Community Engagement Initiatives:** Implementation of community engagement initiatives, such as welcome booths and market tables, to directly interact with residents.
5. **Inclusive Communication:** Opportunities to address the communication divide between permanent and seasonal residents, fostering a more inclusive approach.

Threats

1. Limited Awareness of Existing Tools: The threat of low awareness about existing communication tools, such as the Voyant Alert App, indicating a potential gap in emergency communication.
2. Negative Public Perception: Negative feedback and criticism may pose a threat to the town's public image and credibility, necessitating careful management and response.
3. Changing Demographics: The changing demographics in the community, with an influx of new Canadians and younger residents, highlight the need to adapt communication strategies.
4. Competing Municipalities: The presence of uneven communication practices among municipalities in Muskoka may pose a threat to Gravenhurst's image if not addressed strategically.
5. Staffing and Resource Constraints: Potential constraints in staffing and resources may impact the implementation of recommended communication strategies, hindering the plan's success.
6. Evolving Media Environment: Because Metroland Media Group has ceased publishing the Gravenhurst Banner and because a variety of local and regional digital media options exist, the town should explore these options.

The SWOT analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of communication efforts in the Town of Gravenhurst, highlighting areas of strength, weaknesses to address, opportunities for improvement, and potential threats that should be mitigated.



C. Internal Stakeholder Consultation

1. Stakeholder Consultation:
 - Mayor, Council, Senior Leadership Team, Marketing Division input
 - Internal project team collaboration
2. Organizational Capacity Assessment:
 - Review existing communication activities
 - Identify gaps and opportunities

Summary of Stakeholder Perception on Current Communication Strategies and Channels

Positive Feedback and Improvement:

- Recognition of significant improvement with the new Communications Specialist, transitioning from reactive to proactive strategies.
- Positive feedback on the specialist's ability to make communications easy to read and understand.

Concerns and Areas for Improvement:

- Noted issues with a 'scattered' approach, emphasizing the need for more focused and efficient efforts.
- Concerns about the user-friendliness of the phone system and suggestions to increase usage of EngageGravenhurst.
- Serious gaps in communication, especially in building permit information and response times.
- Emphasis on the need for better communication to the public, clarifying Council's capabilities.

Mixed Reviews and Varied Perspectives:

- Acknowledgment of improvements but with recognition of serious gaps in communication.
- Described the communication struggle as constant and highlighted the reactive nature of current communication.

Recommendations and Areas for Exploration:

- Suggestions to set up processes for communication, utilize automation tools, and manage residents' expectations.
- Discussion about the challenges and considerations regarding printed town guides.

Efforts to Enhance Communication:

- Noted proactive efforts by specific divisions to communicate about ongoing projects and the capital budget.
- Recognition of increased social media presence since the arrival of the new Communications Specialist.

Opportunities for Improvement and Collaboration:

- Identified external opportunities for marketing the town via attention-grabbing posts on social media.
- Emphasis on the internal use of communications as a service.

Challenges and Insights from Different Divisions:

- Discussed challenges with online complaint forms and the difficulty in obtaining information due to quasi-judicial processes.
- Expressed a need to communicate more effectively with the community and highlighted challenges in conveying division activities to residents and Council.

Key Themes:

- There is an overall recognition of improvement in communication efforts, especially with the new Communications Specialist.
- Stakeholders express concerns about the scattered nature of current communication efforts, emphasizing the need for focus and efficiency.
- User-friendliness of communication channels, including the phone system and EngageGravenhurst, is a recurring theme.
- Recommendations include setting up processes, automating communication, managing expectations, and evaluating the feasibility of printed town guides.
- Different divisions within the town have varying perspectives on communication challenges and opportunities.

Next Steps:

- Based on this feedback, there is a need to conduct a comprehensive review of the town's annual communication strategy, addressing concerns and building on successful initiatives.
- Establishing clearer goals, processes, and strategies, as suggested by stakeholders, will be crucial for improving overall communication effectiveness.
- Regular evaluations and adjustments should be made to ensure ongoing improvement and alignment with community and Council expectations.

Summary of Stakeholder Input on Municipal Communication Effectiveness

Positive Observations:

- Positive feedback on tools like Voyent Alert! and EngageGravenhurst.
- Coordination and responsiveness acknowledged, especially in media interactions.
- Recognition of roadside signs for important changes as a helpful idea.
- Positive sentiments about external communications, with noted improvement.

Concerns and Improvement Areas:

- Issues with poor response times, particularly in specific incidents.
- Feedback on website functionality and accessibility.
- Uncertainty about the strategic nature of communication efforts.
- Desires for better communication with younger demographics and a comprehensive strategy.
- Challenges in educating the public about the Town's activities, leading to negative social media posts.

Recommendations and Opportunities:

- Suggestions to use online tools more extensively and adopt a strategic approach.
- Recommendations for diverse tactics, especially for projects with significant information.
- Opportunities identified for educating the public and focusing more on upcoming events.
- Desire for significant public input on specific plans, like the Master Fire Plan.

Key Themes:

- A mix of positive feedback and concerns, emphasizing the need for a more strategic and comprehensive communication approach.
- Recognition of effective tools but a call for increased utilization.
- Concerns about website functionality and the need for education on Town activities.
- Emphasis on clear tactics and strategies.

Next Steps:

- Utilize effective tools more extensively.
- Improve website functionality.
- Address concerns related to response times and coordination.
- Continue efforts to educate the public and enhance transparency.

Summary of Stakeholder Feedback on Internal Communication**Observations:**

- Concerns about the current “shotgun” approach to internal communication.
- Mixed perceptions of past efforts like Staff Town Halls.
- Challenges in engaging staff in operations and public works, with some divisions operating independently.
- Varied opinions on the effectiveness of internal communication, ranging from improvement to issues with planning information.

Specific Feedback and Challenges:

- Challenges in providing Council with necessary information and slow staff responses to public requests.
- Issues with internal confusion due to restructuring, prompting the creation of internal documents clarifying roles.
- Suggestions for broader, higher-level communications to improve staff awareness.
- Mixed perceptions on the effectiveness of all-staff meetings, with challenges noted during COVID and hybrid work scenarios.
- Concerns about overreliance on email messages, with calls to stop “all-staff” emails.
- Challenges in determining what information is “important” for Council, highlighting the need for a framework or SOP.

Recommendations and Opportunities:

- Calls for improved communication and collaboration within the Town, addressing specific issues like business licensing and capital needs.
- Recommendations for better communication with Council between meetings and educating Council about upcoming capital needs.
- Suggestions to use electronic databases for tracking progress and prioritize information flow to and from Council.
- Emphasis on the importance of collaboration among staff members and the need for a more cohesive approach.

Key Themes:

- Mixed perceptions of internal communication effectiveness, emphasizing the need for improvement.
- Calls for a strategic and collaborative approach.
- Emphasis on clarity of roles, staff awareness, and effective communication channels.

Next Steps:

- Develop a strategic internal communication plan.
- Implement tools and methods for effective information flow.
- Address challenges related to confusion and adjust communication methods based on feedback.

Summary of Stakeholder Feedback on Communication Practices

Observations:

- Stakeholders note areas for improvement in both internal and external communication.
- Internal challenges include public works project communication, staff meeting information gaps, and the need for a bottom-up approach.
- External concerns involve inconsistent Town Hall meetings, unclear communication expectations, and a desire for better handling of “hot button issues.”

Specific Feedback and Challenges:

- Challenges with public understanding and issues like Ice Time Registration highlight the need for proactive communication.
- Stakeholders stress briefing notes, an overarching strategy, and proactive communication.
- Concerns about multiple communication lists prompt calls for coordination and personalized approaches.
- Acknowledgment of diverse communication needs for staff with varying email access.
- Coordination challenges with the intranet, suggestions for daily meetings, and SmartTVs in lunchrooms.
- Issues with misinformation emphasize the importance of a unified Council voice and accurate communication.

Recommendations:

- Recommendations include eliminating the ineffective intranet, introducing periodic staff meetings, and implementing a triage system for social media.
- Calls for a unified Council voice and a triage system for calls to the Director.
- Suggestions for checklists or SOPs for better communication and collaboration between divisions.

Key Themes:

- Emphasis on internal collaboration and proactive communication.
- Recognition of diverse communication needs.
- Challenges with misinformation and the need for a unified Council voice.
- Recommendations for an overarching strategy and better coordination.

Next Steps:

- Develop internal checklists for collaboration.
- Establish a clear communication strategy.
- Implement diverse communication methods.
- Provide training to ensure Council adheres to accurate communication practices.

Summary of Stakeholder Preferences and Suggestions on Communication Channels

Internal Communication:

- Preference for face-to-face interactions and direct communication with front-line staff.
- Underutilized platform: “EngageGravenhurst.”

Challenges with Social Media:

- Frustration and uncertainty on handling social media.
- Previous use of RedBrick for social media communication, with mixed feelings.
- Importance of social media, despite challenges, and the need for accurate information promotion.

Preferred Communication Channels:

- Social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter).
- Website usage.
- Print media, especially the Gravenhurst “Banner” newspaper.
- Face-to-face interactions.
- Email newsletters.
- Radio stations (e.g., “Moose News”).

Specific Suggestions and Concerns:

- Need for correction of erroneous information in a neutral tone.
- Demand for business updates and reports for Councillors.
- Emphasis on effective utilization of the Town website.
- Diverse suggestions, including TikTok (not currently used by the Town).

Engagement Strategies:

- Recognition of varied interests and importance of tailoring communication for different demographics.
- Struggles with treating all information equally, emphasizing the need for targeted communication.
- Use of diverse platforms like TikTok, Snapchat, and targeted radio for events.

Feedback on Platforms:

- Feedback on social media groups generating questions and misinformation.
- Appreciation for media support and their use of Town information verbatim.
- Utilization of youth channels for sharing information.

Municipal Initiatives:

- Utilization of “EngageGravenhurst” for specific processes, but calls for broader use.
- Structured input and documentation needed for the planning process.
- Proactive and reactive communication strategies for various events.
- Hybrid meetings for public participation, especially during significant developments.
- Clarifications to Council Procedural By-laws to address loopholes in planning submissions and presentations during formal complaint processes.

Key Themes:

- Preference for diverse communication channels.
- Recognition of challenges and frustrations with social media.
- Emphasis on accuracy in information correction.
- Appreciation for media support and the need for tailored communication strategies.

Next Steps:

- Strengthen the utilization of “EngageGravenhurst.”
- Develop a comprehensive social media strategy.
- Enhance targeted communication for diverse demographics.
- Implement proactive and reactive communication strategies for various events.
- Clarify and address loopholes in the Council Procedural By-laws.
- Continue the Chief’s proactive communication methods.

Summary and Analysis of Stakeholder Input on Communication Priorities

Capital Program Communication:

- Lack of awareness about the Town’s capital program and its focus areas (roads, parks, bridges).
- Desire to enhance community engagement and understanding of major projects.

Education about Municipal Government:

- Recognition of the need to educate residents about the functions and limitations of local government.
- Emphasis on highlighting what the municipality does well.

Budget Information:

- Lack of community involvement in the budget development process.
- Suggested improvement in sharing budget details and involving the community earlier.

Climate Change and Environment:

- Awareness of climate issues and the changing environment.
- Need for communication on the proactive steps the Town is taking.

Planning Process and Applications:

- Desire for more transparency in planning applications, including regular updates, timelines, and processes.
- Focus on sharing accomplishments and results of planning efforts.

General Information Topics:

- Importance of sharing information about events, news updates, and By-laws.
- Need for clear language in communications, especially regarding building and By-laws enforcement.

Marketing and Community Communications:

- Shift from corporate communications to community-focused messaging.
- Emphasis on storytelling and sharing positive actions, history, and achievements of the Town.

Public Education and Engagement:

- Call for educating the public about municipal processes, services, and decision-making.
- Addressing negativity through better communication and transparency.

Municipal Government Structure and Powers:

- Need to clarify the structure, powers, and processes of municipal government.
- Focus on educating residents about the roles and responsibilities of individual Councillors and the Mayor.

Social Media Challenges:

- Challenges with handling social media, especially false claims and rumors.
- Consideration for the right time to respond and the importance of using proper channels for development applications.

Emergency Services Communication:

- Emphasis on the importance of community involvement in emergency services.
- Recognition of the limitations in response time compared to larger urban areas.
- Highlighting the dedication and service from the community in emergency response.

Additional Topics:

- Focus on communicating during the Official Plan review/update.
- Proactive communication about climate change impacts.
- Addressing misinformation on social media.

Key Themes:

- Need for transparency, engagement, and education on various municipal topics.
- Emphasis on community-focused and positive storytelling.
- Challenges and strategies related to social media communication.
- Desire for proactive communication on climate change and emergency services.

Next Steps:

- Develop a comprehensive communication strategy addressing the highlighted priorities.
- Enhance community engagement in budget development and major projects.
- Implement proactive communication on climate change initiatives.
- Focus on storytelling and positive communication to counteract negativity.
- Address challenges associated with social media communication through proper channels.



Summary and Analysis of Stakeholder Input on Accessibility and Inclusivity

Diversity and Inclusion:

- The community is becoming more diverse, and efforts are underway to increase diversity in the workforce.
- Strategies are needed for effective communication with diverse groups, including Chinese visitors.

Communication Tools:

- Utilize available tools, such as smartphones for instant translation.
- Leverage emerging technologies for better communication.

Community Engagement:

- Develop personal relationships with diverse community groups.
- Partner with diverse organizations for inclusive communication.

Specific Demographic Considerations:

- Address challenges for seniors, such as reliance on printed information and spotty internet access.
- Be aware of the unique needs of various demographics, including LGBTQ+ communities.

Language Accessibility:

- Consider bilingual communication.
- Explore translation options for the Town's website.
- Develop pilot projects for reaching different linguistic groups.

Equal & Proactive Communication:

- Equal Access to Information: Seasonal residents will have access to the same information and resources as full-time residents, ensuring transparency and fairness.
- Proactive Communication: In instances where issues specifically impact seasonal residents, such as during off-season periods, prioritize proactive communication to keep them informed and engaged.

Communication Channels:

- Utilize diverse channels, including newsletters, social media, and targeted communications.
- Consider tax bills as a primary communication method.

Inclusivity in Communication:

- Ensure inclusivity is a core value for the Town.
- Overcome challenges related to overcompensation for seasonal residents.
- Communicate consistently regardless of resident type.

Data-Driven Approach:

- Use demographic data to tailor communication strategies.
- Consider Statistics Canada data for better targeting.

Hybrid Meeting Accessibility:

- Make efforts to accommodate hybrid Council and Committee meetings for public presentations.
- Explore online platforms like EngageGravenhurst for public comments.

Fire Safety Education:

- Educate visitors and seasonal residents about seasonal issues, fire safety, and other relevant topics.
- Recognize the impact of short-term rentals on fire safety communication.

Key Themes:

- Emphasis on diversity and inclusion in the workforce and community.
- Use of technology for translation and communication tools.
- Equal treatment for seasonal and full-time residents.
- Importance of understanding and meeting the unique needs of different demographics.
- Utilization of various communication channels for inclusivity.

Next Steps:

- Develop bilingual and translated communication strategies.
- Implement pilot projects for reaching different linguistic groups.
- Enhance accessibility for seniors and those with limited internet access.
- Maintain consistency in communication regardless of resident type.
- Explore hybrid meeting options for broader public participation.

Summary and Analysis of Stakeholder Input on Community Engagement

Feedback Mechanisms:

- Town Hall meetings, Mayor's Open-Door sessions, and Ward meetings are mentioned as effective channels for community engagement.
- Technology, such as telephone town halls, is suggested for wider participation.

Encouraging Engagement:

- Encourage more consistent Town Hall meetings across the town.
- Involve Councillors in various engagement initiatives.
- Provide feedback through various channels like email, phone calls, and social media.

Two-Way Communication:

- EngageGravenhurst and in-person interactions at community events are highlighted for effective two-way communication.

Community Events and Outreach:

- Booths at community events are suggested for direct interaction.
- Mayor and Council attending Lake Association meetings.

Improving Accessibility:

- Offer a variety of communication channels, including official and informal methods.
- Simplify the process for submitting complaints and follow up according to the individual's preferred method.

Flexible Communication:

- Address the expectation of immediate responses on social media with auto-replies or clear communication about response times.
- Increase flexibility in payment methods and improve communication about available options.

Face-to-Face Communication:

- Face-to-face communication is considered the best but can be challenging due to hybrid working arrangements.
- Suggestions for returning phone calls, participating in events, and maintaining a physical presence.

Timelines and Reporting:

- Establish and publish timelines for communications and planning processes.
- Report attendance and issues discussed at Mayor's Open Door and community drop-in meetings.

Staff Responsiveness:

- Address concerns about staff responsiveness, with a need for timely follow-ups.
- Consider the implementation of a Customer Service Policy and a Communications Policy.

Technology Usage:

- Encourage the use of EngageGravenhurst for community input.
- Acknowledge concerns about anonymity on EngageGravenhurst.

Customer Service Policy:

- Highlight the need for a clear customer service policy, as identified in comparisons with other organizations.

Key Themes:

- Diverse feedback mechanisms, including town meetings, technology-driven solutions, and in-person interactions.
- The importance of involving Councillors in engagement initiatives.
- The need for clear and accessible communication channels.
- Balancing face-to-face communication with the challenges of hybrid work arrangements.
- A call for policies to ensure timely staff responses and efficient communication.

Next Steps:

- Explore telephone town hall meetings for wider participation.
- Encourage more consistent town meetings and involve Councillors.
- Simplify and standardize communication channels for submitting feedback or complaints.
- Consider implementing clear customer service and communications policies.
- Continue efforts to increase flexibility, accessibility, and transparency in communication.

Summary and Analysis of Stakeholder Input on Communication Measurement and Improvement

Measuring Success:

- Suggestion to establish representative data for general counts to share perspectives with the District.
- Prioritize communication based on importance and use the right channels.
- Consider more qualitative analysis of communication effectiveness.
- Track metrics like the number of people to a specific web page and use feedback forms.

Communication Channels and Tools:

- Bring back a person to answer all phone calls for better accessibility.
- Use EngageGravenhurst more for planning issues and encourage its consistent use.
- Review the current Social Media Policy, update as needed, and implement a continuous communications training schedule
- Utilize kiosks throughout the town for information dissemination.
- Use Lake and Property Associations to spread news and updates.

Internal and External Success Metrics:

- Internally, all staff should be aware of what's happening, have community knowledge, and success is when residents and businesses understand the Town's actions.
- Success for the Communications Division is measured by effective communication methods and timely information delivery.
- Success externally is when people get needed information in a timely manner, regardless of the effectiveness percentage.
- The Library uses a printed calendar, and success is defined by people knowing what the Town does and why.

Tracking Opinion Changes and Trust Building:

- Acknowledgment of the challenge in tracking changes in public opinions and building trust.
- Ensure current Social Media Policy outlines response times and messaging requirements.
- Concerns about not knowing what changes people's opinions or whether trust is being built.

Internal Communication and Protocol:

- Emphasis on staff being aware of ongoing events and developments in the community.
- Establishing protocol for the Mayor's office and ensuring Councillors follow appropriate channels for complaints.
- Suggestion to hold more BBQs to facilitate staff interactions and understanding.

Council and Stakeholder Education:

- Encouragement to report on the use of EngageGravenhurst and utilize it more if proven effective.
- Stakeholder feedback is considered valuable for continuous improvement.

Election and Formal Complaints:

- Elections are seen as a measure of communication success.
- Encouragement to establish KPIs for communications and report a dashboard to Council.
- Emphasis on formalizing complaints through official processes to prevent social media postings.

Team Collaboration:

- Success is defined by everyone using established systems for complaints, inquiries, and fixes.
- Encouragement for Councillors to refrain from public complaints and be team players.

Key Themes:

- Need for representative data and qualitative analysis.
- Importance of choosing appropriate channels and tools.
- Challenges in tracking opinion changes and building trust.
- Emphasis on internal and external success metrics.
- Advocacy for education on social media metrics and continuous improvement.

Next Steps:

- Consider establishing representative data and prioritizing communication based on importance.
- Encourage more qualitative analysis of communication strategies.
- Explore the use of Key Performance Indicators for communication effectiveness.
- Develop a plan for tracking changes in public opinion and building trust.
- Implement revised social media policy, and conduct annual communications training.
- Enhance internal communication through regular staff meetings and interactions.



D. External Stakeholder Input

External consultations with community stakeholder representatives, including:

- Muskoka Tourism (Discover Muskoka)
- Muskoka Lakes Association
- Muskoka Bay Property Owner's Association
- Moose-FM radio station (My Muskoka Now)
- Taboo Muskoka Resort & Golf

Summary and Analysis of Stakeholder Perception on Gravenhurst's Communication Strategies

Positive Feedback:

- Improvement in communication since the arrival of new staff.
- Appreciation for Council highlights, including links to agenda/videos.
- Positive feedback on the new staff's responsiveness to media inquiries.

Challenges and Areas for Improvement:

- Difficulty in finding information on the website; suggestion to improve website navigation.
- Lack of radio advertisements; recommendation to utilize radio for advance notice of events.
- Traffic alerts are considered lackluster, with suggestions for improvement.
- Inconsistent and arbitrary development information delivery.
- Limited proactive communication; recommendation to communicate proactively.

Preferred Communication Channels:

- Request for a weekly email newsletter for media and the general public.
- Preference for email communication, while some stakeholders are not active on social media.
- Importance of email updates for staying informed.

Tourism and External Marketing:

- External stakeholders involved in marketing Muskoka mainly communicate with the Town on tourism-related matters.
- Focus on festivals and events, particularly those impacting tourists.
- Emphasis on the need for effective communication with stakeholders in the tourism sector.

Association and Resident Perspectives:

- Challenges in accessing development information; inconsistent delivery.
- Suggestions to use the Farmers' Market for distributing information to residents.
- Confusion among association members regarding roles between the Town and the District.

Issues with Mail Communication:

- Limited effectiveness of mail communication for certain residents.
- Preference for online statements for property taxes and water/sewer bills.

Recommendations for Improvement:

- Improve website navigation and user-friendliness.
- Utilize radio for advance notices and traffic alerts.
- Enhance communication on development matters.
- Establish a weekly email newsletter for media and the general public.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities between the Town and the District.
- Encourage proactive communication from the Town.

Key Themes:

- Praise for recent improvements in communication.
- Challenges with website navigation and information retrieval.
- Suggestions to leverage radio for communication and traffic alerts.
- Emphasis on email communication and the print newspapers.
- Focus on tourism-related communication for external stakeholders.
- Concerns about the effectiveness of mail communication.

Next Steps:

- Address website usability issues to enhance accessibility.
- Explore opportunities for radio advertisements and improved traffic alerts.
- Consider the implementation of a weekly email newsletter.
- Streamline development information delivery for consistency.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities between the Town and the District.
- Focus on proactive communication to keep stakeholders informed.

Summary and Analysis of Stakeholder Input on Preferred Communication Channels

Social Media and Visual Content:

- Some stakeholders find social media platforms, especially Facebook and Instagram, effective, particularly when accompanied by images or videos.
- Emphasis on engaging content, such as the success of Instagram posts featuring local attractions.

EngageGravenhurst Website:

- Positive feedback on the usefulness of the EngageGravenhurst website.
- A suggestion to promote EngageGravenhurst through official notices and communication with lake associations and residents' associations.

Radio and Television:

- Radio, especially for local broadcasts, is considered highly effective as people actively listen to it.
- Positive remarks about television's effectiveness in promoting Muskoka Tourism.

Email Communication:

- Email is a preferred communication channel for several stakeholders.
- Suggestions to push out information more actively via email and encourage sign-ups at various events.

Website & Information Boards:

- Some stakeholders prefer accessing information through the official town website.
- A suggestion to utilize boards throughout the town for disseminating important information.

Community Groups and Informal Routes:

- Recognition of the importance of informal routes, including community groups, for spreading information and receiving feedback.
- Advocacy for opening lines of communication with community groups.

Challenges with Social Media Engagement:

- Mixed opinions on the effectiveness of social media.

Challenges and Opportunities:

- Acknowledgment of challenges in reaching certain demographics, such as younger individuals who may not follow traditional communication methods.
- The need to adapt communication strategies for those who moved to Gravenhurst during the pandemic.

Email for Emergency Alerts:

- Stakeholders recommend using email for important alerts, such as fire bans and flood watches.
- A suggestion to make emails smartphone-friendly for better readability.

Communication Strategies for New Residents:

- The recognition that communication strategies should address newcomers, especially those who moved to Gravenhurst during COVID.

Challenges in Staff Recruitment:

- Acknowledgment of challenges in staff recruitment, including affordability of living in the community and the lack of staff housing.

Key Themes:

- Diverse preferences for communication channels, with a mix of traditional and digital methods.
- Recognition of the importance of engaging content, especially through social media.
- Emphasis on the effectiveness of email for important alerts and information.
- Challenges in reaching specific demographics, such as younger individuals and newcomers.
- Acknowledgment of the need for adaptability in communication strategies.

Next Steps:

- Continue leveraging social media platforms with engaging content.
- Promote the EngageGravenhurst website more actively.
- Explore opportunities for community engagement through radio and television.
- Enhance email communication strategies, ensuring readability on smartphones.
- Address challenges in reaching specific demographics, especially newcomers.
- Adapt communication strategies to the evolving needs of the community.

Summary and Analysis of Stakeholder Input on Communication Priorities**Transparency and Proactive Communication:**

- Stakeholders express a need for the Town to be more proactive in sharing information, especially about upcoming issues. Transparency in decision-making, particularly in the context of development approvals, is emphasized.
- Suggestions include providing policy updates and making information easily accessible, possibly through social media channels.

Access to Council Meetings:

- Stakeholders request options for attending and participating in Council meetings hybrid to improve accessibility, particularly for those who may find it challenging to attend in person.

Alerts and Updates:

- Stakeholders emphasize the importance of receiving timely alerts and updates on various issues, such as weather, water/flooding, traffic, and road construction.
- The Voyant Alert App is highlighted, with a recommendation to increase awareness and encourage downloads.

Internal News and MAT Tax:

- Stakeholders, especially those involved in Muskoka Tourism, express interest in internal news about potential issues. Specific interest is shown in understanding how the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) is utilized and seeking clarity on its allocation.

Council Highlights and Newsletters:

- Request for regular Council newsletters with highlights, possibly on a monthly basis, to keep residents informed about key decisions and updates.
- Emphasis on the importance of clear communication regarding the MAT tax and its utilization.

Website Updates and Accessibility:

- Stakeholders recommend monthly updates on the official website, ensuring information is easily accessible. Specific examples include fire ban status and developments on the Bay.
- The need for an organized chart of events that can be distributed widely is suggested.

Waste Management and Community Events:

- Stakeholders express a desire for information on waste management, including depot hours. Additionally, they are interested in updates on community events and activities, with a suggestion to use postcards for easy distribution.

Environmental Concerns and Policies:

- Requests for regular updates on environmental concerns such as fire bans, flooding, and weather are highlighted.
- Stakeholders express an interest in being informed about town policies and have the option to choose specific information through email sign-ups.

Must-Know and Nice-to-Know Information:

- Stakeholders categorize information into “must-know” (critical issues like road closures, flooding, fire bans) and “nice-to-know” (new By-laws, developments). They suggest that the Town could selectively share the latter based on relevance.

Consultation on Budget Impacts:

- Stakeholders express a desire for consultation on budget impacts to ensure their concerns are considered.

Key Themes:

- Stakeholders emphasize the need for proactive and transparent communication.
- Accessibility to Council meetings online is considered important.
- Timely alerts and updates on various issues are crucial.
- Clarity on MAT tax allocation and utilization is requested.
- Regular newsletters and website updates are desired for keeping residents informed.
- Categorized information into “must-know” and “nice-to-know” for effective communication.

Next Steps:

- Increase proactive communication through social media and other channels.
- Explore options for attending and participating in Council meetings online.
- Raise awareness about the Voyant Alert App for emergency alerts.
- Enhance clarity on the use of MAT tax and its impact on stakeholders.
- Implement regular Council newsletters and website updates.
- Improve communication on waste management, environmental concerns, and community events.
- Consider selective sharing of “nice-to-know” information based on relevance.

Summary and Analysis of Stakeholder Input on Accessibility and Inclusivity**Divide Between Permanent and Seasonal Residents:**

- Stakeholders express concern about the perceived division between permanent and seasonal residents, highlighting the use of terms like “City-its” by some permanent residents. There is a desire to bridge this gap.

Targeting Different Demographics:

- Stakeholders emphasize the need for the municipality to target different demographic groups, including seniors and non-English speakers. Suggestions include finding ways to reach different groups and using multiple languages in communications.

Tourism Focus and Branding:

- The importance of promoting Muskoka as a whole, rather than specific towns, is emphasized. From a tourism perspective, focusing on Muskoka as a strong brand is seen as effective, particularly as tourists often view the entire region collectively.

Radio Communication and Changing Demographics:

- Stakeholders, particularly those involved in tourism, highlight the changing demographics of visitors and residents. The use of radio is emphasized as a means to communicate with both seasonal and permanent residents.

Equitable Communication and Online Engagement:

- Stakeholders advocate for equal communication to all residents, regardless of seasonal or permanent status. Suggestions include allowing people to present at Council meetings online, leveraging electronic media, and avoiding reliance solely on traditional media like newspapers.

Diversity and Inclusivity:

- The changing demographics, including an increase in new Canadians, are recognized. Stakeholders stress the importance of addressing the diverse population and adapting town services to be more inclusive.

Relevance of Information to Different Generations:

- Recognition is given to the fact that multiple generations use dwellings in the area. Information needs to be relevant to both older property owners and younger users, especially regarding cottage life.

Language Accessibility and Website Update:

- Stakeholders recommend updating the website to include information in multiple languages, ensuring that language is not a barrier to accessing essential information.

Consistent Communication and Sign-Ups:

- There is a call for consistent communication to all residents, with particular emphasis on crucial topics such as flooding, road closures, fire bans, and waste management. Encouraging more people to sign up for town notices is suggested as an effective strategy.

Welcoming Seasonal Employees:

- A stakeholder representing a large employer highlights the changing demographics in the workforce. There is an inquiry into what the town is doing to be more welcoming to seasonal employees.

Key Themes:

- The division between permanent and seasonal residents is seen as a challenge that needs to be addressed.
- Targeting different demographic groups, including seniors and diverse populations, is considered important.
- Muskoka's collective branding is emphasized for effective tourism communication.
- Inclusivity is highlighted through language accessibility and adaptation to changing demographics.
- Equitable communication methods, including online engagement, are recommended.

Next Steps:

- Address the perceived divide between permanent and seasonal residents through community-building initiatives.
- Develop targeted communication strategies for different demographic groups.
- Emphasize the collective Muskoka brand in tourism communication.
- Implement language accessibility on the website and other communication channels.
- Consider diverse demographics and ensure the relevance of information to various generations.
- Consistently communicate essential information and encourage more residents to sign up for notices.
- Foster a welcoming environment for seasonal employees in collaboration with local employers.

Summary and Analysis of Stakeholder Input on Feedback and Community Engagement**Preferred Communication Channels:**

- Stakeholders express preferences for providing feedback through various channels.
- Website usage is preferred by some.
- Improvement of the phone system for more friendly interactions.
- Increased use of “EngageGravenhurst.”
- Enhancement of the website, including visible council email information and pop-ups for newsletter sign-ups.
- Utilization of email and text messages for communication.

Responsive Town Services:

- Positive feedback is provided regarding the responsiveness of the Town to specific issues.

Engagement with Senior Staff and Municipal Councils:

- Stakeholder engagement with senior staff and municipal councils is discussed, with varied success attributed to individual staff personalities. Positive interactions with specific staff members, communications specialist, and the Mayor are highlighted.

Advocacy and Collaboration:

- The importance of ongoing communication between the residents’ associations and the Town is emphasized. Suggestions include joint advocacy efforts, collaboration on initiatives like the “dark skies” project, and continued communication between the two entities.

Two-Way Communication with Residents:

- Stakeholders advocate for improved two-way communication with residents.
- Online deputations to council.

Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement:

- Difficulty in navigating the Town Hall for information.
- Advocacy for the addition of an online chat-bot or chat-person on the website for quicker and clearer assistance.
- Recommendations for increased signage, welcome booths, and town presence at local markets to enhance community engagement.

Key Themes:

- Stakeholders have varied preferences for providing feedback, including website usage and phone interactions.
- Positive experiences are noted regarding the responsiveness of the Town to specific issues.
- Engaging with senior staff and municipal councils is considered valuable, with the importance of individual staff personalities highlighted.
- Advocacy efforts and collaboration between the residents' associations and the Town are emphasized.
- Two-way communication with residents, including online deputations and input from residents' associations, is encouraged.
- Challenges include difficulty navigating Town Hall and a desire for improved online communication options.

Next Steps:

- Implement improvements to the phone system to enhance user-friendliness.
- Increase promotion and use of EngageGravenhurst for community engagement.
- Enhance the website to make council information more visible and encourage newsletter sign-ups.
- Explore the addition of an online chat-bot for quick assistance.
- Consider making public meetings more interactive and accessible online.
- Implement recommendations for increased signage, welcome booths, and town presence at local markets to enhance community engagement.

Summary and Analysis of Gravenhurst's Communication Strategies

Communication Effectiveness:

- Stakeholders commend recent improvements in communication under new staff.
- Positive feedback on Council highlights and media responsiveness.
- Concerns about underutilized website and lackluster traffic alerts.

Media Preferences:

- Diverse preferences noted, ranging from newspapers to radio and emails.
- Suggestions include optimizing the website, using radio for advance notices, and exploring new channels like Spotify.

Seasonal Resident Engagement:

- Distinction between summer and winter residents highlighted.
- Recommendations for targeted communication at Farmers' Market and consideration for non-social media users.

Information Accessibility:

- Stakeholders express challenges in finding information on the website.
- Preferences for electronic statements over traditional mail.

Content Preferences:

- Key information topics include zoning updates, committee decisions, and MAT fund utilization.
- Requests for transparent communication on development decisions and MAT fund usage.
- Preferences for electronic formats emphasized.

Key Themes:

- Stakeholders appreciate recent improvements but identify areas for enhancement.
- Diverse communication channels are preferred, necessitating tailored approaches.
- Website user-friendliness and transparency on key topics are crucial.
- Seasonal resident engagement strategies need customization.
- Regular assessment and adaptation of communication strategies recommended.

Next Steps:

- Optimize website user interface and accessibility.
- Tailor strategies for engaging seasonal residents effectively.
- Enhance transparency on development decisions and MAT fund utilization.
- Explore additional electronic communication channels.
- Regularly assess and adapt strategies based on feedback and analytics.



E. Benchmarking – Municipal Communications Division

In the ever-evolving landscape of municipal governance, effective communication stands as a cornerstone for fostering transparency, engagement, and community cohesion. Recognizing the significance of benchmarking in refining strategies and optimizing resources, we delved into the corporate communications practices of various municipalities.

By examining key aspects such as division structures, internal and external communication dynamics, creative resource utilization, and strategies for measuring effectiveness, this benchmarking effort aimed to extract valuable insights from the experiences of other municipalities.

In crafting Gravenhurst’s communications plan, drawing inspiration from best practices of larger municipalities can provide valuable insights. Prioritizing digital engagement platforms, proactive community outreach, transparency, crisis communication planning, and strategic partnerships can enhance Gravenhurst’s communication efforts while positioning it for growth and evolution. By adopting these approaches, Gravenhurst can effectively engage residents, build trust, and prepare for future challenges, aligning with its aspirations for progress and development.

The benchmarking includes the following municipalities:

Municipality	Population
Town of Huntsville	21,147
Town of Aurora	62,057
City of Markham	338,503
County of Simcoe	533,169
Regional Municipality of Halton	596,637

Source: 2021 Census, Statistics Canada

Key Findings:

- 1. Division Structure:**
 - All participated municipalities have a dedicated communication division reporting to senior management.
- 2. Internal vs. External Focus:**
 - Examine the balance between internal and external communication efforts to refine strategies for effectively engaging both staff and the public. Emphasis on time-sensitive projects, public-facing communications, and internal coordination.
- 3. Creative Resource Utilization:**
 - Strategies: Use of digital tools, collaboration with external vendors, and comprehensive communications plans.

4. Measuring Effectiveness:

- Challenges: Measuring effectiveness, proving value, and meeting accessibility requirements to ensure municipality’s communication is accessible to a diverse community.

5. Community Engagement:

- Channels: Combination of digital (websites, social media) and traditional (newspapers, community events) methods.

6. Comprehensive Communications Plan:

- Evaluate the benefits of having a comprehensive 360-degree communications plan, incorporating regular touchpoints and open lines of communication with other divisions and stakeholders.

7. Client-Centric Approach:

- Consider adopting a client-centric approach in communication, treating internal divisions and partners as ‘clients’ to foster better collaboration and understanding of their needs.

8. Building Relationships:

- Emphasize the importance of building and fostering relationships with stakeholders, both internal and external, to enhance the town’s overall communication effectiveness.

By examining and implementing these key findings, the Town of Gravenhurst can refine its communication strategies, improve efficiency, and enhance engagement with its community.



F. Public Engagement - Online Survey

An online survey was conducted via EngageGravenhurst in late 2023 to engage the entire community and gather public input on how best to keep the community informed and engaged on town matters.

Key Findings:

- Total 163 participants; 66% respondents participated in a public engagement opportunity within the past year
- 82% respondents are year-round residents; 17% are part-time or seasonal residents
- Respondents are: 72% are 55 plus; 27% are between 25-54; 2% are less than 25 years old
- Social media channels – from most frequently used to least frequently used – Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, X (Twitter), SnapChat, TikTok; 80% respondents use social media every day
- Preference on receiving information and update from the Town of Gravenhurst: by email newsletter (82%), social media (63%), Town and Muskoka Region websites (51%), text message (33%), hard-copy mail/brochure/poster (32%), radio (13%)
- Where to look up Town information: Town website, Facebook, email newsletter, Google, Muskoka Region website, email Town staff, Council Agendas/Minutes
- Respondents are most interested in information such as: events & festivals, By-laws & changes, garbage & recycling, snow & winter operations, roads, development, planning & zoning, property taxes, Council meetings, tourism & attraction, recreation programs, emergency & fire services, budget, library, etc.
- Preferred ways to provide feedback to Town: by email, online survey, in-person meeting, virtual meeting
- Currently, 67% of respondents felt that they are somewhat well-informed about Town operations, projects and initiatives, 59% respondents think there is room for improvement
- One in three respondents sometimes watch Council meetings (live stream or archived)
- 85% respondents visit Town's website regularly, from a few times per year to several times per week; one in two respondents think there is room for improvement in terms of the website (ease of use and navigation)

Public Feedback Summary and Analysis:

1. Awareness of Services:
 - Positive: People appreciate services like weekly info emails but suggest better promotion through avenues like tax bills.
2. Medium Preferences:
 - Positive: There's a preference for traditional communication methods (email, phone, mail, radio) over social media, emphasizing accessibility.
 - Negative: Some find the current phone system challenging, urging improvement.
3. Notification for Important Information:
 - Positive: Residents suggest timely email or text notifications, especially for plans affecting them directly.
4. Information Accessibility:
 - Positive: Suggestions include improved website navigation, clear headlines, and less reliance on links.
 - Negative: Concerns about video accessibility and punctuation for screen readers.

5. Physical Notices:
 - Positive: Recommendations for physical notices in high-traffic areas, electronic signs, and marques for essential information.
6. Community Engagement:
 - Positive: Requests for live-streamed committee meetings, emails for meeting schedules, and interactive town hall sessions.
7. Newsletter and Flyers:
 - Positive: Support for email newsletters, and suggestions for a mailed newsletter or flyer for those without internet access.
8. Public Meeting Notifications:
 - Positive: Residents want notifications for public meetings, with suggestions for a centralized weekly information page.
9. Diverse Communication Channels:
 - Positive: Calls for diverse channels such as radio, email, posters, newspapers, and community billboards.
10. Employee Responsiveness:
 - Concerns: Residents express frustration with inconsistent response times and a desire for more direct, timely communication.
11. Council Engagement:
 - Positive: Residents want more proactive engagement from council members throughout their terms.
12. Survey Feedback:
 - Positive: Appreciation for the survey as a positive step, but some seek clarification on messaging and better promotion of public meetings.
13. Road Construction Updates:
 - Concerns: Residents express a need for more timely and detailed updates on road construction projects.
14. Council and Business Community:
 - Positive: Requests to share survey results with the business community following the closure of the local newspaper.
15. Concerns about Development:
 - Concerns: Some residents express anxiety about the environmental impact of increased development around lakes.

16. Call for Transparency:
 - Concerns: Residents desire more transparency in By-laws matters.
17. Social Media Usage:
 - Positive: Recommendations to use social media platforms consistently and actively for town announcements.
18. Business Support and Main Street:
 - Concerns: A perceived disconnect between the town and local businesses, with calls for more support, especially for Main Street.

The feedback highlights a diverse range of preferences and concerns, emphasizing the importance of a multi-faceted communication strategy that addresses accessibility, responsiveness, and transparency.



IV. STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

A. Alignment with the Corporate Strategic Plan

The 2023-2027 Corporate Strategic Plan serves as the comprehensive roadmap for the Town of Gravenhurst, shaping the next four years and beyond. It informs the Town’s budgets, policies, and service plans, and provides a framework for ensuring accountability in advancing priorities.

The Plan has three main strategic pillars, each with specific goals, planned initiatives for advancing them, and performance measures to monitor and track progress:

Community Vibrancy | Sustainable Growth | Effective Municipal Services

Vision Statement:

Gravenhurst: A sustainable and innovative community where everyone is welcome to visit, stay and grow with us.

Mission Statement:

Enhancing quality of life in Gravenhurst through responsible municipal service delivery.

The Corporate Strategic Plan highlights the importance of enhancing communication efforts through a variety of tactics. Based on the situational analysis and internal / external stakeholder consultation, the following outlines the key focus areas to achieve the strategic communication objectives.

B. Strategic Communications Objectives

1. Enhance Awareness and Accessibility:
Objective: Increase public awareness of town services and initiatives.
2. Improve Communication Mediums:
Objective: Optimize communication methods for inclusivity and accessibility.
3. Strengthen Public Engagement:
Objective: Foster community engagement and participation.
4. Responsive and Transparent Communication:
Objective: Enhance responsiveness and transparency in communication.
5. Diversify Communication Channels:
Objective: Utilize diverse channels for effective communication.
6. Empower Council Engagement:
Objective: Facilitate proactive engagement between council members and residents.
7. Effective Emergency Communication:
Objective: Improve communication during emergencies.

8. Promote Sustainable Development Communication:
Objective: Enhance communication around development projects with a focus on sustainability.
9. Evaluate and Iterate:
Objective: Establish a feedback loop for continuous improvement.
10. Community Collaboration and Support:
Objective: Strengthen ties with the local business community.

These strategic communication objectives aim to create a more transparent, accessible, and engaged communication environment for the Town of Gravenhurst over the next few years. They emphasize responsiveness, inclusivity, and collaboration to meet the diverse needs and expectations of the community.

C. Key Focus Areas

1. Division Re-Organization
 - Better align communications and marketing to ensure a more unified, organized, and strategic approach.
2. Internal Communication:
 - Streamlining communication within the organization
 - Regular internal updates
3. External Communication:
 - Tailoring messages for residents, media, and stakeholders
 - Establishing a consistent brand voice
4. Media Relations:
 - Building positive relationships with media outlets
 - Managing crisis communication
5. Social Media Engagement:
 - Enhancing the town's presence on social media platforms
 - Utilizing social media for community engagement
6. Community Engagement:
 - Implementing strategies to involve the community in decision-making processes
 - Fostering a sense of community

D. Recommendations

Best Practices

1. Comprehensive Analytics:
 - Implement analytics tools to measure the reach, engagement, and impact of communication efforts across various channels.
For example:
DashThis
Google Analytics
Sprout Social /Hootsuite etc.
2. Regular Assessments:
 - Conduct periodic assessments of communication strategies to ensure alignment with community needs and expectations.
3. Inclusive Approach:
 - Develop inclusive communication strategies, considering the diverse demographics, preferences, and needs of both permanent and seasonal residents.
4. Transparency and Proactivity:
 - Prioritize transparency in communicating policy updates.
 - Proactively share information to build trust and keep residents informed about upcoming issues.
5. Diverse Communication Channels:
 - Utilize a mix of communication channels, including the website, radio, social media, and email newsletters, to cater to different resident preferences.
6. Tailored Content:
 - Customize content for different stakeholder groups, emphasizing relevant information for tourists, residents, and businesses.
7. Two-Way Communication:
 - Facilitate two-way communication by implementing online deputation options, interactive public meetings, and channels for residents to provide feedback.

Identified Communication Gaps

1. Website Accessibility:
 - Improve website navigation and accessibility to make it user-friendly for all residents.
2. Proactive Communication:
 - Address the gap in proactively communicating upcoming issues and policy updates to avoid confusion among residents.
3. Enhance Social Media Presence:
 - Enhance the utilization of social media platforms, particularly targeting demographics like youth through platforms like Spotify.
4. Limited Public Engagement:
 - Address the gap in public engagement by involving the community in decision-making processes related to developments and planning.

Strategies to Enhance Social Media and Build Media Relations

1. Social Media Optimization:
 - Develop a comprehensive social media strategy, including regular posts, engaging content, and targeted campaigns to increase followers and engagement.
2. Collaborate with Local Media:
 - Foster relationships with local media outlets to ensure accurate and timely coverage of municipal activities.
3. Interactive Platforms:
 - Utilize interactive platforms on social media, such as polls, Q&A sessions, and live videos, to encourage resident participation.
4. Training Programs:
 - Implement continuous training programs for staff on social media usage and engagement strategies.

Enhancing Community Engagement

1. Engagement Initiatives:
 - Establish regular engagement initiatives, such as a monthly newsletter, highlighting community events, policy updates, and important information.
2. Feedback Mechanisms:
 - Implement accessible feedback mechanisms, including surveys and online forms, to gather resident opinions on various issues.
3. Community Events:
 - Actively participate in community events, markets, and festivals to connect with residents and disseminate information.

Suggested Changes to Current Practices

1. Website Redesign:
 - Consider redesigning the website for improved user experience, featuring prominently displayed council email information and pop-ups for newsletter sign-ups.
2. EngageGravenhurst Utilization:
 - Encourage the use of EngageGravenhurst as a primary platform for engagement and information sharing, ensuring consistent and meaningful interactions.
3. Tiered Communication System:
 - Implement a tiered communication system for emergencies, ensuring that urgent information reaches all residents through multiple channels.

Resources Required

1. Analytics Tools:
 - Invest in analytics tools to measure the effectiveness of communication efforts.
2. Training Programs:
 - Allocate resources for staff training programs focused on social media management and effective communication strategies.
3. Website Redesign:
 - Allocate budget and engage professionals for website redesign to enhance user-friendliness.
4. Community Engagement Events:
 - Allocate resources for hosting regular community engagement events, requiring coordination and logistics planning.
5. Collaboration with Local Media:
 - Invest in building relationships with local media outlets, including potential collaboration agreements and promotional efforts.
6. Interactive Platforms:
 - Allocate resources for the creation and management of interactive content on social media platforms.
7. Staffing Resources:
 - Consider additional communications staffing resources.

V. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Step-by-Step Implementation Approach for the Town of Gravenhurst Corporate Communications Plan

1. Initiation Phase:
 - Timeline: Month 1
 - Responsible Parties:
 - Project Manager: Oversee the initiation, coordinate with internal stakeholders.
 - Project Team: Assist in planning and organizing.
2. Stakeholder Consultation:
 - Timeline: Months 2-3
 - Responsible Parties:
 - Consultant: Engage with key internal stakeholders, Mayor, Council, and Senior Leadership Team.
 - Project Manager: Facilitate communication between the consultant and internal stakeholders.
3. Research and Analysis:
 - Timeline: Months 4-5
 - Responsible Parties:
 - Consultant: Conduct a thorough review of communication methods, tools, and tactics in comparable municipalities.
 - Project Team: Collaborate with the consultant, provide necessary data and information.
4. Interim Report Development:
 - Timeline: Month 6-7
 - Responsible Parties:
 - Consultant: Develop an interim report summarizing best practices and current state analysis.
 - Project Team: Review the interim report and provide feedback.
5. Feedback and Adjustment:
 - Timeline: Month 7-8
 - Responsible Parties:
 - Project Team: Host a working session with Council to discuss the interim report and gather feedback.
 - Consultant: Presentation to the Gravenhurst Project Team to discuss the interim report and gather feedback.
6. Final Plan Development:
 - Timeline: Months 8-9
 - Responsible Parties:
 - Consultant: Develop the final Corporate Communications Plan with recommendations.
 - Project Team: Review the final plan and ensure alignment with organizational goals.

7. Presentation to Mayor, Council, and Project Team:
 - Timeline: Month 9
 - Responsible Parties:
 - Consultant: Present the final plan to Mayor, Council, and the project team.
 - Project Team: Facilitate discussions and address any questions or concerns.

8. Implementation Strategy Development:
 - Timeline: Months 10-11
 - Responsible Parties:
 - Project Team: Collaborate with the consultant to develop a detailed strategy for implementing the plan (12-24 month marketing & communication implementation plan).
 - Communications Division: Identify specific tasks and responsibilities.

9. Resource Identification:
 - Timeline: Months 11-12
 - Responsible Parties:
 - Project Manager: Identify budgetary needs for implementation.
 - Finance Division: Allocate budget for resources (2024 or 2025 Budget).

10. Training and Development Planning:
 - Timeline: Months 12-13
 - Responsible Parties:
 - HR Division: Identify training needs and plan development programs.
 - Project Team: Collaborate on the training plan.

11. Rollout of Communication Enhancements:
 - Timeline: Months 13-24
 - Responsible Parties:
 - Communications Division: Implement changes to social media, media relations, and community engagement strategies. Hire and train new staff.
 - Project Team: Monitor and ensure proper execution.

12. Monitoring and Evaluation:
 - Timeline: Ongoing
 - Responsible Parties:
 - Project Manager: Oversee the continuous monitoring of communication strategies.
 - Communications Division: Evaluate the effectiveness of implemented changes.

Resources Required:

- Budget Allocation: TBD based on identified needs during resource identification phase.
- Staffing Needs: Additional staff for social media management, community engagement, and media relations.
- Training and Development: Budget for training programs on new communication tools and strategies.

This step-by-step approach outlines the key activities, responsible parties, and resources required for the successful implementation of the Corporate Communications Plan in the Town of Gravenhurst. The timeline, roles, and budget considerations are integral components to ensure a smooth and effective execution.

VI. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Metrics and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Assessing Corporate Communications Plan Effectiveness

1. Newsletter Engagement:
 - Metrics: Open rates, click-through rates
 - KPIs: Increase in open rates by X%, click-through rates above industry average
2. Social Media Impact:
 - Metrics: Follower growth, engagement (likes, comments, shares), impressions
 - KPIs: X% increase in followers, engagement rates exceeding benchmarks
3. Media Relations:
 - Metrics: Media coverage, positive vs. negative mentions
 - KPIs: Increase in positive media coverage by X%, decrease in negative mentions
4. Community Engagement:
 - Metrics: Participation in town hall meetings, online surveys, community events attendance
 - KPIs: X% increase in community engagement activities
5. Website Analytics:
 - Metrics: Website traffic, user engagement, bounce rates
 - KPIs: X% increase in website visits, lower bounce rates
6. Feedback and Satisfaction Surveys:
 - Metrics: Responses to satisfaction surveys
 - KPIs: Achieve a satisfaction rate of X% or higher
7. Internal Communication Effectiveness:
 - Metrics: Employee survey results, internal newsletter engagement
 - KPIs: Improve employee satisfaction scores by X%, increase internal newsletter readership
8. Response Time to Inquiries:
 - Metrics: Average response time to resident inquiries
 - KPIs: Achieve an average response time of X hours or less
9. Training and Development Completion Rates:
 - Metrics: Staff participation in communication-related training
 - KPIs: X% of staff completing recommended training programs
10. Resource Allocation Efficiency:
 - Metrics: Budget spending, resource utilization
 - KPIs: Achieve effective resource allocation within the allocated budget

11. Message Recall and Understanding:
 - Metrics: Surveys assessing public understanding of key messages
 - KPIs: X% increase in public understanding of key messages
12. Strategic Plan Alignment:
 - Metrics: Alignment of communication efforts with strategic plan goals
 - KPIs: X% of communication activities directly contributing to strategic plan objectives

Regularly monitoring these metrics and KPIs will provide insights into the success and impact of the Corporate Communications Plan for the Town of Gravenhurst. Adjustments can be made based on regular review of the performance against these indicators to continuously improve communication strategies.

Anticipated Outcomes

1. Enhanced Community Engagement:
 - Anticipated Outcome: Increased participation in town hall meetings, public consultations, and community events.
 - Metrics: Track attendance, online engagement, and participation rates in surveys and feedback sessions.
2. Improved Communication Effectiveness:
 - Anticipated Outcome: Residents better informed about town initiatives, developments, and decisions.
 - Metrics: Monitor website traffic, newsletter subscriptions, and open rates; conduct regular surveys to assess awareness levels.
3. Increased Transparency:
 - Anticipated Outcome: Greater trust and confidence in municipal actions through transparent communication.
 - Metrics: Evaluate public perception through surveys on transparency, accessibility of information, and satisfaction with communication.
4. Diversified Communication Channels:
 - Anticipated Outcome: Broadened reach to residents of all demographics through various communication platforms.
 - Metrics: Track engagement on traditional channels (mailers, newspapers) and digital platforms (social media, website analytics).
5. Effective Emergency Communication:
 - Anticipated Outcome: Improved emergency preparedness and response through timely and clear communication.
 - Metrics: Assess the speed and effectiveness of emergency communication responses, feedback on emergency plans.
6. Empowered Council Engagement:
 - Anticipated Outcome: Council members more connected with constituents, resulting in informed decision-making.
 - Metrics: Measure council engagement levels, responsiveness to resident inquiries, and attendance at town hall meetings.

7. Positive Public Perception:
 - Anticipated Outcome: Improved overall town image and satisfaction among residents.
 - Metrics: Conduct periodic surveys to measure public perception, assess sentiment on social media, and track media coverage.
8. Adaptability to Changing Needs:
 - Anticipated Outcome: A communication plan that evolves with the community's changing needs and technological trends.
 - Metrics: Regularly assess and update the plan based on feedback, emerging communication technologies, and shifts in community demographics.
9. Increased Accessibility:
 - Anticipated Outcome: Information accessible to residents with diverse needs and preferences.
 - Metrics: Evaluate the accessibility of information through user feedback, ensuring compliance with accessibility standards.
10. Stronger Community Cohesion:
 - Anticipated Outcome: Fostering a sense of unity and shared responsibility among residents.
 - Metrics: Assess community sentiment, involvement in local initiatives, and participation in collaborative projects.

The anticipated outcomes are aligned with the overarching goal of creating a dynamic and responsive communication ecosystem that fosters a well-informed, engaged, and connected community in the Town of Gravenhurst.

By implementing these strategies and allocating the necessary resources, the Town of Gravenhurst can enhance its communication practices, engage the community effectively, and build a stronger, more transparent relationship with its residents.

