
Subject: Communications Overview

Report to: Corporate Services Committee

Report date: Wednesday, May 12, 2021

Recommendations

1. That the report from the Boulevard Strategy Group entitled “Communications Overview” attached as Appendix 1 to Report CAO 7-2021 **BE RECEIVED**;
2. That the principles articulated in Section 5.0 of Appendix 1 to Report CAO 7-2021 **BE ADOPTED** as a frame for considering options to reorganize the communication work of the Region;
3. That further analysis of the potential options proposed in Section of 6.0 **BE UNDERTAKEN** in the context of the development of a communication masterplan for the Region and against the principles articulated in Section 5.0 of Appendix 1 to Report CAO 7-2021;
4. That staff **BE DIRECTED** to report back to Council before the end of the year on the status of the development of the communication masterplan and on the analysis of potential options for consolidation of the communications functions of the Region;
5. That Council **APPROVE** the retention of consulting services to assist with the development of the communications masterplan and organizational options for communication functions within the Region with funding to be found within the current budget of the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer; and
6. That staff **BE DIRECTED** to continue to find opportunities in all communication portfolios to engage in new partnerships, improve communication strategic alignment as an enterprise, improve processes, procedures and services, and that progress be reported on as part of the report back noted in bullet 4 above.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to fulfill the direction of Regional Council’s April 24, 2021, Motion related to enhancing and supporting Niagara Region’s public facing communications.

- The information in this staff report, and the consultant report attached as Appendix 1 to Report CAO 7-2021, provide information on the current service delivery model and considerations for potential changes with a view to consolidation.
- The information provided in the consultant's report is an overview only and is not a comprehensive review.
- One of the priority projects in the Strategic Plan is the development of a communications masterplan. An RFP is planned to be released in August 2021. It is recommended that any changes to the organization of communication resources in the Region be informed by this masterplan.

Financial Considerations

It is recommended that staff issue an RFP in support of the development of the communications masterplan and organizational options for communication resources. Funding for this initiative will be found from within the current budget allocation of the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer. No further funding is requested at this time.

Analysis

At the April 24, 2021 Regional Council meeting, Regional Council directed the Chief Administrative Officer to provide a report to the Corporate Services Committee on a potential reorganization of the core communications resources found in all departments of Niagara Region, including Public Health, with a view to creating a unified strategic communications entity. This report was to be delivered to Corporate Services Committee for discussion at their May 12, 2021 meeting. A full version of the Regional Council motion is included in the report attached as Appendix 1 to Report CAO 7-2021.

Given the short timeframes associated with Regional Council's direction, staff engaged Boulevard Strategy Group to prepare a communications overview report that provides current context and considerations for potential changes to the Region's communications service delivery model. This report, attached under Appendix 1 to Report CAO 7-2021, outlines the following information:

- Role of communications in the municipal sector
- Core communications functions in municipal government
- Current state of communications resources across Niagara Region (centralized division, Public Health, other departments)
- Operational needs and obligations

- Proposed guiding principles
- Potential options for further consideration
- Conditions for success under any model

The report is a point in time snapshot and summary of considerations collected and reported over a six-day timeframe during the week of May 3.

In addition to the work completed by Boulevard Strategy Group, staff contacted colleagues in the following municipalities regarding their communications models: the Regions of Durham, Peel, Halton, Waterloo, York and the City of Hamilton. This research found that the Regions of Peel, Halton, and the City of Hamilton deliver communications through a completely centralized model. The Regions of Durham, Waterloo and York have both a centralized division and some decentralized resources, including decentralized resources in Public Health. See Appendix 2 to Report CAO 7-2021 for further details.

Alternatives Reviewed

Staff have not conducted a comprehensive analysis of options. Potential options that would be considered as part of a thorough review, should Regional Council wish to proceed further, are included under Section 6.0 of the report attached as Appendix 1 to Report CAO 7-2021.

Conclusions

One of the priority projects in the Strategic Plan is the development of a communications masterplan. To ensure the best alignment for the Region to achieve its communication objectives, it is recommended that any changes to the organization of communication resources in the Region be informed by this masterplan.

To ensure that Council sees progress on this file, it is further recommended that staff report back to Council before the end of the year on the status of the development of the communication masterplan and on the analysis of potential options for consolidation of the communications functions of the Region.

In the spirit of continuous improvement and in respect for Council's Motion on enhancing the Region's public facing communications, staff will continue to find opportunities in all communication portfolios to engage in new partnerships, improve

communication strategic alignment as an enterprise, improve processes, procedures and services, and will report on progress as part of the report back on the development of the communications masterplan.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Research and analysis associated with the delivery of communications services relates to the fourth pillar of Regional Council's 2019-2022 Strategic Priorities, Sustainable and Engaging Government.

The development of a communications master plan is a priority project in the Implementation Plan of the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan

Other Pertinent Reports

N/A

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This report was prepared in consultation with the Corporate Leadership Team and the Medical Officer of Health.

Appendices

Appendix 1	Boulevard Strategy Group Report, "Communications Overview"
Appendix 2	Environmental Scan of Communication Organizations In Other Municipal Jurisdictions