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# 2019 Business Plan & Budget

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## Communications

### Prior Year Accomplishments

#### Economic Innovation & Prosperity

- Consistent with direction from Council in the 2014-2018 Strategic Plan to evaluate and strengthen the Northumberland County brand, the Communications Department collaborated with the Economic Development and Tourism Department to launch Phase One of a brand strategy project. The County retained The Letter M Marketing agency to work with staff on a formal assessment of the County brand, in fulfillment of the objectives of this phase. This assessment included:
  - An in-depth review of County materials and online presence, and a review of 18 comparable or best-in-class communities;
  - Extensive public and stakeholder consultation, including 20 one-on-one interviews; three focus groups; a workshop with County Council; and a community survey generating approximately 1,060 responses;
  - Identification of nine attributes comprising Northumberland County's identity, and recommendations for implementation of a distinctive brand identity.

Findings have established a research-based foundation with which to inform Phase Two of the brand strategy project: the development of a Communications & Marketing Master Plan for Northumberland County.

- Recognizing the strategic importance of destination development to the economic well-being of the County, and the role of signature events in fostering interest and attraction, Communications staff, together with Economic Development & Tourism staff, collaborated with representatives of Alderville First Nation to submit a comprehensive



bid to the Aboriginal Sport & Wellness Council of Ontario to host the 2019 Ontario Indigenous Summer Games.

## **Sustainable Infrastructure & Services**

- Supported successful deployment of 2018 projects and initiatives by collaborating with department leads to define communications objectives, and coordinating content creation and distribution, including media planning and pitching, key messaging and Q&A development, and/or website and collateral development for:
  - 2017 Annual Report
  - 2018 Financial Framework Open House
  - Vacant Unit Property Tax Rebate program Open House
  - Housing and homelessness response initiatives including plans for a new emergency shelter system, and the County's second homelessness registry week
  - Waste services agreement with Alderville First Nation
  - Emerald Ash Borer response project plan
- Enhanced service delivery to internal partners – and ultimately the effectiveness of external communications – by expanding internal capacity for creative services (layout and design, photography, videography).
- Within the first three months of staffing a Grant Writer position, coordinated the development and submission of grant applications seeking more than \$750,000 in funding from other levels of government, with expectations of delivering a minimum of \$80,000 in actual funding for County programs and services through this position, for 2019.

## **Thriving & Inclusive Communities**

- Continued to expand reach of information about County programs, services, and initiatives through best-practice communications and media relations, including:
  - Ensuring that inquiries from the media are responded to quickly and efficiently, in a way that best conveys the County's position on a given issue.



- Identifying approximately 60 newsworthy County stories and presenting them to the media for publication using compelling content.
- Developing approximately 50 sets of remarks for elected officials and senior staff for announcements and events throughout the County, framing greetings in the context of Strategic Plan key messaging and County core values.
- Growing the County's social media community through advertising and the posting of sharable content.
- In collaboration with Information Technology staff, completed the RFP process to select a solution provider for the redesign of the corporate website, and launched the project to deliver a new Northumberland County website by April 2019:
  - Improving navigation and harmony of content across multiple County web properties.
  - Better positioning information based on user-focused content categories and straightforward language to address needs of users (focusing on presenting information in one unified voice rather than as department-segmented information).
  - Integrating corporate social media properties, for single-pane viewing.
  - Integrating technology to improve customer service, including modules that enable 'reporting a problem'; online payments; permit applications.
  - Responding to mobile and tablet viewing.
  - Aligning with AODA accessibility standards.
- Coordinated and marketed events celebrating County programs and services or community milestones, such as:
  - Annual Volunteer Recognition event: in conjunction with National Volunteer Week, recognizing seven individuals for achieving volunteer service milestones in support of various County programs.
  - Local Government Week 'Paint the Plow' activity in collaboration with County Transportation team: evolved this activity into a contest for 2018, where students from five elementary schools across Northumberland painted the blades of County snow plows in the theme of 'Partners Today for a Terrific Tomorrow'- creating understanding about the connections the students have



day-to-day with their local level of government – and Council evaluated the artwork to determine a winner. The winning class was awarded a tour of the Material Recovery Facility and a pizza lunch.

- Oaktober: A day of learning and fun in nature for families and outdoor enthusiasts, this event celebrated recreation opportunities in the County Forest with the intent of moving low-awareness residents to state of high awareness and interest in regularly accessing Forest trails, as well as increasing awareness of trail etiquette, and promoting Forest volunteer opportunities.
- Council inauguration: supported the Legislative Services team in planning and organizing inauguration activities for the new term of County Council.
- Provided communications support for departmental planning and implementation of projects and events including:
  - Announcement of government funding for addition of 29 beds at the new Golden Plough Lodge
  - 2018 Multicultural Day
  - 2018 Survivor Day
  - Farm 911 – the Emily Project: installation of first local signs
  - Early Years services initiatives, including community engagement in priority-setting, caregiver engagement in physical literacy, recruitment for EarlyON Centre Advisory Committees, and events coordinated by EarlyON Indigenous culture team.

## **Organizational Excellence**

- Awarded a 2018 Ovation Award of Merit from the International Association of Business Communicators (Toronto Chapter) for Northumberland County's Canada 150 publication entitled: 150 Stories & Images of Arrival in Northumberland.
- Increased the frequency of employee newsletter distribution to monthly, instead of every other month, to improve the effectiveness of the medium for sharing timely information with staff about corporate decisions and activities.
- As part of the County's culture of continual improvement toward excellence, coordinated the organization's second staff survey process to obtain feedback from



employees about organizational performance and internal culture, as well as opportunities for improvement.

- Based on assessment of the 2016 survey cycle, made adjustments to the process to better align with business and strategic plan implementation, and updated branding to 'Employee Insight Survey'.
- Coordinated the third-party-delivered staff survey, including plans for encouraging staff in all areas to complete the survey and plans for communicating results to all staff.

## **2019 Service Objectives & Initiatives**

### **Economic Innovation & Prosperity**

- Should the bid by Northumberland County and Alderville First Nation to host the 2019 Ontario Indigenous Summer Games be successful, collaborate with Economic Development & Tourism staff to act as principal County resources for the planning, coordination, promotion and execution of the Games.
- Advance efforts to strengthen the Northumberland County brand, based on assessment work undertaken throughout 2018 as part of Phase 1 of the Brand Strategy Project.

### **Sustainable Infrastructure & Services**

- Support successful deployment of 2019 projects and initiatives by collaborating with department leads to define communications objectives, and coordinating content creation and distribution, including media planning and pitching, key messaging and Q&A development, and/or website and collateral development.
- Consistent with plan and timelines for rebuild of the Golden Plough Lodge, finalize a communications plan for sharing information with residents and families, staff and Council, the general public and stakeholders regarding key milestones.
- Through a centralized grant-writing resource, monitor and identifying opportunities to secure funding from other levels of government and external sources for investment in County initiatives, and coordinate interdepartmental collaboration on applications; delivering a minimum of \$80,000 in funding for 2019.



## **Thriving & Inclusive Communities**

- Continue to expand reach of information about County programs, services, and initiatives through best-practice communications and media relations, as well as coordinating and marketing events celebrating County programs and services or community milestones.
- Continue to provide project management leadership, in collaboration with Information Technology staff, to ensure successful delivery of new corporate website by anticipated April 2019 'go-live' date, and manage related promotions to staff, stakeholders and community members.
- Develop a public engagement protocol to create consistency of practice across the organization. This protocol will consider:
  - Forms of engagement including public information-sharing/outreach; consultation; participation; and sustained problem solving.
  - Sustained community research practices:
    - Assessment of the information needs and desired delivery mechanisms of residents, member municipalities and stakeholders.
    - Use of tools such as quick polls, website modules listing engagement opportunities, feedback mechanisms that are compliant with AODA standards, overviews of where and how feedback is incorporated.
  - Promotions tactics to advise residents of opportunities for interaction and input.

## **Organizational Excellence**

- In alignment with the development of a 2018-2022 Council Strategic Plan, create a four-year Corporate Communications Strategy defining objectives and measureable actions for fostering two-way information-sharing between residents/stakeholders/employees and the County.
- In conjunction with the Finance Department's Asset Management initiative, coordinate development of a formal Customer Service framework for the organization centered around "People Practices":
  - Establishing guiding principles, service standards and corporate policy.



- Coordinating employee training and resource-development that emphasizes relationship-building and excellence in customer service.
- Instituting customer feedback and response-improvement mechanisms.
- Developing a promotion strategy advising stakeholders and residents of opportunities to connect with the County.
- Support leadership team efforts related to departmental review and action of Employee Insight Survey results.
- Continue to strengthen corporate internal communications program by collaborating with Information Technology staff on the roll-out of digital signage in staff areas at County facilities, including development of a content management plan to ensure regular refresh of information shared with staff.

## Long Term Plan & Strategic Objectives

### Economic Innovation & Prosperity

- Leveraging research from Phase One of the brand strategy project, coordinate development of a Communications & Marketing Master Plan, which will include:
  - A multi-year brand implementation and marketing plan: build momentum around the answer to the question: Why choose Northumberland?
    - Refreshed visual identity system: revisiting the corporate logo, fonts and colour palettes to ensure consistency of application across all assets, while enabling flexibility of purpose:
      - Retaining main logo elements, while considering how to incorporate various departments/services;
      - Reintroducing County Crest for council-related business;
      - Strengthening use of 'swoosh' for marketing materials
    - Marketing and public relations plan: strategies and tactics to increase awareness and positive perceptions of, and action related to, the brand among target audiences, delivering both tangible and intangible outcomes for the benefit of the community.
    - Metrics: framework for monitoring and reporting plan-related outcomes.



- An enhanced corporate communications framework: an action plan for engaging and sharing information with target audiences based on industry (communications) and sector (municipal) best practices, emerging tools, and research into the ways in which citizens prefer to hear from, and communicate with, their local government.
- A wayfinding strategy: ensure creative, memorable, and consistent signage throughout the County at main travel gateways, that links communities together under the broad County banner. Specific focus will be placed on implementation of new 401 gateway signage in 2019.

### **Sustainable Infrastructure & Services**

- Continue evaluating opportunities to expand the corporate customer service framework to incorporate best practices for connecting with and serving residents and stakeholders, such as:
  - a municipal 311 service, delivering a single point of access to local government non-emergency services.
  - ‘social response’: officially using social media tools to address inquiries, complaints and feedback as part of a multi-channel approach to customer service support.

### **Thriving & Inclusive Communities**

- Advance public engagement and business intelligence practices by:
  - Strengthening use of audience research to align communications efforts with the information needs/desired delivery mechanisms of residents/stakeholders, and to measure the effectiveness of these efforts.
  - leveraging insights from the trend of ‘Gamification’ (applying game-playing elements (eg: point scoring) to non-traditional area to stimulate participation) to foster public interest and engagement in municipal policy/strategy/service development and delivery.



## **Organizational Excellence**

- Implement a media monitoring service to capture more effective analytics on the reach of County communications, and to support timely, effective identification of key issues.
- Continue to expand the corporate marketing mix by maximizing the use of technology to deliver effective communications, including new social media channels, website aps, SMS technology, and other web and mobile-focused tools and solutions.
- Pursue best practice strategies and tactics to ensure ongoing strength of corporate culture and employee engagement in order to maximize performance and achieve the Organizational Excellence pillar of the corporate Strategic Plan.