City of North Bay

Communications Review Report

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Introduction

The City of North Bay engaged KPMG to conduct an Organizational Review for the municipality. The overarching goal of the review is to conduct an overall assessment of City services to ensure value for the taxpayer.

One of the objectives identified as part of scope of the review included investigating the municipality's communications, including policies and plans for public engagement. Given Redbrick Communications' 20-year history working in the municipal sector, KPMG engaged the agency to conduct this piece of the broader review.

Over the past several years, the communications landscape has changed dramatically. More than ever, municipalities need the ability to communicate quickly to keep up and be visible: local newsrooms are shrinking; anyone can easily share their voice and opinion on social media, which increases the risk of mis- and disinformation; communities have greater expectations to be informed and give input; lack of trust in government bodies is growing; at the same time, workplaces are evolving, and populations are growing and changing. This means communicators need to adjust

how they share information, including sharing more short bursts – or layers of information – that lead to more in-depth information for those interested.

Effective, strategic communications plays a critical role in building public confidence in municipal decision making and service delivery, and an understanding of how municipal governments operate. When done well, communications can strengthen trust between a municipality and its constituents.

The City of North Bay's leadership recognizes there are opportunities to improve how the municipality communicates, shares information and engages with its key stakeholders and the community. They are seeking specific recommendations to enhance the communications function based on best practices.

This report provides a summary of the internal research and key themes. It also provides recommendations for consideration to support stronger communications planning, messaging and next steps.

Methodology

- ✓ Review of communications policies and the City's strategic plan

- ✓ Meeting with the CAO

- ✓ Interview with the Mayor

- ✓ Meetings with each member of the Senior Management Team (SMT)

- ✓ A half-day workshop with SMT

- ✓ Input from the 2022 Employee Engagement Survey

- ✓ KPMG Organizational Review Findings

- ✓ Insights from Redbrick's 20 years' experience in communications working with municipal clients and interviewing communications leaders for past projects

- ✓ Public relations and communications best practices and future trends

Limitations:
Recommendations in this report are currently based on the above sources. Municipal communications review projects commonly include gathering input and data from internal and external sources, including staff across the organization, elected officials, key stakeholders, partners, and the community, to ensure the voices that municipalities are seeking to communicate and engage with are heard. While the City's leaders have a good pulse on the communities they serve, a next step would be to confirm any assumptions or beliefs shared to ensure the recommendations reflect audience needs.

Community and Communications Context

- Population: nearly 53,000*

- Located between Lake Nipissing and Trout Lake

- At the crossroads of two TransCanada highways (Hwy 11&17)

- A three-hour drive from Toronto, and three and half hours from Ottawa

- Mix of industrial, commercial, and institutional (ICI) operations, including Nipissing University and Canadore College

- Mix of urban and outdoor recreation

- Nearly 65% of the population is between 20 to 64 years of age. The highest population is between 20-39 (13,685), followed by 40 to 59 (13,205)*

- Currently, one communications officer, plus an interim marketing intern (contract), support the entire municipal organization

- The city's media landscape is declining, as seen across the country. Fewer municipal stories are covered

- Increased spread of misinformation through channels not managed by the City, and greater expression of targeted frustration on social media channels (a common trend seen in other municipalities)

Demographics source: Statistics Canada 2021 Census of Population North Bay Profile

Leadership Interviews: High-level findings

High-level Themes

- The communications officer is well respected and has greatly improved the overall communications function. The marketing intern is providing significant value, manages daily communications operations needs, which allows the officer to focus on activities that bring greater strategic value to the organization.

- Media relations between the City and local outlets has improved and is more efficient. Responses to media inquiries are stronger and more consistent.

- Demands are increasing – internally and externally for communications and public engagement.

- Leaders report that how the City manages and mitigates issues could be improved. They feel they are often "firefighting" and that there are opportunities to anticipate and incorporate more proactive planning.

- It would help if roles and responsibilities related to communications are more clearly defined.

- Stronger internal processes would help the City communicate more effectively and strengthen information sharing.

- Leaders recognize the role Council members play as influencers in the community and want to ensure they are providing effective support and timely information to elected officials to support them in their conversations with constituents.

- There is recognition that more communications-related training is needed across the organization to increase consistency.

- Each department could improve internal collaboration and the sharing of consistent information.

Opportunities

- Greater consistency and professionalism in City documents and use of the municipal brand for public-facing materials
- Align communications with business goals
- Improve internal communications
- Increase use of tools and technology
- Tell a stronger City story
- Celebrate and share successes
- Improve measurement and evaluation (KPIs)
- Learn from successes
- Clarify roles

Leadership Workshop Input

Discussion overview

On October 26, 2023, the Senior Management Team participated in an interactive communications and change management half-day workshop with Redbrick. The session covered several topics, with the following goals:

- Establish a better and more consistent understanding of what communications is and can be
- Develop a common understanding of the scope and importance of improved communications
- Increase understanding of how change management fits in
- Think about the role of SMT and where they fit as leaders to elevate communications at the City
- Consider opportunities for each team to better support the Communications Officer

Further to the goals, the session was a starting point to achieve the following outcomes:

- Consider a vision or line of sight for communications
- Start to define the high-level City story
- Begin to identify short, medium and long-term strategies/considerations
- Begin to identify opportunities to streamline processes and clarify roles

Becoming Audience Centric

The definition of communications excellence, as per the Canadian Public Relations Society, is "the strategic **management of relationships** with diverse stakeholders and audiences to achieve mutual understanding; realize organizational goals; and serve the public interest." Focusing on relationship management means that organizations need to be audience centric and that communications must be two-way (not simply a push out of information).

During the workshop, SMT identified three key audiences on which to focus and to consider ways the City can strengthen relationships, better meet needs, and enhance information sharing and engagement. These audiences included:

- Council

- Internal staff

- Local community

SMT input related to communications to Council

A positive relationship between municipal staff and Council is critical to moving forward the business of the municipality, and for strengthening trust between the community and its local government. Council gives direction and makes decisions, which are informed by comprehensive information, analysis and recommendations from staff subject matter experts.

SMT recognizes that local councillors have an overarching desire to improve the City. Leaders also perceive that elected officials feel there are opportunities to improve current approaches. At the same time, from the leadership perspective, the City's scope of programs and services is significant. Leaders recognize councillors receive a great deal of technical information and that City staff need to help ensure elected officials understand the details and nuances related to legislation, regulations and technical expertise. SMT is looking for opportunities to better support Council's understanding of these parameters and the impacts they have on municipal decision making.

Council decisions are also influenced by the community they serve. Councillors are elected by constituents and make decisions that they feel are in the best interest for the community. Often, they must make difficult decisions that balance residents wishes with legislative requirements and/or finding solutions that are best for the community as a whole.

Communications to Council continued

Priority topics to strengthen storytelling

SMT identified the following topic areas that need strong positioning and messaging for Council:

- Implementation of the Organizational Review
- Municipal efforts to improve safety in the community
- The City's role in homelessness, mental health and addictions
- ERP system rollout (the new Enterprise Resource Planning software and the benefits it will bring)

Opportunities to improve communications with Council

    Short term: more clearly share current status, progress and timelines of City initiatives

    Medium term: provide a status report with a list of upcoming action items

    Long term: schedule proactive communications related to milestones, goals and measurement

Ideas for improvement:

- Add a public engagement section to the Council report template
- Ensure regular communication with Council, including in between Council meetings
- Share a biweekly public service announcement
- Ensure more visual communications to support text
- Provide FAQs to Council to help them communicate with constituents

SMT input related to communications to Internal Staff

Internal staff are a critical audience when considering how to improve communications. They interact with residents and partners daily and can be leveraged as key communicators and ambassadors on behalf of the municipality.

In addition to being public servants, many staff are also local taxpayers and consumers. If communication is done effectively, it can help staff become more informed, understand municipal decisions, increase their commitment to and confidence in the organization. It can also build greater competency, support and a broader perspective. Staff are important voices for sharing feedback and ideas for improvement.

Effective and strategic internal engagement helps build buy in during times of change, increase a sense of value by improving staff recognition efforts, which can lead to improved retention rates.

Communications to Internal Staff continued

Priority topics to strengthen storytelling to internal staff:

SMT identified the following stories that need to be strengthened for Internal Staff:

- Implementation of the coming Enterprise Resource Planning software and what it means
- Organizational Review and its impacts
- City's annual budget

Ideas to improve communications to internal staff:

- Stronger branding
- Regular newsletter and more frequent updates
- Consistent sharing of information across the organization
- Improved promotion and use of the internal Gateway site
- Regular and consistent meetings at the team level in each department
- "Coffee with" opportunities to learn more about different areas and staff across the organization

SMT input related to communications with the Local Community

The North Bay community is diverse by education, background, understanding of its local government and more. SMT believes that jobs, housing, food and physical security are top of mind for most residents. Overall affordability for housing, taxes and access to services are also key topics of concern. At the same time, SMT feels that the community recognizes that City services impact their daily lives. Improving community wellbeing is a high priority for the City and partners. Focused work is underway to increase the community's sense of safety, especially downtown.

SMT feels that there is overall community confusion about what services the City is responsible for versus those of the Province. There is an opportunity to clarify roles and responsibilities and explain how municipal tax dollars are being used to provide City services and improve the general quality of life in North Bay.

City leadership feel that the main barriers and challenges to reach and engage the community include time, attention and the amount of misinformation spreading on social media channels not managed by the City.

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Communications to the Community continued

Priority topics to strengthen storytelling to the community

SMT identified the following stories that need to be strengthened for the community:

- Clarity related to the services that the City is responsible for
- How tax dollars are spent to deliver services (what's in it for the community)
- The City's priorities and how they are being addressed and actioned
- The City's efforts to improve safety in the community and address homelessness and addictions

Ideas to improve communications to the community

Short term: social media posts with pictures to show delivery of services; short and positive information bursts

Medium term: schedule routine events/activities (e.g., seasonal) and plan ahead for major projects to ensure a proactive approach; regular meetings between the communications officer and departments

Long term: schedule communications over the longer term, aligned with Council priorities; ensure communications are driven by a strategic plan

KPMG High-level Findings

KPMG High-level Findings*

- Strategic priorities:
  - Addressing homelessness, addictions and mental health
  - Developing a new community centre
  - Implementing a new ERP system
  - Improving customer service
- The City's current strategic plan is high level and not supported by business plans; priorities are influenced by Council.
- The City currently lacks service standards and KPIs.
- Financial and capacity pressures exist.
- There is a need to strengthen use of technology across the organization.

*Refer to KPMG's full final report for more detailed findings and recommendations.

Municipal Best Practice

Insights from municipal communications leaders

Redbrick has an in-depth understanding of the municipal context and is deeply connected within the municipal communications community. We are regularly called upon to conduct communications review projects for municipalities across Ontario, to review best practice and make recommendations to improve the function. These reviews often include researching comparable municipalities and conducting interviews with their communications leaders. Over the past four years alone, Redbrick has held in-depth conversations with approximately 40 municipal communications leads to learn about their successes, lessons learned, and where they are putting investment and focus.

Through our regular client work, we can also confidently say that Redbrick has provided communications-related support for nearly every facet of municipal service delivery for about a quarter of Ontario's 444 municipalities and several others in three different provinces. In addition to client work, Redbrick maintains a Municipal Communicators Network of more than 400 communications managers from across Canada. We have a reputation for being helpful, and when we reach out in search for best practices, ideas and solutions, municipal communications managers are quick to share their insights with us. This has proven helpful in many past projects, including this project for the City of North Bay.

The following section shares best practices and insights from municipal communications leaders from across the province gathered over the past few years.

Take aways from high-functioning municipal communications teams

- ✓ They focus on strategy first and connection to business goals before considering tactics.

- ✓ Communications leaders have a seat at senior most tables and are sought out for strategic advice.

- ✓ Teams are highly visible and collaborative with regular and intentional connections with department teams.

- ✓ Clear and understood processes and planning / measurement tools are in place.

- ✓ Teams function like a newsroom.

- ✓ Tools and tactics are audience focused.

- ✓ Communications manage their own budgets, with flexibility and trust to invest where needed to achieve goals.

- ✓ Team members embody a growth mindset.

Top areas of investment or focus of high-functioning municipal teams
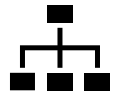
1. Increasing team capacity

2. Digital storytelling, transformation, measurement

3. Public engagement

4. Customer service alignment with communications
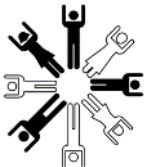
5. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion communications and positioning
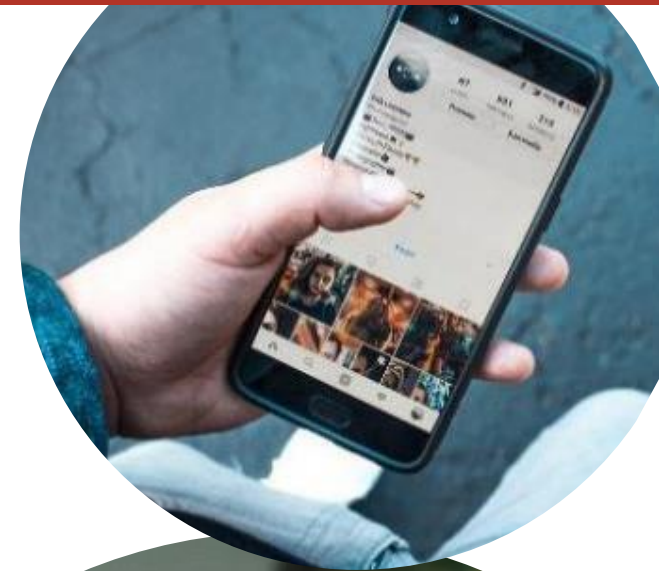
Key findings from across the municipal sector

Municipalities functioning like a "newsroom"

- Tell a concrete, simple story for best results

- Flexible to adapt to changes in local news seen in many municipalities

- Experiencing and adapting to changes in media consumption (digital-first, looking for "news" outside of traditional sources)

- Increasingly, municipalities are telling the story from start to finish

- Organic content has more reach than paid advertising

- "Stories" include easy to share content, images, links to more info, posted in multiple locations, and layers of information from "quick hits" to a pathway from which to gather more information for those who are interested

Municipal key findings continued

Tools vary by audience, no magic bullet to reach everyone

- Must be audience centric

- Seniors often targeted separately from others (but don't assume that seniors don't engage online)

- Range of engagement platforms (dedicated online engagement platform, virtual meetings, in-person meetings, hosting community engagement events)

- Traditional advertising is still popular, where possible, but some question its value vs. organic content

- Social media – different messaging / creative content for different platforms

- Social media – templates to help departments create their own content when needed and more time sensitive (e.g., water main breaks overnight)

- Internal tools include emails, newsletters, Town Hall meetings, staff recognition

Municipal key findings continued

Be more visible and bring more voices into the fold *(combatting misinformation/negativity, and becoming more inclusive)*

- Grow influential groups

- Increase the associations with which the municipality participates

- Find the voices of those not on digital

- Meet the moderators of community groups if appropriate and productive

- Develop stronger organizational listening – be deliberate and use tools to hear from audiences

Municipal key findings continued

Good policies and tools create a strong foundation

- Have strong policies to support communications – media relations, social media
- Communications toolkits come in handy, with timelines

Customer service connection

- Teams are creating stronger ties with customer service teams, in some cases they are in the same division
- Two-way sharing of information for early issues identification, consistency of messaging, strengthening content, enhancing the ability to proactively respond

Issues management

- Proactive approach with pre-approved messaging and processes for common issues
- Issues management framework in place
- Standard briefing note template that includes key messaging

Municipal key findings continued

Looking ahead

- Trust building and relationship management: managing misinformation and disinformation, naysayers

- Reaching audiences where they live; some are considering subscription-based permissions – getting emails, and maybe phone numbers for texting

- Looking for ways to address the digital divide

- Partnering with community and media organizations

- Positioning the organization's EDI principles, actions

Comparable Municipal Staffing Complements

The following chart details communications staffing complements from several similar-sized Ontario municipalities.

Municipality	Population (2021)	Communications Complement*
North Bay	50,000	1 FTE + 1 contract
Collingwood	26,000	2 FTE
Georgina	45,000	4 FTE + 1 contract
Halton Hills	61,000	5 FTE
Kawartha Lakes	75,000	3 FTE
Caledon	82,000	7 FTE
Northumberland County	85,500	4 FTE

*As of January 2024

Sector Trends and Best Practice

Edelman: *The Future of Corporate Communications*

Edelman is a global communications firm, well known for studying the influence of trust across society in different sectors. Recently, they examined the "current state, evolution, and forward focus of the corporate communications function and communicators' leadership role" in today's changing landscape. Here are some of the key findings based on survey results from more than 200 senior-most communications executives and insights from more than 20 in-depth interviews :

- The COVID-19 pandemic increased the strategic role of communications.

- Communications teams need to be multidisciplinary; add stronger business acumen (value creation), integration and collaboration.

- Teams should focus on professional development – learning the science, beyond the art of communications, including areas such as change management and finance.

- The use of technology is growing with more blurred lines between marketing and communications tools.

- Employee engagement is critical for business success.

- Organizational social purpose is more critical than ever.

- Strong governance, process and accountability matter.

- Communications must demonstrate ROI to business goals and how their work is making an impact.

- Communicators must become and act as a partner with leadership.

- TRUST is the number one currency gained through consistent demonstration of the brand being brought to life.

Best practices

Effective and strategic communications can be achieved when each of the following elements are in place.

Trusted strategic advisor / connector

Data and measurement for listening and proven outcomes

Aligned with corporate strategic plans

Effective and Strategic Communications

Adaptable, innovative: varying skillsets, effective tools

Supported by strong internal processes

Consistent corporate story and brand (Customer Service, Internal Communications focus)
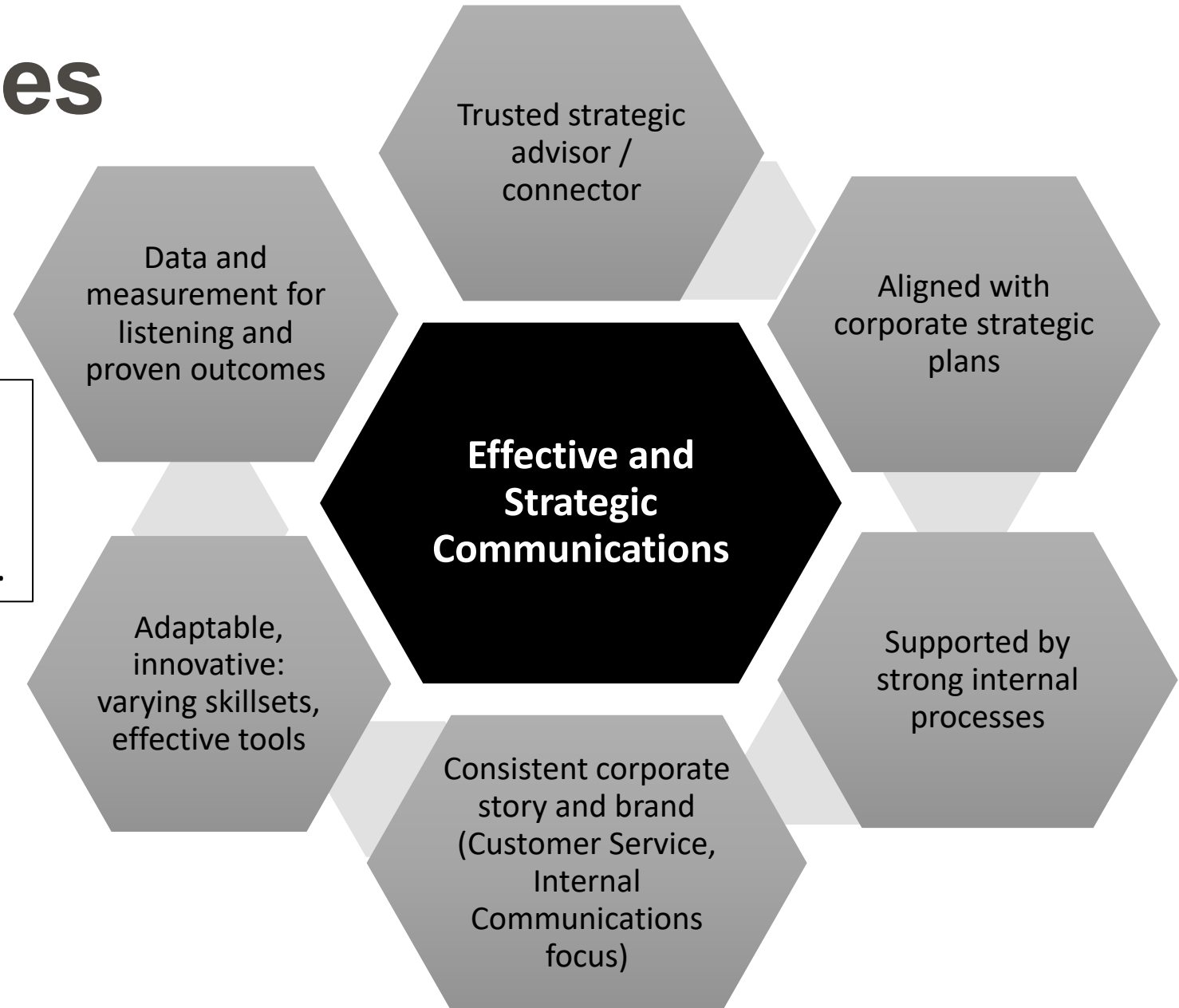
Communications Landscape

Declining media landscape

Real-time access to information and increasing expectations

Audiences creating their own content

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Megatrends in public relations

Higher stakes and rising value of reputation

Content shock and disinformation

Decline of journalism

AI comes to PR

Empowered audiences

Many speak, few listen

A gap in wealth and trust

What that means for communications leaders

Focus on relationships and community building	Play a central role to define and demonstrate the organization's character, values and purpose at senior table	Earn trust through inclusive listening
Leverage data on publics', attitudes and behaviours	Align communication planning with strategy and purpose	Become organizational storytellers

Analysis: City of North Bay Communications

Internal Strengths

- The communications officer reports to the CAO and is highly respected. He is adding value and has strengthened the City's communications function. Messages are more aligned with corporate goals.

- SMT recognizes the value effective communications can bring the municipality and is committed to finding and implementing ways to improve it. Efforts have begun to improve collaboration across the organization.

- Leaders appreciate that the City's media relations and efforts have been strengthened.

- Council expects and has identified improved communications and public engagement as key priorities.

- The addition of the contract marketing intern is making a significant difference in reducing reactive communications and meeting day-to-day needs, while freeing up the officer to collaborate with departments for more proactive planning.

- The officer tends to be engaged early on key project files.

- There is a desire to increase the use of technology to find organizational efficiencies.

- Communications officer is commonly engaged when issues arise. There is an opportunity to enhance issues management practices at the City.

- Core policies to support communications are in place (e.g., media relations, social media)

Internal Challenges

- The current communications function is currently focused on meeting day-to-day operational needs. As such, a clear vision or set of strategic priorities have not been established. Clear measures for success are also not in place.

- Limited resources and increased workload and demands make consistent strategic communications challenging, including presenting a strong and professional brand, and ensuring resources are in place when the communications officer is unavailable.

- Strong internal processes help strengthen proactive communications. At the City, these process are not consistent across all departments. More clarity with roles, responsibilities and expectations of when to engage communications would help improve the strategic value communications can deliver.

- Improving cross-department collaboration will help break down siloes and ensure messages are delivered in a more consistent and coordinated way across the organization.

- The City's current strategic plan is high level, with little tie to communications, which makes it challenging to align communication efforts with organizational plans.

- As can be common in other municipalities with limited staff, internal communications has not been an area of focus. In recent staff engagement sessions, communication was identified as a top theme for improvement. Not all staff have access to email, which makes it more challenging to reach everyone across the organization.

- The City is about to go through a significant organizational change. Time and resources will be needed to roll it out effectively and support a positive culture.

- Clear processes and expectations related to meeting corporate needs vs. supporting elected officials are not in place.

- As demands increase and provincial policies change, municipalities are facing capacity, financial and social pressures.

External Opportunities

- The City's social media presence has strengthened significantly, with opportunities to continue building on this effort and using the tools more strategically.
- The City's communications officer has built strong relationships with media. Media pick up releases.
- The City has developed positive relationships with the local Indigenous communities.
- The City has many positive stories to tell. There are opportunities to share achievements, how the City is innovative and has efficient planning processes, how taxes are at work etc.
- The community's customer experience is related to communications and the City's brand and reputation. There are opportunities to ensure interactions with the City are positive with consistent messaging and a clear brand experience.
- The new public engagement section of the website is helping consolidate engagement opportunities. Recent projects have garnered improved levels of engagement. These efforts are a step in the right direction. More focused effort is needed to continue to strengthen how the City approaches engagement and meets needs.
- Communications for highly visible projects have become more proactive.
- There are opportunities to strengthen relationships with key partners and community groups (e.g., university, college, hospital, social service providers).

External Threats

- When communications are highly reactive, it is challenging to tell strong stories and get ahead of issues.

- As seen in other municipalities, the number and/or strength of negative voices and the spread of misinformation seem to be increasing online, which City staff find challenging to manage.

- There is community misunderstanding of what the City is responsible for vs. other levels of government. The City can do more to take advantage of opportunities to share accomplishments and work.

- Website content is not consistently updated. Leaders report that information is hard to find. Processes are not in place to ensure content is kept current or regularly reviewed to leverage the website as a strong communications tool.

- Local media landscape is shrinking with less coverage on municipal issues, and fewer investigative, in-depth stories.

- Seniors, businesses, and youth have been identified as hard-to-reach audiences. As such, communications to these groups is disjointed.

- Expectations for public engagement are increasing. Recent City efforts have improved the municipality's overall approach. However, a corporate framework, toolkit, improved processes/resourcing and training would help ensure a more coordinated approach across the organization and result in more meaningful engagement. Other municipalities are also finding non-traditional ways to reach a broader audience. The City may need to consider expanding how it engages the community.

- Community expectations for digital customer service delivery are increasing. The City is working on its strategy and its ability to communicate quickly.

- Leaders have identified a need for improved issues management processes. Information and misinformation travels quickly. Municipalities need to be ready to respond quickly and effectively when issues arise in order to maintain public trust and confidence. Strong processes, with clear roles and responsibilities, will help the City improve its ability to get ahead of issues.

Municipal Communications Maturity

Redbrick has developed a proprietary *Municipal Communications Maturity Index* to review and map an organization's current state of communications and identify opportunities for improvement.

The index is based on a review of other business and public relations maturity models, communications capability frameworks, and current municipal best practice and future trends.

Mapping of the City of North Bay is informed by the qualitative and quantitative research identified in the Methodology.

Municipal Communications Maturity Index: City of North Bay

	1. Side Hustler	2. Doer	3. Ally	4. Strategist	5. Partner
Organizational structure and competency	Fractured and off the side of the desk; under resourced, limited skills and/or training; no access to the senior leadership team	Limited dedicated resource(s); emerging training/development; report to manager or director with limited to no access to the senior leadership team	Resourcing for service level expectations; some training/development; duo reporting to CAO and other	Strong alignment to service objectives; sufficient resources and varied skillsets to meet needs; development plans in place; report to CAO with seat at senior table	Sufficient complement for entire organization's communications needs; multidisciplinary; function is equal partner and integrated at senior table; embedded continuous improvement
Strategic Business Purpose	No Corporate Communications (CC) strategy (internal or external); tactical	Minimal involvement in business strategy and decision making;	Aligns with business strategy emerging; consulted for some key decisions	Function aligned with overall strategy; CC strategy followed	Value Creator: involved in and advise on all business strategy
Organizational Accountability and Processes	No processes; no KPIs or use of analytics/data; no standards nor clear roles or confidence in communications	Some standardized processes and service level standards; minimal KPIs, use of analytics and reporting; emerging confidence in communications; some collaboration with departments	Processes are standardized, basic service standards in place; some analytics/data and reporting; regular collaboration; some confidence in communications	KPIs tracked; often data driven with regular reporting; continuous improvement; expected collaboration and high confidence in communications	Advanced analytics and reporting and KPIs; demonstrated impact to business goals; standardized/streamlined processes; clear roles; built in collaboration
Operational Investment and Backing	No budget, tools nor automation; no flexibility to take innovative approaches	Minimal budget, basic tools; limited to no flexibility to take innovative approaches	Some budget and automation; emerging use of communications/marketing tools, some flexibility to take innovative approaches	Centralized budget, more advanced business tools in place; often innovative	Centrally owned and managed budget for all municipal communications; proactive adoption of new tools; always seek innovative approaches
Community Building, Accessibility and Inclusivity	Reactive issues management with no communications involvement; no focus on strategic relationship building or on accessible / inclusive communications*	Some involvement in issues management and strategic relationships; some accessible and inclusive communications	Often involved in issues management and strategic relationships; communications are often accessible and inclusive	Always consulted for issues management and guiding strategic relationships; communications are always accessible and inclusive	Communications has influence and guides ethical response and strategic relationships; Accessible and inclusive approach across the organization

*accessible and inclusive communications mean the use of plain language, visual storytelling, following AODA guidelines and inclusivity best practices / language demonstrating a welcoming workplace / community

Recommendations

5 Recommended Priority Areas to Improve City Communications

1. Vision and Priority Setting

2. Mindset and Structure

3. Positive Storytelling and Community Building

4. Measurement and Evaluation

5. Public Engagement

Proposed Supporting Action Plan
(by priority area)

1. Vision and Priority Setting

Goal: Demonstrate, across the organization, a commitment to the importance of enhanced communication

Action	Priority	Timing
• Establish a clear vision and guiding principles for communications	H	2024
• Create 2024 communications calendar to set first-year priorities aligned with budget and business plans	H	2024

• Develop an internal communications strategy
   • Establish a vision and goals for internal communications based on staff feedback
   • Determine central channel to provide information and ensure access to all
     • Establish and promote the Intranet as central source of information
     • Rollout regular screensavers pointing to new content
   • Identify tools and tactics to ensure all staff are reached (e.g., Recorded "Coffee With…" videos with different managers and staff across the organization to learn about what they do; newsletter written by staff and printed to be available to all)
   • Establish clear roles, responsibilities and expectations related to internal communications
   • Use recent staff input to set a baseline and measure success and improvement based on goals set
	H	2024
		
		Rollout in 2025

• Develop a layered communications professional development plan across the organization for various staff and Council:
   • Communications staff (e.g., public engagement through the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), communications analytics and data, APR or IABC designation)
   • City staff (e.g., media training – every 2-3 years; council report/plain language writing and presenting to Council – every 3 years; issues management for leaders; IAP2 public engagement certification for identified staff who lead engagement initiatives; change management)
   • Council (e.g., communications for elected officials; media and social media training – every term of Council)
	M	2025

• Align communications with customer service. • Establish regular connection, sharing and processes with customer service reps	M	2025
• Allocate central budget for communications, including tools, paid advertising	M	2025 or 2026

Mindset and Structure

Goal: Sufficient capacity, increased proactive planning and common understanding of roles / responsibilities

Action	Priority	Timing

• Consider increasing communications capacity. Based on data from comparable municipalities and the increasing demands on communications, the City has a business case to increase the current complement of full-time equivalents in communications. Redbrick recommends:
    • Phase One: make the current intern position permanent
    • Phase Two: enhance Communications Structure to:
        • Communications Manager
        • Two full-time officers, specialists or coordinators
	H	2024

• Establish regular connections and collaboration with departments:
    • Annual planning meetings after budget passed
    • Quarterly check-in meetings
    • Expand use of project-specific meetings as needed
	H	Through 2024

• Develop an operational communications plan
    • Details roles, responsibilities, processes and timelines for communications activities (planning, issues management, website and social media, media relations, public engagement etc.)
    • Conduct a communications road show to rollout out the plan (include brand guide in road show)
	H	2024

• Ensure consistent use of brand guide and voice: create templates or toolkits as needed	M	2024
• Ensure new employee onboarding includes communications policies and branding	L	2025 and beyond

Mindset and Structure continued

Action	Priority	Timing
• Develop a communications annual planning calendar	H	2024
• Review and update current communications policies: media relations, social media etc.	H	2024
• Strengthen the City's issues management framework: 　• Develop processes, early warning systems, roles, consistent briefing note for Council, preapproved messages, include EDI positioning	H	2024
• Establish an easy process for staff to share good news stories with communications (possible short online form)	H	2024
• Create a communications brief to initiate projects	M	2025
• Enhance the City's photo library: 　• Identify staff to take photos, provide training and guidelines 　• Take seasonal photos: use communications staff or hire a photographer per season 　• Rollout a community photo contest campaign as seen in other municipalities	M	2025 and beyond
• Update the City's social media policy including establishing social guidelines and criteria for City channels to ensure the municipality is leveraging each channel strategically (develop a business case and plan for each channel)	L	2025 to 2026

Positive Storytelling and Community Building

Goal: Tell a stronger, positive and more proactive City story

Action	Priority	Timing
• Strengthen social media content (e.g., follow more partners, reshare others' content, consistent brand and use of colour in posts; showcase more people; appropriate use of graphics per channel)	H	Through 2024
• Share regular updates and messaging with Council; make it easy for them to share corporate updates	H	Through 2024 and ongoing
• Develop a social media strategy to ensure focused and strategic use of the channels	H	2024
• Develop a social media calendar with pre-approved Days of Recognition and how the City will recognize each one	M	2025
• Share human stories of staff at work, creating authenticity and connection	M	Plan and begin 2025
• Identify local influencers/champions, strengthen relationships and invite in more voices (university, college, hospital, BIA, Community Advocate/Ambassador group)	L	2025
• Create more "quick and dirty" messaging that leads to further detail: most important take aways – increase ability to communicate quickly and provide layered information	M	With each initiative as appropriate
• Look for opportunities to target news to different audiences: seniors, youth, businesses (identify influencers who connect regularly with these audiences)	L	With each initiative as appropriate

• Establish the "Capital Projects" vision and story
     • Create a consistent process and toolkit to guide construction communications
     • Investigate opportunity to have a construction activity online, interactive map
	M
	 M
	 L
		2025
		 2025
		 2026

Measurement and Evaluation
Goal: Continuous improvement with consistent monitoring and use of data

Action	Priority	Timing
• Leverage and/or invest in technology to measure analytics and run reports (e.g., Hootsuite, Facebook Insights, Google analytics)	H	2024
• Gather current available data. Establish baseline numbers and set targets. Include any available community data from customer service calls/emails, survey results where appropriate etc.	H	2024
• Establish KPIs, aligned with business goals, to demonstrate impact	H	2024
• Establish a communications dashboard to report data consistently	M	2025
• Build in evaluation into project planning	H	With each initiative
• Report back on measures and record lessons learned	M	With each initiative

Public Engagement
Goal: Take steps to enhance the City's public engagement efforts

Action	Priority	Timing
• Consistently report back on engagement findings and how input was used to influence the decision • Add public engagement section to appropriate Council reports *(for which engagement took place)*	H	2024
• Identify staff to achieve IAP2 (International Association of Public Participation) certification	M	2025
• Develop a corporate public engagement framework that outlines the City's guiding principles to engagement. Create an accompanying toolkit for staff to enhance strategic engagement planning – include roles, responsibilities, timelines, planning questions and templates	M	2025
• Evaluate need and budget for online engagement software (e.g., Social PinPoint, Granicus)	M	2025
• Seek to engage a diversity of voices: go where people are, offer fun opportunities to engage, beyond digital	L	2025 and ongoing
• Create an annual corporate public engagement calendar to consider timing and coordinate engagement initiatives; look for opportunities to overlap or create synergies (e.g., Burlington's Annual Food for Thought)	M	2025 and ongoing

Year-by-Year Proposed High-level Action Plan

2024

Action	Priority Area
• Seek approval to increase communications staff capacity	Mindset and Structure
• Create 2024 communications calendar to set first-year priorities aligned with budget and business plans	Vision and Priority Setting
• Strengthen regular connections and collaboration with departments	Mindset and Structure
• Strengthen social media content and create more "quick and dirty" messaging that leads to further detail	Positive Storytelling and Community Building
• Increase and enhance regular updates and messaging with Council; make it easy for them to share corporate updates	Positive Storytelling and Community Building
• Build in evaluation into project planning. Report back on measures and record lessons learned (including public engagement)	Measurement and Evaluation
• Establish an easy process for staff to share good news stories with communications	Positive Storytelling and Community Building
• Leverage current measurement tools to increase reporting back to leadership and council related to communications impact, reach and success	Measurement and Evaluation
• Develop an operational communications plan with a clear vision and guiding principles for communications	Mindset and Structure
• Ensure consistent use of brand guide and voice: create templates or toolkits as needed	Mindset and Structure
• Create and rollout a communications brief to initiate projects	Mindset and Structure
• Engage leadership in reviewing issues management processes	Mindset and Structure

2025

Action	Priority Area
• Develop a communications annual planning calendar	Positive Storytelling and Community Building
• Create an annual corporate public engagement calendar	Public Engagement
• Develop a social media calendar with pre-approved Days of Recognition and showing City staff at work	Positive Storytelling and Community Building
• Establish processes to align communications with customer service	Vision and Priority Setting
• Allocate central budget for communications, including tools, paid advertising	Vision and Priority Setting
• Ensure new employee onboarding includes communications policies and branding	Mindset and Structure
• Strengthen the City's issues management framework working with leadership	Positive Storytelling and Community Building
• Develop a social media strategy and local influencers	Positive Storytelling and Community Building
• Review and update current communications policies: media relations, social media etc.	Positive Storytelling and Community Building
• Work with HR and other areas to develop an internal communications strategy	Vision and Priority Setting
• Gather current available data. Establish baseline numbers. Identify gaps. Set targets where possible.	Measurement and Evaluation

2026 forward

Action	Priority Area
• Establish 2026 KPIs, aligned with business goals and establish a communications dashboard to report data consistently	Measurement and Evaluation
• Establish a communications dashboard to report data consistently	Measurement and Evaluation
• Develop a corporate public engagement framework and an accompanying toolkit for staff	Public Engagement
• Enhance the City's photo library	Mindset and Structure
• Develop a layered communications professional development plan. Identify staff to achieve IAP2 certification	Vision and Priority Setting
• Seek to engage a diversity of voices and consider non-traditional engagement methods	Public Engagement
• Evaluate need and budget for online engagement software	Public Engagement
• Look for opportunities to target news to different audiences	Positive Storytelling and Community Building
• Establish the "Capital Projects" vision and story. Develop a communications toolkit for staff for consistency.	Positive Storytelling and Community Building

Priority KPIs

Communications KPIs vary depending on the municipality's goals and priorities. To begin with, for the City of North Bay, improvement in communications will be measured by the implementation of the recommendations and actions proposed in this report. Is progress being made? Are new processes in place? Is cross-departmental collaboration with communications occurring more often. In addition to these KPIs, standard measurements, such as social media and website analytics can also be incorporated as part of overall evaluation of success and improvement.

Measure #1: (internal) More proactive planning and collaboration
- Planning calendars in place; projects mapped out
- Number of communications plans developed
- Number of departments engaging with communications

Measure #2: (internal) Greater organizational competency
- Defined roles and responsibilities for communications
- Updated policies in place
- Number of communications-related training sessions completed

Measure #3: (external) Higher engagement and positive reaction
- Increased social media engagement
- Number of stories shared related to City accomplishments
- Number of stories shared showing daily City work
- Public engagement participation numbers, diversity of voices, feedback on how meaningful the engagement was

Thank you