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COMMUNICATIONS

Town of Goderich
Corporate Communications Plan

August 2025

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Executive Summary

The Town of Goderich has a solid foundation for connecting with residents, based on the commitment of Council and staff to transparency and service. Communications responsibilities have traditionally been shared informally across departments, but the Town now sees the need for a more consistent, proactive, and coordinated approach to both communication and engagement.

This report presents a practical and scalable Communications Plan, grounded in extensive consultation with Council and staff, a review of existing policies and channels, and research into best practices across Ontario. It outlines realistic, phased recommendations to help the Town:

- Clarify the Town's communication and engagement mandate
- Define the roles and responsibilities of Council, Senior Leadership Team members, and staff
- Strengthen policies and procedures for clarity and alignment
- Build internal capacity through training, tools, and planning support
- Align public engagement with decision-making processes
- Identify scalable options for staffing or external support

Recognizing that the Town currently operates without a dedicated communications position, this plan presents flexible options for addressing this need. Some actions can be undertaken internally over time, others may benefit from external support, such as project-based help or a communications retainer.

The plan aims to equip Goderich with the confidence, structure, and tools needed to build trust, reduce misinformation, support constructive dialogue, and meet the communication expectations of residents, without overwhelming existing capacity.

Setting the Stage: Why This Work Matters Now

Municipal communication is no longer a "nice-to-have". Communications is a core function that enables democratic decision-making, transparent service delivery, and meaningful public participation. In 2025, the demands on local government communications are growing:

- Residents expect more timely, accessible, and interactive updates
- Online platforms amplify both civic dialogue and unconstructive discourse
- Misinformation can spread quickly, especially on contentious issues
- Staff and Council are increasingly confronted by misinformation, public frustration, or even hostility
- Municipalities are being asked to do more with limited capacity

In Goderich, Council and staff demonstrate a clear commitment to transparent service and open governance. As the Town grows and public expectations continue to evolve,

there is a timely opportunity to strengthen internal coordination, formalize communication practices, and explore scalable tools to support more consistent, proactive outreach. Consultations revealed a strong appetite, for both staff and residents, for deeper engagement and more timely, accessible communication, particularly around major projects and decisions.

This plan responds directly to that context. It offers a framework that reflects the Town's current capacity, builds on its strengths, and prepares the organization to meet changing needs, all while maintaining its small-town character and collaborative culture.

The Role of Strategic Communication in Local Government

In today's rapidly evolving, hyper-connected information environment, municipalities must move beyond reactive communication. Without clear strategies, shared messaging, and consistent planning, local governments risk being misunderstood, misrepresented, or missing opportunities to engage meaningfully with the communities they serve.

Effective municipal communication isn't just about transparency; it's about building trust, encouraging participation, and preventing misinformation from spreading. It also ensures that Council and staff are aligned internally and prepared to respond confidently and consistently.

A strong municipal communications approach helps to:

- Build public trust in decisions and processes
- Promote constructive, respectful public discourse
- Reduce confusion and misinformation about Town projects or policies
- Help residents understand complex or controversial issues
- Reinforce the professionalism of Council and staff
- Ensure consistency across departments and platforms
- Manage expectations and reduce frustration or speculation

For municipalities like Goderich, where communications responsibilities are decentralized and resources are limited, a shared framework, supported by tools, training, and coordinated messaging, is critical. This plan lays the groundwork for that structure, while allowing flexibility to grow in alignment with the Town's vision and capacity.

Research Summary

Activities Completed

- Interviews with the CAO, Clerk, and the Senior Leadership Team
- Individual consultation sessions with each Member of Council

- Review of communications channels - website, social media, and project communications
- Review of community-based social media platforms
- Environmental scan of practices in other municipalities
- Review of relevant policy documents:
  - Procedure By-law
  - Code of Conduct
  - Complaint Protocol
  - Council-Staff Relations Policy
  - Communications and Social Media Policies

Key Findings

- Strong engagement from Council and staff
  - There is a shared commitment to improving communications and better informing residents, grounded in a strong culture of service and transparency.
- Desire for greater clarity and consistency
  - Council and staff expressed a need for clearer roles, expectations, and communication protocols to help them communicate confidently and in alignment.
- Reactive communication is the norm
  - Most communication is issued in response to inquiries or issues rather than being proactively planned, limiting the Town's ability to shape public understanding or get ahead of emerging concerns.
- Strain on staff capacity
  - Repetitive inquiries and unclear communication processes divert staff from their core responsibilities, especially when multiple departments or individuals respond to similar questions without coordination.
- Inconsistent and underused digital channels
  - The Town's website layout is strong but lacks up-to-date, resident-focused content, particularly on the homepage and major project pages.
  - The social media presence of Council members varies in terms of tone, format, and frequency, lacking consistency.
  - News releases and updates are infrequent, and accessibility practices are inconsistently applied.
- Information gaps and risk of misinformation
  - Project updates are often embedded in lengthy PDFs or written in technical language, which limits accessibility.
  - Some local news outlets are linking directly to the Town's channels, making it essential that content is accurate and current to avoid misinterpretation.
- Survey results reinforce the need for improvement

- Communication ranked among the top five priorities in the 2023–2027 Strategic Plan engagement process.
- Residents, staff, and Council rated current communications between 3.4 and 3.6 out of 5, citing the need for more timely, transparent updates and improved website content (2023-2027 Strategic Action Plan)
- Residents primarily rely on the Town's website and social media for information, channels they perceive as lacking fresh and consistent content.
- Gaps in internal coordination
  - Communication around major initiatives are often managed informally or within departments, without a coordinated approach or centralized oversight.
- Mixed experiences with the Public Forum
  - Although meant to demonstrate transparency, the one-way format of the Forum has caused frustration for both residents and Council, due to limited opportunities to respond meaningfully at the time.

SCOR Analysis (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, Risks)

Strengths

- Engaged leadership: Council and staff are actively involved and show a clear willingness to improve communication practices.
- Strong policy foundations: Core policies (e.g., Media Relations, Social Media, Council–Staff Relations) provide a solid starting point for clearer roles and expectations.
- Commitment to transparency: Public input is valued and supported through recent projects and updates to the Procedure By-law.
- Civic interest: High public attendance and correspondence with Council reflect an engaged and invested community.

Challenges

- No centralized communications function: The absence of a dedicated role or team results in reactive, uncoordinated communications and duplicated effort.
- Inconsistent messaging: Departments and Council often communicate independently, increasing the potential for confusion.
- Limited tools and templates: Without shared resources or planning systems, communications are more time-consuming and more challenging to standardize.
- Pressure on existing capacity: Staff time is diverted from strategic priorities due to the need to respond to recurring questions or address misunderstandings.

- Social media uncertainty: Council members vary in their confidence and activity on social media, citing concerns about tone, backlash, and lack of support.
- Public Forum limitations: The current format sometimes heightens frustration, as residents may not feel that their concerns are addressed in real-time.

Opportunities

- Revise the Public Forum model: Transition to more accessible and interactive engagement tools (e.g., open houses, surveys, delegations).
- Develop a communications toolkit: Templates, FAQs, social media guidance, and project update formats can support consistency across the organization.
- Expand training and support: Equip Council and staff with practical tools for handling public inquiries, managing social media, and addressing misinformation.
- Modernize digital communications: Refresh website content, enhance project visibility, and implement a social media calendar to promote more timely and coordinated messaging.
- Clarify communications roles and flow: Clearly define who is responsible for communicating specific information, when it should be shared, and how it should be delivered across the Council, staff, and any future communication roles. Review and confirm these roles and responsibilities quarterly to ensure they remain effective and to keep them top of mind across the organization.
- Fill the local media gap: Be the primary and trusted source of timely local information, reducing reliance on third-party interpretation.

Risks

- Spread of misinformation: Without proactive communication, gaps may be filled by speculation or incomplete information, leading to further confusion.
- Burnout or disengagement: Reactive communication demands strain staff capacity and reduces time available for strategic work.
- Missed opportunities for early engagement: Residents may feel decisions are already made if engagement only happens at the end of the process.
- Declining trust or credibility: If residents feel their voices are not being heard meaningfully, public confidence in Council decisions may erode.

Strategic Direction: Communication Mandate

Communications in the Town of Goderich should:

- Provide clear, timely, and accessible information
- Reflect Council's priorities and the Town's Strategic Plan

- Encourage respectful, informed public participation
- Strengthen trust in the Town's operations and decisions
- Ensure consistent messaging across departments and leadership

Roles and Responsibilities

While communication responsibilities are already understood informally within the Town, there remains some overlap and uncertainty about who communicates what, when, and how. This could result in duplication, inconsistent messaging, or gaps in the information shared with the public. The following recommended roles and responsibilities are designed to formalize these functions, reduce ambiguity, and provide a clear reference point for both Council and staff. By defining and regularly reviewing these roles, ideally on a quarterly basis, the Town can strengthen coordination, support consistent public messaging, and establish a solid foundation for updating existing policies and developing future communication and engagement guidelines.

Council

- Serve as ambassadors for the Town, share Town-issued messages with accurate, timely information with the community.
- Direct all resident and business inquiries or service requests to Town Hall rather than responding to operational matters directly.
- Represent the Town's decisions and processes consistently, even when individual votes may differ, to maintain public confidence.
- Use social media and public platforms in accordance with the Town's communications and social media guidelines, ensuring messages are aligned with official information.
- Participate in training on constructive engagement, handling misinformation, and responding to unproductive or disruptive interactions in a professional manner.

Mayor (as Head of Council)

- Serve as the primary spokesperson, unless otherwise delegated, for official Town positions and significant announcements.
- Engaging with and representing Council decisions to the media, public, and stakeholders.
- Leads public events and ceremonies, serving as a visible representative of the municipality.
- Coordinate with the CAO or their designate before making public statements on behalf of the Town to ensure accuracy and consistency.
- In a community crisis or declared emergency, the Town shall follow the Incident Management System (IMS). To ensure accurate and timeliness of public communications (major announcements (press conferences) and media

releases), the Mayor, in consultation with Municipal Emergency Control Group (MECG) members (Incident Commander, CAO and the EIO), will share only verified, official updates, coordinated through the designated Emergency Information Officer (EIO), or their designate when on vacation/sick.   This will be considered the official source of information. No independent statements or updates will be issued outside the IMS structure on any external media channels.

Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

- Provide strategic oversight of all corporate communications to ensure alignment with Council priorities and corporate objectives.
- Serve as the lead spokesperson for operational matters, delegating to senior staff where appropriate.
- Ensure that communication roles, protocols, and expectations are clearly communicated to staff and reviewed regularly.
- In a community crisis or declared emergency, follow the Incident Management System (IMS). Acting as the chief advisor to the Mayor and MECG on municipal procedures and policies, assisting with media and media relations.

Department Directors and Managers

- Oversee the communication of departmental initiatives, projects, and services, ensuring that content is accurate, timely, and coordinated through the Town's established processes.
- Notify the CAO (and, where applicable, Town Communications Lead or their designate) of issues that may attract media interest or public concern.
- Use approved templates, formats, and channels for public notices, project updates, and engagement opportunities.
- Support consistent messaging by aligning departmental communications with corporate priorities and Council direction.

Communications Lead / Designate *(current state designated or future dedicated role)*
Under the current corporate structure, communications responsibilities are shared among members of the leadership team and reviewed by the CAO. As the organization grows, these functions may be consolidated under a dedicated Communications Lead/Designate role, which encompasses the following responsibilities:

- Coordinate corporate communications across all departments, serving as the central point for message development, review, and dissemination.
- Develop and maintain communications tools, templates, and guidelines for staff and Council.
- In the event of a community crisis or declared emergency, monitor and respond to emerging issues, misinformation, and public feedback in collaboration with the CAO and Incident Commander.

- Support Council and staff with media relations, public engagement planning, and clear, accessible writing.
- Serve as the Town's Emergency Information Officer in the Town's Municipal Emergency Control Group (MECG)

All Town Staff

- Share accurate, approved information about Town programs, services, and processes within the scope of their role.
- Direct media and public inquiries outside their area of responsibility to the appropriate manager or communications lead.
- Use approved templates, channels, and guidelines when creating materials for public distribution.
- Identify and share opportunities for proactive communication with their manager or the communications lead.

Town of Goderich – Communications Roles & Responsibilities Matrix

Role	Primary Responsibilities	Key Communication Functions	When to Review
Council	Represent the Town and its decisions to the public	- Serve as ambassadors, sharing Town-issued messages - Direct all resident/business inquiries and service requests to Town Hall - Use social media and public platforms in accordance with communications and Social Media Terms of Use, ensuring messages are aligned with official information	Quarterly
Mayor	Head of Council and primary spokesperson	- Speak to major Town announcements and decisions - Represent Council to media/public - Coordinate statements with Incident Commander, CAO and EIO/Designate	Quarterly
CAO	Strategic oversight of corporate communications	- Lead operational communications - Approve key messages - Assign spokespersons	Quarterly

Directors & Managers	Lead departmental communication	• Ensure accuracy/timeliness of updates • Flag emerging issues to CAO • Use approved templates and processes	Quarterly
Communications Lead / Designate *(future)* *(current coporate structure in place as noted above)*	Coordinate corporate messaging and channels	• Manage website, social media, and content calendar • Develop tools/templates • Monitor and address misinformation • Support public engagement	Quarterly
All Town Staff	Share accurate information within their role	• Respond within scope • Use approved tools/templates • Flag opportunities for proactive communication	Quarterly

Strategic Directions

The following strategic recommendations directly address the themes identified in the research, consultations, and SCOR analysis. These findings confirm that, although the Town of Goderich benefits from engaged leadership, solid policy foundations, and a culture of transparency, there are opportunities to clarify roles, enhance coordination, and move from primarily reactive communication to a proactive, planned approach. Staff and Council share a desire for clearer expectations, updated tools, and consistent messaging across all channels.

These recommendations aim to address those needs while building on existing strengths. They offer a practical, scalable plan for immediate improvements and long-term capacity building, ensuring that communications are more coordinated and consistent, and better equipped to reduce misinformation, promote constructive dialogue, and strengthen public trust. Each recommendation considers the Town's current resources, providing options that can be implemented internally or with external support. Collectively, they lay a strong foundation for updating policies, clarifying roles, and aligning communication practices with community expectations.

1. ## Recommendation: Evolve Communications and Engagement Policies to Reflect Current Practices

Rationale:
The Town of Goderich has a strong foundation of policies that demonstrate a

commitment to transparency and public input. There is now an opportunity to update these policies to align with modern tools, expectations, and community needs.

For example, the current Procedure By-law includes a Public Forum near the end of Council meetings, which may limit the usefulness of feedback, especially if it is offered after a discussion has already occurred or a decision has been made. Council meetings serve an important governance role and are not always the best setting for real-time public consultation, except in cases of legislated planning application public meetings. For major projects, initiatives, or contentious issues, residents gain the most when engagement happens earlier in the process through dedicated and accessible formats.

Updating policies and procedures can help ensure communications are proactive, engagement is meaningful, and both Council and the public are clear on how and when to participate.

Recommended Actions:

1. Update the Communications and Media Relations Policy
   - Reflect the Town's commitment to proactive, two-way communication.
     Suggested wording:
       - The Town recognizes that effective communication is a two-way process. Corporate social media accounts (e.g., Facebook) will be managed as official information channels, with the expectation that comments and questions are acknowledged in a timely, professional, and respectful manner. Staff will respond where clarification or factual information can be provided and will redirect inquiries to appropriate channels when necessary. Inappropriate or offensive content will not be tolerated in accordance with the Town's Social Media Policy.
   - Include guidance on digital communication, emergency messaging, and interdepartmental coordination.
     Suggested wording:
       - Digital communication: The Town will use digital tools (e.g., website, e-newsletters, social media) as primary channels for timely, accessible, and accurate updates on Town services, Council decisions, and community engagement opportunities.
       - Emergency messaging: In the event of a community crisis or declared emergency the Town shall follow the Incident Management System (IMS). To ensure accurate and timeliness of public communications (major announcements (press conferences) and media releases), the Mayor, in consultation with Municipal Emergency Control Group (MECG) members (Incident Commander, CAO and the EIO), will share only verified, official updates, coordinated through the designated Emergency Information Officer (EIO)(Communications Lead), or their designate when on vacation/sick. This will be considered the official

source of information. No independent statements or updates will be issued outside the IMS structure on any external media channels.
- o Interdepartmental coordination: Departments are expected to work collaboratively to ensure consistency of messaging. Major initiatives will be coordinated through the CAO's office to avoid duplication, ensure alignment, and maintain a unified voice.

2. Revise the Town's Social Media Policy and Adopt a Social Media Policy for Council
   - Council considers adopting a Social Media Policy tailored specifically to Council to address newly emerging issues in the municipal sector, supporting best practices in social media. The policy should align with the Council's Code of Conduct. Other municipal Councils have adopted these policies, such as the Toronto, Chatham-Kent, and Prescott.
     - o While social media can be an excellent tool for communicating quickly with constituents, obtaining input, and being transparent, it can also breed incivility that is generally avoided in face-to-face interactions.
     - o Adopting a policy provides Council with the opportunity to manage their accounts effectively, as well as establish consistent parameters for elected officials participating in social media.
     - o The elements of a draft policy could include guidance for:
       - Overall principles
       - Members accounts
       - Election campaign period
       - Monitoring and engagement principles
     - o In the interim, in the absence for a formal policy, Council should consider:
       - Council members are encouraged to use their personal accounts responsibly, clearly indicating when opinions expressed are personal and not official Town positions.
       - As per best practice, Council members should delineate between their personal and elected official accounts, resulting in independent social media accounts for their personal or elected official business (i.e., Mayor X – official account of the Mayor of Goderich, Councillor X)
       - Members of Council are encouraged to share official, approved Town posts rather than creating their own content on Council decisions, Town programs, services, or initiatives.
   - In the Town's Social Media Policy
     - o Clarify roles and expectations for corporate and personal use for employees.
       Suggested wording:
       - Corporate social media accounts will be managed by designated staff and reflect the Town's official voice.

- Personal accounts must not disclose confidential information or undermine the reputation of the Town, Council, or staff.
    - Implement a Social Media Terms of Use on the Town's website, and link to the Terms of Use in the 'About' section of the social media platform. **See Appendix A.**
    - Include accessibility standards (AODA) and tone guidelines for constructive dialogue.
      Suggested wording:
        - AODA: All corporate posts will meet or exceed Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) information and communications standards for municipalities, including the use of plain language, alternative text for images, captioning for video, and accessible formatting.
        - Tone and constructive dialogue: The Town's social media presence will model respectful and constructive communication. Content will be written in plain, inclusive language, avoiding jargon. Comments and questions will be engaged with, where appropriate, fostering transparency and dialogue without entering into unproductive debate.

3. Review and strengthen the Council-Staff Relations Policy
   - Strengthen expectations for collaborative and respectful communication.
     Suggested wording:
       - Council members and staff will communicate with mutual respect, professionalism, and an understanding of their respective roles. Differences of opinion are expected but will be expressed constructively.
   - Outline principles for sharing information and responding to public inquiries.
     Suggested wording:
       - Staff will provide Council with timely, accurate, and relevant information to support decision-making. In return, Council members will direct resident inquiries through the appropriate staff channels rather than responding independently with unofficial or incomplete information. Staff responses to public inquiries will be factual, consistent, and documented when appropriate.

4. Develop a clear Public Engagement Framework
   - The Town will adopt and implement the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) for public consultation.
       - The Town will use IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation to guide when and how to engage the community, ensuring transparency and meaningful opportunities for input before decisions are finalized.

- o Staff will use a standardized engagement toolkit that outlines clear processes and provides templates for surveys, open houses, public information centres (PICs), and digital engagement formats.
- o Public input opportunities will be identified and communicated at the outset of major projects, so residents understand when and how they can provide feedback.
- o Provide consistent messaging to the public about how they can get involved in projects, policies, or major initiatives.
- o These actions would be part of implementing the public engagement framework.

5. The Public Forum during Council meetings should be reconsidered to either be scheduled at the beginning of the agenda with a three-minute time limit per speaker or removed altogether. In either case, residents will continue to be directed to more effective channels for providing input on initiatives.

6. Promote and simplify the delegation process so residents know how to contribute effectively to Council decisions.
   - Revise content on the Speaking at Council webpage to provide a plain-language step-by-step on "How to Speak at Council".
   - Differentiate between the format opportunities to speak at Council statutory public meetings, delegating to a Council report, and the public forum.
   - Revise the online delegation form to use plain language and focus on the end-user.
   - Update the deadlines and requirements section on the website using plain language (e.g., presentation materials submitted ahead of time).
   - Clearly indicate on the website the staff support available to assist first-time delegates in navigating the process.

Outcome:
Together, these updates will foster a more transparent and more inclusive environment for communication and engagement, helping residents understand how to be heard and ensuring that Council meetings focus on informed, timely decision-making rather than serving as a public engagement forum.

2. Recommendation: Enhance Digital Communications and Online Content

Rationale:
With limited local media coverage, municipalities like Goderich are increasingly responsible for sharing their own stories. Residents depend more than ever on official Town channels such as the website and social media to stay informed. When these channels are not consistently updated or project details are hard to find, an information gap appears that can lead to speculation, misinformation, or frustration.

Timely and accessible digital communications ensure residents receive updates, decisions, and input opportunities directly from the Town. Proactive content/marketing planning also alleviates staff workload by streamlining workflows and cutting down on last-minute communication requests.

Recommended Actions:

1. Update key sections of the Town website, including popular pages like Council meetings, major projects, and public notices. Focus on clarity, simple language, and making information accessible.
2. Create a consistent, resident-friendly approach to project pages with the end-user in mind. Include dedicated sections for key updates, community impact, FAQs, timelines, opportunities for input, and a background section for more technical information, such as technical staff reports, consultant reports, and terms of reference.
3. Ensure the social media content calendar is shared with all members of the Senior Leadership team to coordinate messaging across departments and ensure timely, consistent updates throughout the year.
4. Ensure Council decisions and project milestones are communicated in a timely manner using plain language summaries on the website and social channels.
5. The Town should explore new e-newsletter options or revise the current website subscriber updates to make information clearer and easier to access.
   - **Current issues:** Subscriber emails simply replicate the project webpage. Updates appear near the bottom, buried among 25+ hyperlinks, making them difficult to find.
   - **Recommended improvements:**
     1. Revise the email template so the actual update appears at the top, with only essential links included.
     2. Post updates directly on the project webpage (rather than as a PDF) so the same content is delivered to subscribers.
     3. Align improvements with redesigned project pages (see previous recommendation) to ensure updates are written in a resident-friendly, easy-to-scan format.

Outcome:
By strengthening its digital presence, the Town can close the local information gap, reduce confusion or misinformation, and build public trust through timely, transparent, and coordinated communication. A more structured digital approach also improves internal efficiency and reinforces the Town's role as the primary, credible source of local information.

3. Recommendation: Develop a Framework for Responding to Misinformation, Disinformation, and Unconstructive Dialogue

Rationale:

As public discourse becomes more polarised and digital platforms amplify misinformation, municipalities must be prepared to respond efficiently and professionally. In Goderich, staff and Council have observed increasing difficulties in addressing false claims, managing online commentary, and engaging residents who are not participating constructively. Without clear protocols, responses may be inconsistent, reactive, or altogether avoided, potentially harming public trust and credibility.

A framework can help guide appropriate, consistent, and proportionate responses, whether online, in public meetings, or through direct communication, while ensuring the Town remains respectful, transparent, and focused on facts.

Recommended Actions:

- Develop response protocols for both online and in-person situations, specifying when and how to correct misinformation and when to disengage.
- Establish escalation procedures for harmful, harassing, or disruptive interactions (e.g., when to involve the Clerk, CAO, or refer to a Code of Conduct or legal support).
- Include example responses and tone guidelines to help staff and the Council communicate facts calmly, respectfully, and non-defensively.
- Integrate training on misinformation and disinformation into Council and staff professional development, including how to identify false information and respond clearly and confidently.
- Track emerging issues with regular check-ins or a digital sentiment scan to spot and prepare for recurring misinformation trends before they grow.
- Ensure responses align with the Town's Code of Conduct, Staff-Council Relations Policy, and Social Media Policy, so they are supported by policy and not seen as personal. Updates to these policies should be the first step and noted in the previous recommendations in this report.

Outcome:

A proactive, policy-supported approach will strengthen the Town's capacity to handle misinformation effectively and consistently, reduce reputational risk, and encourage respectful dialogue, even when issues are contentious.

4. Recommendation: Build Internal Capacity Through Training, Tools, and Collaboration

Rationale:

Council and staff in Goderich are deeply committed to engaging the community, but currently lack shared tools, consistent training, and dedicated supports to perform

communication tasks confidently. Without a dedicated communications role, it becomes even more essential to provide internal teams with practical support, templates, and guidance.

By strengthening internal capacity, the Town can improve its ability to provide accurate, timely, and consistent information to residents, while promoting a respectful and constructive tone in both in-person and online interactions.

Recommended Actions:

1. Training for Mayor and Council Members (to be included in Council Training Matrix)
   - Provide practical and accessible training during Council orientation or annual refreshers on:
     - Best practices for social media conduct and tone
     - Approaches to engaging respectfully with residents
     - Guidelines for sharing Town-approved or corporate messages
     - Responding constructively to public concerns, including how to address misinformation, disinformation, and disruptive commentary while maintaining professionalism
2. Training for Staff (To be included in Staff Training Matrix and Onboarding for New Employees)
   - Provide ongoing professional development opportunities focused on:
     - Writing in plain, accessible language
     - Handling resident inquiries with empathy and consistency
     - Designing inclusive and accessible content across platforms
     - De-escalating challenging conversations, especially when dialogue becomes unproductive or misleading
3. Communication Tools and Templates
   - Develop a suite of easy-to-use templates and supports, including:
     - Public notice templates and messaging checklists
     - Project FAQs and "at-a-glance" summary web pages
     - Council meeting highlights formatted for web and social sharing
     - Planning tools for public open houses or information sessions
   - The Town should update its existing Social Media Response Chart (part of the Social Media Policy) to provide clearer direction on how to comment, monitor, and post online. The revised guidelines should go beyond simple response categories to:
     - Promote respectful, healthy public dialogue.
     - Provide strategies for addressing misinformation and disinformation.
     - Offer staff practical steps for monitoring and responding consistently across platforms.
     - These updated guidelines would be developed and rolled out during the implementation phase of this plan.

4. Internal Resource Hub
   - Create a centralized folder or intranet space where staff can access:
     - Approved templates, tone guidance, branding elements, and digital tools
     - Examples of effective messaging for various platforms
     - Standardized communication protocols for project leads and departments

Outcome:

These actions will promote a more coordinated and confident communications culture across the organization, empowering staff and Council to engage effectively, respond constructively, and ensure residents receive the information they need. Capacity will gradually increase, without requiring significant new investment.

Budgetary Considerations

Implementing this communications plan does not require a full-time communications department. However, a realistic investment in training, tools, and strategic support will be necessary to achieve the Town's goals. The following costs are estimated based on current market rates in the region and can be adjusted depending on the Town's preferred approach.

One-Time Investments (Year 1 Implementation)

*Item (in priority of implementation)	Estimated Cost
Mayor, Council and Staff Training (1-2 days, + prep)	$5,500 - $11,000
Creation of a comprehensive engagement framework (3 days + prep + creative + website updates to reflect new framework)	$16,200 - $20,000
Coaching (fee for service)	Billed by hourly rate (approx. $350-$375/hr)
Development of communications tools (guidelines, templates, FAQs, checklists)	$2,000 - $3,500 **per template/tool**
Policy review (development, consultation and review)	$2,000 - $3,500 **per policy**

*Estimated fees do not include HST nor additional expenses such as travel and accommodation.

Ongoing or Optional Investments

Option	Estimated Annual Cost	Notes
Part-time Communications Officer	$35,000– $55,000/year	Based on a 1-2 day/week position (or 0.3– 0.4 FTE) at competitive local rates. Supports day-to-day communications, content development, and staff coordination. Salary varies based on the

		level of experience and expertise required by the Town.
Retained Communications Support (Consulting Firm)	$8,400 per month	Up to 28 hours of work per month (approx. one day per week) Ideal for supporting the foundational elements outlined in this report - including policy review and updates, templates, engagement tools, strategic messaging, and training, particularly during initial implementation. This can be scaled by usage per month (e.g., one month only 3 hours, but one month is 30 hours)
Subscription-based tools (e.g., content scheduling, public engagement platforms)	$1,200 - $2,500/year	Optional, depending on the platform selected and internal capacity to use it. Tools could include survey platforms and automated social media posting systems (e.g., Hootsuite (social media), Granicus (public engagement)

In-Kind Contributions

Staff Time: CAO, Clerk, and Senior Leadership Team members will need to coordinate, implement and maintain content, messaging, and project updates.

CAO and Clerk Support: Continued oversight and coordination of communication and engagement strategies across departments and Council.

Implementation Guidance

These investments are scalable and can be phased over time. For example:

- Short-term: Retain external support while building internal capacity and implementing foundational policies and tools.
- Medium-term: Hire part-time staff or reallocate duties once systems are in place and engagement expectations increase.
- Long-term: Reassess communication needs as the community grows or new projects emerge.

Conclusion

The Town of Goderich is well-positioned to enhance its communication and engagement strategies in a manner that aligns with its organizational culture and the community's expectations. Council and staff have demonstrated a strong commitment to progress, and there is a solid foundation of policies, practices, and goodwill to build upon.

This plan provides a practical and scalable roadmap to modernize communications, beginning with clarifying roles, updating policies, and equipping staff and Council with the right tools and training. It also offers options for building capacity, whether through internal staff, external support, or a combination of both.

Investing in strategic communications will foster more informed public discussions, build trust in decision-making, and enhance coordination among the Council, staff, and the community. Implementation can be phased based on available resources, with initial efforts focused on key needs: messaging consistency, engagement clarity, and internal coordination.

Whether through new staffing, retained expertise, or incremental improvements, these recommendations are designed to align with the Town's pace, budget, and priorities, helping Goderich develop a communication strategy that is transparent, inclusive, and future-ready.

Appendix A – Town of Goderich Social Media Terms of Use

Town of Goderich – Social Media Terms of Use

The Town of Goderich uses social media to share information, updates, and opportunities for residents to connect with their local government. Our goal is to foster respectful, inclusive, and constructive dialogue. By participating on the Town's social media channels, you agree to follow these Terms of Use.

The Town monitors social media accounts during regular business hours (Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.) and during community emergencies. While we welcome questions and comments, please note that social media is not a substitute for official consultation processes, such as surveys, open houses, or delegations to Council.

Commenting Terms of Use

To keep our online spaces safe and respectful, the Town may remove posts or comments that:

- Use abusive, threatening, defamatory, or offensive language.
- Promote hatred, harassment, or violence against individuals or groups protected under the Ontario Human Rights Code.
- Share personal or confidential information without consent.
- Spread misinformation or disinformation, or intentionally mislead the public.
- Are repetitive, spam, or unrelated to the topic being discussed.
- Promote illegal activity, infringe on copyright, or advertise commercial products or services.
- Compromise public safety or the security of Town staff or residents.

Users who repeatedly disregard these Terms of Use may be blocked from the Town's social media platforms.

Our Approach to Engagement

- **Respectful dialogue:** We encourage constructive discussion and diverse perspectives.
- **Timely information:** The Town will provide updates as soon as reasonably practicable.
- **Fact-based communication:** Where misinformation appears, the Town may provide clarification or links to reliable sources.
- **Consistency:** All information shared on Town channels reflects Official Town positions or updates.

Emergencies

In the event of a community crisis or declared emergency, the Town shall follow the Incident Management System (IMS). To ensure accurate and timeliness of public

communications (major announcements (press conferences) and media releases), the Mayor, in consultation with Municipal Emergency Control Group (MECG) members (Incident Commander, CAO and the EIO), will share only verified, official updates, coordinated through the designated Emergency Information Officer (EIO), or their designate when on vacation/sick. This will be considered the official source of information. No independent statements or updates will be issued outside the IMS structure on any external media channels.

Questions or Concerns

If you have questions about these Terms of Use or wish to report inappropriate content on the Town's social media channels, please complete the [Customer Service Feedback online form] (link to be inserted).

The Town of Goderich is committed to an inclusive, respectful, and informed online community. Thank you for helping us maintain a constructive space for everyone.