

Report

City of Merritt
REGULAR Council Meeting
August 18, 2020

File Number: 0620

To: Scott Hildebrand, Chief Administrative Officer
From: Will George, Economic Development & Tourism Manager
Date: July 16, 2020
Subject: City of Merritt Communication Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council adopt the City of Merritt Communication Plan

AND THAT Council directs staff to execute the recommended Implementation Plan in the Communications Plan.

Background:

The Communication Strategic Plan was identified in July 2019 as a Council Strategic Priority. During discussions on creating this Plan, it was identified additional staff support would be required to implement the Plan and develop a new City of Merritt website in-house. In response, the City of Merritt hired a Special Projects Coordinator, in November 2019, to work with existing staff and execute these high priority projects.

In 2019, the City of Merritt established the Communications Department to enhance and increase overall City Communications. This department is under the portfolio of the Economic Development, Communications and Tourism Manager. Starting in November 2019, City of Merritt staff have been working to develop the Merritt Communication Plan to support all City Departments. The decision to create the Merritt Communication Plan in-house ensured the Plan was focused on Merritt and created without high cost consulting fees.

During the development process, City staff analyzed more than 20 communication plans from communities across North America. These included communities such as: The Peace River Regional District, District of Squamish, City of Dawson Creek, and the City

of Nanaimo. The structure and layout of the municipal Communication Plans were reviewed and in-house vs. hiring a consultant was considered during the start of this project. City staff incorporated the leading elements of these examples, along with original local content, to produce a plan specifically tailored to Merritt.

In the creation of this plan a survey was conducted with City Council, City Staff, and local media to gather input. Survey questions were tailored to each audience such as:

- Are there issues you would like noted regarding communication between you, or your department, and other departments?
- How many hours per week do you currently utilize the services of the Communications Department?
- What is the main information platform you currently direct residents to for City related questions?
- Do you feel the City of Merritt currently provides good communication to Nicola Valley residents? 1-10
- Do you find you receive communications material from City Staff in a timely manner?

Survey feedback consisted of responses from 15 City staff, 4 Media personnel and 1 City Councillor. The anonymous survey results have been incorporated, wherever possible, into the Merritt Communication Plan.

Portions of Phase 1 in the Merritt Communications Plan have been implemented and staff are currently enhancing overall City communications. Some examples of recently completed communication projects include:

- The new City of Merritt Logo
- New City Logo branding on City Vehicles and Documents
- A Merritt Graphic Standards Guideline
- A New City of Merritt Website (Launched June 22, 2020)
- Additional City Social Media Content and Layout Upgrades
- Weekly Communication Reports to Council and City Management

The City of Merritt has traditionally relied on external media as the primary source to deliver information to citizens. To reach citizens of all demographics, the City will continue relationships with local media, while enhancing and utilizing new media channels that support the City's goal of providing more first-party information. The Communication Plan additionally provides a framework to assist the flow of information between City departments and Council. This Plan is projected to be a valuable resource for both internal and external use.

Options / discussion

1. THAT Council adopts the City of Merritt Communication Plan, and
 THAT Council directs staff to execute the recommended Implementation Plan in the Communications Plan.
2. THAT Council adopts the City of Merritt Communication Plan following Council suggested changes.
3. THAT Council receives this report for information.

Financial / Risk Implications:

Additional staff time would be required to manage the Communications Plan and implement the recommended action items.

Strategic Plan Reference:

The below is identified in the NEXT section of Council's Strategic Priorities:

- Communication Strategic Plan: Framework

City of Merritt Strategic Plans relating to the Communication Plan includes:

- City of Merritt Economic Development Action Plan- 2014/2015
- City of Merritt Official Community Plan
- City of Merritt Parks, Recreation & Culture Master Plan – 2017
- Our Merritt: Age-Friendly Action Plan - 2016
- City of Merritt – City Centre Improvement Plan – 2008

Others Consulted:

- City Council and Staff
- Local Media
 - Q101
 - Merritt Herald
 - Merritt Morning Market

Attachments:

- City of Merritt Communication Plan

Respectfully submitted,

Will George
Economic Development, Communications and Tourism Manager