



Municipality of Southwest Middlesex Corporate Communications Plan

Final Report
August 2020

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Municipality of Southwest Middlesex

Corporate Communications Plan

1.0 PURPOSE

The purpose of the Corporate Communications Plan is to provide a guiding document to support corporate communications practices, as well as identify, develop and implement communications-related policies and procedures.

The Corporate Communications Plan will ensure that the Municipality of Southwest Middlesex's communications practices are consistent, transparent, effective, coordinated, well managed and meet the needs of the community.

Our residents, staff, volunteers, businesses and visitors have different communication needs and it is the intent of the Plan to make information more accessible in order to meet these needs. The Plan reviews the Municipality's previous communications planning projects, current communication initiatives, and provides a vision, goals, strategic objectives and actions to guide and enhance future communications.

2.0 SCOPE

This plan applies to all forms of communications to and from the Municipality with the public, as well as internal communications within the Municipality. The plan applies to electronic, printed and verbal communications.

3.0 DEFINITIONS

External Communication: the transmission of information between an organization and another person or entity in the Municipality's external environment.

Internal Communication: the transmission of information between organizational members or parts of the organization. It takes place across all levels and units of a Municipality.

Media: includes traditional news media (print, radio and television), online (websites) and social media (blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and other sites where content is generated by users).

Social Media: online communication channels in which the objective is to publicly share information and create interaction between two parties (e.g., the corporation and a citizen, or a councillor and a constituent). These channels can include Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, as well as blogs, mobile applications, websites, photo boards, discussion boards or any other online location where commentary is publicly shared.

Stakeholder: an individual, organization or group that has interest in an issue, will be or is likely

to be affected, or has the ability to affect a decision or outcome. Organizations include non-governmental organizations, government, institutions and businesses.

Public Engagement: an ongoing process involving communication and interaction between the Municipality of Southwest Middlesex and its residents. Public engagement facilitates information exchange, discussion, debate and decision-making.

Public Relations (also known as Corporate Communications): the strategic management of relationships between an organization and its diverse public, or stakeholders, through the use of communication, to achieve mutual understanding, realize organizational goals and serve the public interest (Canadian Public Relations Society).

4.0 CONTENT

4.1 Introduction

The Municipality of Southwest Middlesex is growing. New residential, commercial, industrial, infrastructure and community development has greatly increased the need for enhanced communications within the Municipality and between the Municipality and the public. Effective communications, both internal and external, is important for effective and efficient municipal operations and relations.

While Communication staff have specific responsibilities for communications, it is every employee's responsibility to engage in communications. In this way the Communications Plan is intended to guide all of us and enhance the services we deliver as a municipality by working collaboratively across departmental lines, enhancing the quality of our relationships and practicing effective public engagement.

4.2 Background

The Municipality of Southwest Middlesex Communications Plan was developed by conducting a scan of communications plans in other municipalities. These plans were identified by availability.

The previous Municipality of Southwest Middlesex Communications Plan (2015) was also reviewed. The current Communications Plan builds off the previous plan, which was approved by Southwest Middlesex Council in 2015, to enhance communications goals of Southwest Middlesex.

The Communications Plan has been established to implement communications-related goals from the 2019-2024 Economic Development Strategic Plan as adopted by council in December 2019. Municipal comparators, best practices, and input from staff were used to develop the draft communications plan.

Key themes evident in the results included:

- Multiple forms of communication should be used (e.g., newsletters, email, intranet).
- Staff feel uninformed of the happenings outside of their department, facility and at Council.
- Strong desire to see overall communications improved.
- Media training, including the development of tools (e.g., templates for press releases, guidelines for speaking with the media through a corporate policy).
- Consistent, timely internal communications through the intranet or individual emails.
- Develop a strategic and consistent approach for the use of social media.
- Proactive rather than reactive communication.
- Face to face meetings are an important form of communication.
- Seek feedback from the public; ensure and promote two-way communication.

Through the Economic Development Strategic Plan public consultation process, Southwest Middlesex also conducted an external survey of the public. Overall, survey feedback indicated that the Municipality needs to improve upon informing and making efforts to engage the public in decision-making. Key results of the external survey were:

- Local newspaper, Southwest Middlesex’s website, word of mouth and newsletters were the top sources used to receive municipal information.
- Southwest Middlesex’s website, Facebook and Twitter accounts, and email distributions were the top sources that respondents would prefer to receive municipal information from.

4.3 Customer Service Excellence

The Municipality of Southwest Middlesex provides a range of services to the public and its aim is to provide a high level of quality service to meet the needs of its customers. It is policy that all Municipal employees will strive to provide Customer Service Excellence to all internal and external customers that we serve. Customer Service Excellence leads to a more effective workforce, an enhanced public image and improved relationships with residents, taxpayers and visitors.

Customer Service Excellence can be provided in a number of ways (in-person, by phone, in writing) and by using a number of tools (voicemail, e-mail, social media). Key to this plan is “two-way” communication. Two-way communication brings organizations and stakeholders closer together by allowing them to negotiate with one another to reach mutually satisfactory outcomes.

Rather than a one-dimensional plan that prescribes how Southwest Middlesex can best convey information to stakeholders, the Communications Plan is a roadmap for truly effective communications that involves ongoing, direct and timely dialogue with stakeholders.

The process of sending messages to audiences is outdated. By engaging in two-way communications, Southwest Middlesex will foster effective relationships with the stakeholders

and ensure that Southwest Middlesex communications are well coordinated, effectively managed and responsive to the information needs of the public, employees and council and encourage effective public engagement.

In the case of government, two-way communication models allow for better, more representative public policy because they are created through dialogue and negotiation with stakeholders.

It is important to ensure that information can be exchanged readily with the customer and the Municipality of Southwest Middlesex, customers requesting a response to a non-routine inquiry will be required to provide name, home address, telephone number and email address to municipal staff. Failure to provide the requested contact information shall result in the request not being processed.

4.4 Current Initiatives

The following chart summarizes the communication initiatives/tools currently used by the Municipality of Southwest Middlesex:

External Communications Summary Table

Communications Method	Details
Letters	Issued as needed by departments to address various issues. Also used by council to communicate with upper tiers of government.
E-mails	Issued as needed in response to information requests, complaints, etc.
Municipal Newsletters	Council “What’s New” newsletter posted on the website and posted on social media the day following the council meeting. Municipal newsletter mailed quarterly to all households and businesses within the municipality and posted on social media and website where possible. Tax bill newsletter mailed with interim taxes bills Newsletters have also been used to provide updates on special municipal projects (eg. Construction newsletter).
Press Releases & Public Notices	Brief articles and announcements released for media to pick up. Press releases and

	public notices are also posted to the municipal website and social media accounts.
Municipal website	The main source for information on municipal departments, services and programs. Includes landing pages for the Middlesex County Library, Elm Child Care Centre and Invest in Middlesex.
Newspaper	Advertisements placed in local newspaper to announce public information centres, open houses, public notices, employment opportunities, etc. Newspaper reporters commonly attend council meetings and other municipal events and report to the public. It was identified in the public survey that residents value municipal communications through various methods including local newspapers.
Social Media	Southwest Middlesex has a corporate Facebook page, Twitter account, YouTube channel and LinkedIn account. All are used to get information out to the public quickly and to a wide population. Also used to respond to resident questions and inquiries. Southwest Middlesex YouTube channel is experiencing minimal use –we plan to take advantage of opportunities to take further advantage of the YouTube channel. The Middlesex County library has a separate Facebook, and Twitter account. As separate entities, the Southwest Middlesex Fire Department Association has its own Facebook account and the Elm Child Care Centre its own Facebook account.
Your Say Southwest Middlesex	Your Say Southwest Middlesex is the municipality’s online public engagement platform (name if website is developed). Municipal projects, initiatives and issues are posted to the site for the purpose of engaging the public through discussion, comments and feedback. Data collected through the site will be considered in municipal decision-making.
Contact at Municipal Office and other	Daily in-person contact with members of the

Municipal facilities	public and other stakeholders.
On site inspections, meetings, daily interactions, by-law enforcement	Building inspectors visit sites as requested to inspect permit projects. Public Works department staff on site to perform construction work/maintenance. By-law Enforcement Officer visit residences/businesses to address complaints. Meetings with different members of the public and community groups/organizations.
Telephone interaction	Call comes into the municipality for different purposes/departments.
Committee/Board meetings	Various committees involve staff and council members. Committee/Board members also engage with the community through events and management of municipal facilities. Staff may also have contact with committee members

Internal Communications Summary Table

Communications Method	Details
Staff Meetings	Staff Meetings held morning after council meetings – used to discuss council decisions, new initiatives/projects, health and safety updates, etc.
Management Meetings	Provide managers opportunity to share information on department activities and allow the CAO to provide information on meeting organizational goals/council directives.
Department Meetings	Department Heads organize their own meetings with their staff.
Council Meetings	Department heads present reports to council and answer questions from council. Council requests updates and reports on different issues from Department Heads.
Daily Staff Interaction	Open concept municipal office allows staff to easily communicate daily. There are challenges with communication between municipal office staff and offsite staff, as well as staff who are not on email.
E-mails	Internal e-mails critical for effective information sharing, Staff share information via email frequently and work to cc all impacted individuals.
Information Boards	Health and Safety Board, Community Board
Staff Newsletters	Monthly staff newsletter used to keep staff informed on what is happening in the municipality.

4.5 Communications Target Audiences

This communications plan and future communications policies, initiatives and practices of the municipality should consider both internal and external target audiences. Examples of key target audiences of the Municipality and their communications needs are identified below:

Internal Target Audiences Summary Table

Target Audience	Key Communication Needs
Members of council	Timely, two-way communication with constituents as well as municipal senior management. Council needs to be kept aware on the status of municipal initiatives, projects and emerging issues.
Senior Management Team	Two-way communication with CAO, supervisors and staff.
Municipal employees, including: Out-of-office employees (public works, fire, parks and recreation, volunteer fire fighters)	Organizational and departmental information exchange; respond to stakeholder and resident inquiries

External Target Audiences Summary Table

Target Audience	Key Communication Needs
Residents	Provide accountability for council; tax and water/sewer inquiries; bylaw enforcement complaints; building inspection inquiries; planning interests; recreation programs and services; public engagement/input opportunities, etc.
Businesses	Information exchange on business-related issues.
Property owners	Development and planning services; tax and water/sewer inquiries; property standards.
Organizations and community groups	Dialogue/engagement on municipal initiatives and projects that affect these groups; collaboration/partnership on service delivery.
Media	Clarification on council/municipal activities, initiatives/projects and processes
Developers/Builders/Investors	Availability of residential/industrial lands; infrastructure; tax rates and development charges; zoning and planning issues; economic development initiatives.
Community facility users/committees	Opportunities for involvement/visits; rates and fees/operating hours of facilities and programs.

Visitors/Tourists	Information on attractions, activities, events, transportation, mapping, and accommodations. Promoting Southwest Middlesex as a place to visit.
Consultants/Contractors/Service Providers	Support, collaboration and/or information sharing on projects and services; information on procurement policy and processes.
Upper Tier Governments (County, Prov., Fed.)	Support/collaboration on joint initiatives and shared services; information sharing; requests for information; grant and funding applications and status.
Middlesex County member municipalities	Support/collaboration on joint initiatives and shared services; information sharing,

4.6 Communications Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles

The Southwest Middlesex Communications Plan (2014/93) established a purpose and guiding principles for communications in the Municipality of Southwest Middlesex as follows – “to ensure a consistent, standard practise that reflects the Municipality’s commitment to customer service excellence and accessibility”.

Our new policy vision and guiding principles are as follows:

Vision:

To provide effective, open communications that fosters a positive public profile, through engaged dialogue and education using multiple communications methods with an aware and involved community and engaged and responsive employees, capable of listening, sharing ideas openly and working collaboratively to shape the future of Southwest Middlesex.

Mission:

To provide a framework to enhance Southwest Middlesex two-way communications capacity, improve stakeholder relationships, and deliver effective communications programs that help achieve organizational goals.

Communications Guiding Principles:

- Provide information in a clear, accessible and responsive manner.
- Use a variety of ways and means to communicate and provide information in multiple formats to respond to diverse needs by considering the range of communication tools at our disposal and use those most appropriate to address the needs associated with each circumstance.
- Work collaboratively across the organization to ensure that information is thorough, factual and timely.
- Support opportunities for engagement to inform public policy.
- Respect the access to information and privacy rights of citizens and employees.

4.7 Communications Goals and Objectives

The communications goals, strategic objectives and actions in this Communications Plan have improved on those from the previous Southwest Middlesex Communications Plan (2015) and are updated to reflect the current communications environment and needs of the municipality. The goals, strategic objectives and actions are intended to improve the way that the Municipality communicates with its various target audiences.

Goal 1: Improve the quality of internal communications

Objective 1.1

Make information about corporate priorities, initiatives, department functions, programs and responsibilities easily accessible to ensure all members of the organization have the information needed to succeed in their role and that accurate information is conveyed to the public and stakeholders.

Strategies and proposed actions:

- a) Make Information about corporate priorities and initiatives easy to access:
 - Develop and promote existing internal online database of general inquiries/frequently asked questions for employees to find answers to questions
 - Create a source for employees to get important updates on “need to know” information (council decisions, new policies, etc.)
 - Host twice yearly, or more often, information sessions for employees to keep them informed about municipal priorities, initiatives, financial position (budget), etc.
- b) Increase employee’s knowledge of departmental functions across the organization:
 - Provide an overview of organizational structure and department functions in the new employee orientation program.
- c) Ensure employees at all locations feel a strong connection to the organization:
 - Continue to inform employees of matters affecting them before informing the public.

Objective 1.2

Increase employees’ readiness for communication and problem solving across departments;

Strategies and proposed actions:

- a) Increase communication skills and enhance the communications capacity of the organization as a whole:
 - Seek out beneficial training opportunities and resources for employees to improve their communication skills (plain language, writing style guidelines, corporate identity guidelines, email policies and best practices, privacy issues and confidential information, report writing, negotiating, conflict resolution, etc.) and understanding of communications roles in the organization based on their responsibilities.
 - Develop background information and key messages for employees for large projects.

- Implement annual needs assessment sessions between communications and municipal service areas; develop service level agreements.

Goal 2 – To proactively identify issues and respond to them in a timely manner, reducing the likelihood of escalation:

Objective 2.1

Improve the organization’s ability to anticipate and respond to issues.

Strategies and proposed actions:

- a) Ensure employees have the skills and information needed to proactively identify, respond to and anticipate issues, decreasing the likelihood of escalation:
 - Develop tools to be used across the organization such as a key message template.
 - Prepare employees to be ready and accessible to respond to inquiries.
 - Incorporate a quick poll feature on Southwest Middlesex social media and/or website to gauge public opinion on Municipality issues.

- b) Build an understanding of the organization’s communication function (not merely a communication or planning function – it involves everyone) and ensure that the process for receiving and responding to feedback from the public is accessible and compliant with AODA Accessibility Standards:
 - Create more informal opportunities for feedback.
 - Develop policies and/or standard operating procedures for communications related functions.

- c) Foster a culture shift whereby employees understand their role in the issues management process:
 - Through training and behavioural change, improve the communications capacity of employees, better equipping them to interact with key stakeholders and respond to issues more effectively
 - Cultivate external experts that can speak to municipal issues
 - Work with employees and council earlier on to develop key messages, be more proactive.

Goal 3 – To support and encourage an engaged community that is aware of and participates in the public involvement process, and recognizes its role in addressing issues and contributing to municipal policy and solutions:

Objective 3.1 – Increase participation in public consultation and dialogue:

Strategies and Proposed Actions:

a) Increase public engagement opportunities and dialogue with key community and stakeholder groups and ensure that the process for receiving and responding to feedback from the public is accessible and compliant with AODA Accessibility Standards:

- Develop and implement public engagement policy/guidelines based on best practices from other municipalities.
- Encourage employees to select the best engagement strategies to serve their purpose and continue to schedule frequent and timely meetings with facility/program users and other appropriate community groups.

b) Increase awareness of existing opportunities for public engagement and dialogue:

- Better promote opportunities for the public to get involved and provide feedback.

c) Identify new/alternative opportunities for public engagement that are accessible and convenient to the public:

- Take consultation activities outside of the municipal office to a place that's convenient for the public, when possible.
- Provide informal opportunities for stakeholders to provide feedback (online polls and forums, etc.)
- Hold town hall and/or state of the municipality type meetings that provide opportunities for the public to ask questions about municipal matters. Continue to participate in community events that are compatible with the Municipality's corporate vision and goals (e.g., Breakfast with the Mayor, etc.).

d) Promote southwestmiddlesex.ca and social media as the key resource to access information about the municipality while integrating and promoting social media as a tool to quickly convey messaging to the public:

- Include regular (monthly) quick polls on southwestmiddlesex.ca and/or social media to encourage informal input on current issues and gauge public perception.
- Update the social media policy.
- Equip employees with tools and guidelines for using social media (eg. Best practices, dos and don'ts, guidelines for sharing information, etc.)

e) Increase the public's trust that the municipality genuinely wants input and will take various points of view into consideration:

- Create "How to get involved" section of website that lists public engagement opportunities, how to provide feedback, a summary of feedback received, and how the feedback was used. Promote the web page, generating awareness and encouraging future participation.

f) Establish and build mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders that value cooperation and collaboration, including building relations with boards, committees, agencies and associations:

- Explore the possibility of leveraging existing advisory through an approach where

- the organization provides municipal information to its members on behalf of the municipality and solicits feedback (identify key issues and pulse check).
- Work with advisory committees/special interest groups to host public events at which municipal staff/council can address municipal issues.

Goal 4 - To establish and build on mutually beneficial, trustworthy relationships with stakeholders.

Objective 4.1

Improve the quality of the Municipality of Southwest Middlesex key stakeholder relationships.

- a) Develop and nurture ongoing positive media relations in an effort to increase media coverage of municipal news/events and ensure that the media coverage is accurate:
 - Provide more information on critical or complex issues through media packages, media briefings and more face-to-face time with key reporters
 - Consistently identify newsworthy stories and present them in a way that is compelling
 - Ensure inquiries from the media are given a high priority and responded to as quickly and efficiently as possible.

- b) Make municipal information and opportunities for public input more accessible, ample and diverse by maintaining accessibility requirements in compliance with AODA and corporate policy:
 - Provide accessible formats and communications supports to the public and staff (e.g., accessible document training, fillable PDF forms, etc.).
 - Balance the use of traditional consultation methods (e.g., public meetings, surveys) and emerging methods (e.g., online forums) to best suit the situation.

- c) Develop a social media strategy:
 - Integrate this strategy with existing social media guidelines and media relations policies
 - Employ social media measurement to gauge the effectiveness.

- d) Increase public engagement opportunities and dialogue with key community and stakeholder groups:
 - Work with stakeholder groups to host public events at which city employees/councillors can address municipal issues.
 - Explore the possibility of leveraging existing advisory committees (or groups with a similar structure) to help identify key issues, pulse checking, etc.

- e) Implement the corporate customer service strategy – ensure that the customer service standards are compliant with the AODA Accessibility Standards:
 - Provide appropriate customer service training and resources for employees
 - Make the public aware of the municipality’s customer service standards, including timelines for responding to inquiries, mail, email, etc.

- f) Make regular stakeholder research a cornerstone of municipal activities – regularly endeavour to understand what is important to residents:
- Conduct citizen satisfaction survey every two years
 - Increase use of research and public opinion polls in municipal decision making
- g) Increase communications skills and enhance the communications capacity of the organization as a whole:
- Better equip our organization’s spokespeople and develop templates for routine communications to maximize efficiency and consistency (e.g., policies, public notices, press releases, signage).
 - Seek out beneficial training opportunities and resources for employees to increase their communication skills (plain language, writing style guidelines, corporate identity guidelines, email policies and best practices, privacy issues and confidential information, report writing, conflict resolution, negotiation, effective listening, problem solving and decision making, constructive feedback, etc.).

Objective 4.2

Increase stakeholders’ awareness of municipal programs and initiatives

Strategies and Proposed Actions:

- a) Develop a media relations strategy:
- Review best practices and media relations strategies of other municipalities.
 - Continue to use local print, online, and where warranted, radio media outlets to communicate municipal messaging as well as online and social media to reach the diverse demographic population of the municipality.
- b) Continue to rely on the municipality’s advertising program to convey important information to residents:
- Review existing advertising policies and update them to reflect changing circumstances
- c) Participate in public outreach and speaking engagements to increase the profile of the municipality:
- Continue to participate in community events that are compatible with the Municipality’s corporate vision and goals (consider developing information sessions such as Mayor’s annual State of the Municipality (possibly following annual audit) and Breakfast with the Mayor.
 - Continue to host in-person public engagement events, including open houses/public information centres.
- d) Revamp southwestmiddlesex.ca – focus on presenting information as one voice rather than as information from various departments. Whenever possible build in opportunities for users to provide feedback on issues/services of the day:

- Implement and promote a “How to get involved” central information section on the home page that conveys all the ways residents can comment and/or participate. Promote a calendar of various public meetings, workshops and ongoing committees that invite public involvement.
 - Explore centralizing content around easy-to-recognize user themes and customer focussed content categories.
 - Use the most straightforward language possible. Increase website function and access through new template, modules and structure, as well as making the website mobile friendly while meeting AODA standards.
- e) Make municipal information and opportunities for input more accessible, ample and diverse by maintaining accessibility requirements in compliance with AODA and corporate policy:
- Provide accessible formats and communication supports to the public and staff (e.g., accessible document training, fillable PDF forms, etc.).
- f) Develop a Municipality of Southwest Middlesex brand management program and promise:
- Be consistent with branding internal and external documents and promotional materials
 - Develop and roll out sign guidelines so that all municipal signage is consistently designed and branded
 - Branding to be continued through all departments including municipal vehicles, equipment and signs.

5.0 IMPLEMENTATION

This policy will supersede the following policies:

- Municipality of Southwest Middlesex Municipal Website Policy (2014/093)
- Municipality of Southwest Middlesex Social Media Policy (2014/093)

To ensure the Southwest Middlesex Communications Plan is a living document that guides the communications activities of the Municipality, a detailed implementation plan is necessary.

The intent of the implementation plan is to set out the general timeline and priority for which key actions will be initiated. Timelines are not static and may change based on competing priorities. The implementation plan also identifies the department/staff lead and resources needed to contribute to the success of the key action items and overall communications goals.

As identified in the Implementation Plan, some actions have already been implemented and/or initiated.

Appropriate reporting will occur when significant actions are completed.

See Appendix A for the full Southwest Middlesex Communications Plan – Implementation Plan.

6.0 COMMUNICATION

This plan will be communicated to the Council and staff of the Municipality of Southwest Middlesex and posted internally to the Southwest Middlesex for staff reference. The plan will be communicated to the public through the Municipality of Southwest Middlesex website.

7.0 LINKAGES

AC-001 - Municipality of Southwest Middlesex Corporate Accessibility Policy & Procedures

CO-002 Policy – Notice to the Public Policy

CO-003 Policy - Council Code of Conduct

E-004 Policy - Employee Code of Conduct

IT-002 Policy – Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality of Information

8.0 REVIEW

This Communications Plan will be reviewed once per Council term or more often as needed.

Implementation Plan

Goal one: To improve the quality of internal communications. (2020-2022)

Objective	Strategy	Proposed actions	Role/Responsibility	Timing
1.1 Increase the percentage of employees that consider themselves well-informed about Municipality programs, issues and initiatives.	Make information about corporate priorities and initiatives easy to access.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build on existing new employee orientation program to ensure employees are informed about Municipality policies, procedures, etc. 	CAO/Finance/Department Head	2020
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and promote internal online database of general inquiries/frequently asked questions for employees to find answers to questions. 	CAO/Department Heads/Communications	2022
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a source for employees to get important updates on “need to know” information (Council decisions, new policies, etc.) which may include exploring opportunities to provide computer access for employees that don’t usually have computer access. 	CAO/IT to set up/Communications	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host twice yearly or more frequently information sessions for employees to keep them informed about Municipality priorities, initiatives, financial position (budget), various projects, initiatives and roles of different departments, etc. Record sessions and make them available to employees at a future time. 	CAO with Department Heads	2020
	Increase employees’ knowledge of departmental functions across the organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and promote internal online database of general inquiries/frequently asked questions for employees to find answers to questions. 	CAO/Department Heads/Communications	2022
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide an overview of organizational structure and department functions in the new employee orientation program. 	CAO/Finance	2021
	Ensure employees at all locations feel a strong connection to the organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that bulletin boards include current information for employees. 	Administrative Coordinators/Finance	2020
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to inform employees of matters affecting them before informing the public. 	CAO/Department Heads	2020
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage senior staff and/or supervisors to personally engage their employees on important issues through multiple communication methods. 	CAO/Department Heads	2020

Implementation Plan

Goal one: To improve the quality of internal communications. (2020-2022)

Objective	Strategy	Proposed actions	Role/Responsibility	Timing
1.1 Increase the percentage of employees that consider themselves well-informed about Municipality programs, issues and initiatives (continued).	Ensure employees at all locations feel a strong connection to the organization (continued).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a staff newsletter with the purpose to share information with all employees across the organization and highlight the various projects, initiatives and roles of different departments and divisions or hold employee events at locations outside the office (employee show and tell; informal meet and greet events). 	CAO/Department Heads/Communications	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase opportunities for employees across the organization to collaborate through cross-departmental projects, initiatives, and teams. 	CAO/Department Heads/Communications	2022
1.2 Increase employees' readiness for communication and problem solving across departments.	Increase communication skills and enhance the communications capacity of the organization as a whole.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek out beneficial training opportunities and resources for employees to improve their communication skills (plain language, writing style guidelines, corporate identity guidelines, email policies and best practices, privacy issues and confidential information, report writing, negotiating, conflict resolution, etc.) and understanding of communications roles in the organization based on their responsibilities. 	CAO/Deputy Clerk	2020
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop background information and key messages for employees for large projects. 	Communications	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure staff have appropriate training and guidelines to ensure AODA compliance. 	Deputy Clerk/Accessibility Coordinator	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform council, senior staff and employees of the municipal communications role, functions and resources; incorporate more information into new employee orientation program. 	CAO/Communications	2020
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review communication goals and achievements annually. 	Communications	2021 start
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement annual needs-assessment sessions between Communications and municipal service areas; develop service level agreements, expectations and priorities. 	Communications/ Department Heads	2021 start

Goal two: To proactively identify issues and respond to them in a timely manner, reducing the likelihood of escalation. (2020-2022)

Objective	Strategy	Proposed actions	Role/Responsibility	Timing
2.1 Improve the organization's ability to anticipate and respond to issues.	Ensure employees have the skills and information needed to proactively identify, respond to and anticipate issues, decreasing the likelihood of escalation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regularly monitor media and social media for emerging issues. Develop Standard Operating Procedure to guide monitoring and reporting. 	Communications	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate a quick poll feature on Southwest Middlesex social media and/or website to gauge public opinion on Municipality issues. 	ITS, Communications	2020
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop tools to be used across the organization such as a key message template. 	Communications	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create an internal online issues database (possibly Keystone) to track issues and responses; list key messages, background information and key contacts. Evaluate effectiveness annually. 	ITS, front-line employees, Communications, Mayor	2021
	Build an understanding of the organization's communication function (not merely a communication or planning function – it involves everyone) and ensure that the process for receiving and responding to feedback from the public is accessible and compliant with the AODA Accessibility Standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop policies and/or standard operating procedures for communications related functions. 	CAO/Communications	2022
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform council, senior staff and employees of the municipal communication role, functions and resources. 	CAO	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create more informal opportunities for feedback. 	Communications	2020
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take consultation activities outside of municipal town hall to a place that's convenient for the public, when possible. 	Municipal employees Council members	2021

Objective	Strategy	Proposed actions	Role/Responsibility	Timing
2.1 Improve the organization's ability to anticipate and respond to issues (continued).	Foster a cultural shift whereby employees understand their role in the issues management process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through training and behavioral change, improve the communications capacity of employees, better equipping them to interact with key stakeholders and respond to issues more effectively. 	CAO	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek out beneficial training opportunities and resources for employees to improve their communication skills (plain language, writing style guidelines, brand guidelines, email policies and best practices, privacy issues and confidential information, report writing, etc.). 	Department Heads/ Communications	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with employees and Council earlier on to develop key messages; be more proactive. 	CAO/Communications	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the number of spokespeople and subject matter experts in the organization and provide training. Make credentials known to establish credibility. 	CAO/Department Heads	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultivate external experts that can speak to Municipal issues. 	CAO/Communications	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop tools to be used across the organization such as a key message template. 	Communications	2021

Goal three: To support and encourage an engaged community that is aware of and participates in the public involvement process, and recognizes its role in addressing issues and contributing to municipal policy and solutions. (2020-2022)

Objective	Strategy	Proposed actions	Role/Responsibility	Timing
3.1 Increase participation in public consultation and dialogue.	Increase public engagement opportunities and dialogue with key community and stakeholder groups and ensure that the process for receiving and responding to feedback from the public is accessible and compliant with the AODA Accessibility Standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement public engagement policy/guidelines based on best practices from other municipalities. 	CAO/Communications	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage employees to select the best engagement strategies to serve their purpose and continue to schedule frequent and timely meetings with facility/program users and other appropriate community groups. 	CAO/Department Heads	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure multiple channels, formats, locations and opportunities for the public to engage and provide feedback is available and promoted including online and informal opportunities. Schedule and advertise public consultation opportunities as council and senior managers see fit. 	Communications	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a directory of key community and stakeholder groups (eg, media, business, community organizations, service clubs) including contact information and general services/interests 	Communications	2020
	Increase awareness of existing opportunities for public engagement and dialogue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better promote opportunities for the public to get involved and provide feedback. 	Communications	2020
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research the advantages/disadvantages of social media platforms that the municipality has not yet used, or used minimally (e.g., YouTube, Instagram, etc.) 	Communications	2021
	Identify new/alternative opportunities for public engagement that are accessible and convenient to the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide informal opportunities for stakeholders to provide feedback (online polls and forums, etc.). 	Communications	2020
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take consultation activities outside of the municipal office to a place that is convenient for the public, when possible. 	Municipality employees	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold Town Hall and/or State of the Municipality type meetings that provide opportunities for the public to ask questions about municipal matters. Continue to participate in community events that are compatible with the Municipality's corporate vision and goals (e.g., Breakfast with the Mayor, etc.) 	Council Members / CAO / Communications	2021

Objective	Strategy	Proposed actions	Role/Responsibility	Timing
3.1 Increase participation in public consultation and dialogue (continued).	Promote southwestmiddlesex.ca and social media as the key resource to access information about the municipality while integrating and promoting social media as a tool to quickly convey messaging to the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equip employees with tools and guidelines for using social media (e.g. best practices, dos and don'ts, guidelines for sharing information, etc.). 	Communications/IT	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include regular (monthly) quick poll on southwestmiddlesex.ca and/or social media to encourage informal input on current issues and gauge public perception. 	Communications/IT	2020
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a "How to get involved" section of website that lists public engagement opportunities (past, upcoming; calendar of events), how to provide feedback (info session, survey, etc.), a summary of feedback received, how feedback was used, etc. Promote the web page, generating awareness and encouraging future participation. 	ITS/Communications/ Municipality staff (web authors)	2020
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare a toolkit for councillors for using social media (e.g. best practices, dos and don'ts, guidelines for sharing information, etc.). 	Communications	2021
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a high level "Get to know Southwest Middlesex" document which includes core service information for sharing online (in hard copy on request). 	Communications	2022
	Increase the public's trust that the Municipality genuinely wants input and will take various points of view into consideration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a "How to get involved" section of website that lists public engagement opportunities (past, upcoming; calendar of events), how to provide feedback (info session, survey, etc.), a summary of feedback received, and how the feedback was used, etc. Promote the web page, generating awareness and encouraging future participation. 	IT/Communications/ Municipality employees (web authors)	2020
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show residents how the Municipality uses their input. Help them know their input is valued: Create a section on the Municipality's website that lists public engagement opportunities (past, upcoming), a summary of feedback received, how the feedback was used, etc. Promote the web page, generating awareness and encouraging future participation ("How to get involved"). Provide concise summaries of actions taken as a result of citizen input. 	ITS, Communications, Municipality employees (web authors)	2021
	Establish and build mutually beneficial relationships with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the possibility of leveraging existing advisory through an approach where the organization provides municipal information to its members on behalf of the Municipality and solicits feedback (identify key issues and pulse check). 	Communications	2021

	stakeholders that value cooperation and collaboration, including building relations with boards, committees, agencies and associations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with advisory committees/special interest groups to host public events at which municipal staff/council can address municipal issues. 	CAO/Department Heads/Communication	2022
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish communications channels with local organizations to reach a number of stakeholders in a targeted and cost-efficient approach. Provide opportunities for people to talk to municipal employees to learn more about municipality initiatives and issues through stakeholder public events. 	Municipality employees	2022

Goal four: To establish and build on mutually beneficial, trustworthy relationships with stakeholders. (2020-2022)

Objective	Stakeholder	Strategy	Proposed actions	Role/Responsibility	Timing
<p>4.1 Improve the quality of the Municipality of Southwest Middlesex's key stakeholder relationships.</p> <p>(Existing relationships will be measured using stakeholder relationship measurement methodology so the Municipality can quantify change over time.)</p>	<p>Local media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print • Online <p>Where appropriate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio • Television 	Establish a baseline.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct stakeholder research to establish baseline; determine how stakeholders describe the current quality of their relationship with the Municipality. 	Completed – through SWM Economic Development Strategy	2019
		Develop and nurture ongoing positive media relations in an effort to increase media coverage of municipal news/events and ensure that media coverage is accurate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently identify newsworthy stories and present them in a way that's compelling (e.g. timing, significance, proximity, prominence and human interest). 	Communications, Municipality employees	2021
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure inquiries from the media are given a high priority and responded to as quickly and efficiently as possible. 	Municipality employees	2020
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a media relations policy to include templates and tools to be used by staff. 	Communications	2022
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more information on critical or complex issues through media packages, media briefings, and more face-to-face time with key reporters. 	Communications	2022
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and maintain a key stakeholder and media contact list and create a roster of internal and external experts that can speak to Municipality issues. 	Communications	2021
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis media training for new council and appropriate staff 	CAO/Human Resources	2022
	Southwest Middlesex residents	Make municipal information and opportunities for public input more accessible, ample and diverse by maintaining accessibility requirements in compliance with AODA and corporate policy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide accessible formats and communications supports to the public and staff (e.g. accessible document training, fillable PDF forms, etc.) 	Communications/Clerks Office	2021

Objective	Stakeholder	Strategy	Proposed actions	Role/Responsibility	Timing
4.1 Improve the quality of the Municipality of Southwest Middlesex key stakeholder relationships (continued).	Southwest Middlesex residents (continued)	Make municipal information and opportunities for public input more accessible, ample and diverse by maintaining accessibility requirements in compliance with AODA and corporate policy (continued).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that information about accessible services and features is available on the website. Consider the accessibility of emergency procedures, plan or public safety information and develop templates for emergency communications that are AODA compliant. 	Communications/Clerks Office	2022
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balance the use of traditional consultation methods (e.g. public meetings, surveys) and emerging methods (e.g. online forums) to best suit the situation. 	Municipality employees	2021
		Develop a social media strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate this strategy with existing social media guidelines and media relations policies. 	Communications, ITS	2021
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employ social media measurement to gauge effectiveness. 	Communications	2021
		Increase public engagement opportunities and dialogue with key community and stakeholder groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with stakeholder groups to host public events at which Municipality employees/councillors can address municipal issues. 	Communications	2022
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure multiple channels, formats, locations and opportunities for the public to engage and provide feedback are available and promoted including online and informal opportunities. 	Communications	2022
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the possibility of leveraging existing advisory committees (or groups with a similar structure) to help identify key issues, pulse checking, etc. 	Communications/ Clerk's Office	2022
		Implement the corporate customer service strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide appropriate customer service training and resources for employees, including accessible customer service resources available on the Infonet. 	Administration/Human Resources	2021
		Ensure that the customer service standards are compliant with the AODA Accessibility Standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make the public aware of the Municipality's customer service standards, including timelines for responding to inquiries, mail, email, etc. 	Administration/Human Resources	2021

Objective	Stakeholder	Strategy	Proposed actions	Role/Responsibility	Timing
4.1 Improve the quality of the Municipality of Southwest Middlesex key stakeholder relationships (continued).	Southwest Middlesex residents (continued)	Make regular stakeholder research a cornerstone of Municipality activities; regularly endeavour to understand what's important to residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct citizen satisfaction survey every two years. 	Administration/ Communications	2022
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase use of research and public opinion polls in municipal decision making 		
	Municipality employees	Increase communication skills and enhance the communications capacity of the organization as a whole.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better equip our organization's spokespeople and develop templates for routine communications to maximize efficiency and consistency (e.g. policies, public notices, press releases, signage). 	Communications	2021
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek out beneficial training opportunities and resources for employees to increase their communication skills (plain language, writing style guidelines, corporate identity guidelines, email policies and best practices, privacy issues and confidential information, report writing, conflict resolution, negotiation, effective listening, problem solving and decision making, constructive feedback etc.). 	Human Resources/ Communications	2021
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equip municipal councillors with the information and resources (e.g. briefing notes) they need to be effective conduits for information-sharing and relationship-building. 	Communications	2021
	4.2 Increase stakeholders' awareness of Municipal programs and initiatives.	Local media	Develop a municipal media relations strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review best practices and media relations strategies of other municipalities. 	Communications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to use local print, online, and where warranted, radio media outlets to communicate municipal messaging as well as online and social media to reach the diverse demographic population of the municipality 					
		Continue to rely on the Municipality's advertising program to convey important information to residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review existing advertising policies and update them to reflect changing circumstances. 	CAO/Senior Management	2021

Objective	Stakeholder	Strategy	Proposed actions	Role/Responsibility	Timing
4.2 Increase stakeholders' awareness of Municipal programs and initiatives (continued).	Southwest Middlesex residents	Participate in public outreach and speaking engagements to increase the profile of the Municipality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to participate in community events that are compatible with the Municipality's corporate vision and goals (consider developing information sessions such as Mayor's annual State of the Municipality (possibly following annual audit) and Breakfast with the Mayor. 	Council/CAO/Administration	Ongoing
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to host in-person public engagement events, including open houses/public information centres. 	Municipality employees	Ongoing
	Revamp Southwest Middlesex.ca. Focus on presenting information as one voice rather than as information from various departments. Whenever possible, build in opportunities for users to provide feedback on issues/services of the day.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the most straightforward language as possible. Increase website function and access through new template, modules and structure, as well as making the website mobile friendly while meeting AODA standards. 	Communications/Municipality employees (web authors)	2020	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid the use of PDFs on website to ensure more effective search engine optimization and ease-of-use. 	Municipality employees (web authors) – will be complete through new website	2020	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore centralizing content around easy-to-recognize user themes and customer-focused content categories and to accommodate as many residents as possible use consistent visual icons to help communicate the information categories and use these widely across a variety of communications platforms, such as the website, advertising and literature 	ITS/Communications	2020	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update the municipal website policy that establishes staff roles, responsibilities and approval processes in order to ensure that the website remains up-to-date and consistent in style. 	ITS/Communications	2020	

Objective	Stakeholder	Strategy	Proposed actions	Role/Responsibility	Timing
4.2 Increase stakeholders' awareness of Municipal programs and initiatives (continued).	Southwest Middlesex residents	<p>Revamp Southwest Middlesex.ca. Focus on presenting information as one voice rather than as information from various departments.</p> <p>Whenever possible, build in opportunities for users to provide feedback on issues/services of the day (continued).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage web authors to continuously improve their service area's presence on the web. Keep information fresh; make web content count for a variety of publics, i.e. taxpayers, community partners, other Canadian municipalities, etc. 	ITS/Communications	2020
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide refresher training for web authors (e.g. web software, writing for the web, style guidelines). 	ITS/Communications	2020
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update social media policy and guidelines that establishes roles and responsibilities for social media accounts as well as public commenting guidelines. 	Communications	2021
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to promote opportunities for public input and community engagement on the municipal website and social media accounts. 	Communications	2020
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement and promote a "How to get involved" central information section on the home page that conveys all the ways residents can comment and/or participate. Promote a calendar of various public meetings, workshops and ongoing committees that invite public involvement. 	ITS/Communications, Municipality employees (web authors)	2020
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rebuild of southwestmiddlesex.ca and ensure website is AODA compliant (Accessibility Standards). 	ITS	2020		
	New Canadians /non-English speaking residents	<p>Make Municipality information and opportunities for input more accessible, ample and diverse by maintaining accessibility requirements in compliance with AODA and corporate policy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide accessible formats and communication supports to the public and staff (e.g., accessible document training, fillable PDF forms, etc.). 	Communications	2022

Objective	Stakeholder	Strategy	Proposed actions	Role/Responsibility	Timing
4.2 Increase stakeholders' awareness of municipal programs and initiatives (continued).	New Canadians /non-English speaking residents	Make Municipality information and opportunities for input more accessible, ample and diverse by maintaining accessibility requirements in compliance with AODA and corporate policy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create an inventory of languages spoken by employees and record in electronic system available to all staff. Leverage the translation capabilities of Municipality employees to affordably and informally provide information in languages other than English. 	Human Resources	2020
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a high level "Get to know Southwest Middlesex" document which includes core service information for residents and business and post to website – print where necessary. 	Communications	2022
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where practical, make published information (reports, brochures, etc.) available on request in multiple formats to accommodate persons with disabilities, in compliance with the AODA Accessibility Standards. <p>Include disclaimer on printed material and website that Municipality documents are available in alternate formats upon request.</p>	Municipality employees	2022
	Municipality employees	Develop a Municipality of Southwest Middlesex brand management program and promise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop municipal brand identity guidelines. 	Communications	2020
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be consistent with branding internal and external documents and promotional materials. 	Municipality employees	2021
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On an ongoing basis, drive the brand internally through open, honest communication and by encouraging behaviours that build trust. 	Senior Management/ Municipality employees	Ongoing
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and roll out sign guidelines so that all Municipality signage is consistently designed and branded. 	Communications	2021
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unveil corporate writing style guidelines and develop templates for routine communications to maximize efficiency and consistency (e.g., policies, public notice, press release, signage, public information centres). 	Communications	2021
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify leadership behaviours that support the branding and messaging guidelines. 	CAO	2021
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Branding to be continued through all departments, municipal vehicles, equipment and signage. 	Senior Management/ Communications	2021