



Township of Hamilton Communications Plan

2024-2027



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Land Acknowledgement Statement

The Township of Hamilton is situated within the traditional territory of the Mississauga Anishinaabeg and Chippewa Nations, collectively known as the Williams Treaties First Nations. Our work on these lands respectfully acknowledges their resilience and their longstanding contributions to the area now known as the Township of Hamilton.

The Township of Hamilton Community Profile

The Township of Hamilton is a rural municipality, a picturesque tapestry of natural beauty and community spirit. Established in 1850, the Township of Hamilton is nestled between Lake Ontario to the south and the tranquil waters of Rice Lake to the north. Featuring eight charming hamlets - Baltimore, Bewdley, Camborne, Cold Springs, Precious Corners, Plainville, Gore's Landing, and Harwood - each with its own unique character, and with a combined population of approximately 11,000. The rolling hills of Northumberland provide a backdrop to the Township's vibrant patchwork of farms and diverse wildlife inhabiting the wetlands and Oak Ridges Moraine.

The southern portion of the Township contains the largest population base and is the hub for most commercial and industrial activities, while the northern region blends agricultural and residential areas with a variety of tourism resorts. Bewdley stands out as a haven for anglers, offering some of the finest fishing experiences in Southern Ontario. The Township surrounds the Town of Cobourg to the south, borders the Municipality of Port Hope to the west, and is adjacent to the Township of Alwicks Haldimand to the east. Covering an area of 256.08 km² (98.87 sq mi) with a population density of 42.7/km² (111/sq mi), the Township is intersected by major transportation arteries, including the Canadian Pacific Railroad, Canadian National Railroad, and Highway 401. Whether it's the call of the countryside or the allure of the lakes, the Township of Hamilton is a testament to the enduring charm of rural Ontario.



2023-2026 Strategic Plan Mission, Vision, and Values

The communications Plan is designed in alignment with the 2023 – 2026 Township of Hamilton Strategic Plan.

“Develop and implement a Communications Plan to offer a diverse range of communication methods to encourage distribution of accurate, timely, and factual information about services, programs, activities, etc.”

Vision

Making life better everyday by creating a vibrant and sustainable township we are all proud to call home.

Mission

To provide effective and efficient services delivered through accountability and respect to promote the social, economic and environmental priorities of our community.

Values

Accountability & Transparency

We stand behind our commitments and recommendations and deliver on our priorities.

Respect

We value other's opinions and insights and act professionally in our interactions with each other and the public.

Teamwork

We work together to achieve the highest standard of performance.

Service Focused

We maintain a positive attitude and are willing to assist and provide the best service possible to Council, our colleagues, and the public.

Inclusive

We bring together people with different backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences to improve creativity and decision-making and to better representant serve our growing community.



About The Communications Plan

The Communications Plan supports the Township of Hamilton 2023-2026 Strategic Plan. The priorities for the Plan are designed to enhance communication with the community, with the goal of establishing trust in accuracy and timeliness of information. The priorities, goals and action items foster a well-informed community, support two-way communication, and encourage public participation in municipal business through a strong sense of community connection.

Challenges include limited media options and residents limited access to high-speed internet and digital technology. Challenges are encountered in engaging residents and encouraging local government as a priority.

Development of the Plan included public input, interviews, departmental interviews, and municipal best practices. A working group of Council members, staff, and members of Township of Hamilton Advisory Committees were instrumental in developing this Plan.

Guiding Principles

The priorities, goals and action items of this Plan are consistent with the guiding principles and work toward accomplishing the Mission, Vision, and Values of the Strategic Plan.

- To Listen
- To Respond
- To Collaborate
- To Take Responsibility

Audiences

Identifying and understanding how our target audiences receive, understand and respond to information is critical in crafting and delivering our message. Depending on the audience, the message and its delivery are tailored specifically to each group. By doing so, we increase the likelihood of effective communication and a broader understanding of the issues.



Residents



Potential
Residents



Council



Staff



Businesses /
Developers



The Path Travelled

The Township of Hamilton has not previously adopted a formal Communications Policy or Plan. Public communications at the Township have been the responsibility of multiple staff members. The Township has used traditional communication platforms and tools including social media, public engagement platforms, and the municipal website.



The Path Forward

Strong communication tools can be utilized by all municipal departments to improve customer service and public relations. Effective communications are essential for delivering public services.

The Township of Hamilton provides high impact and relevant services to the community and has a responsibility to effectively communicate to and engage with their residents and visitors on the matters that impact their lives. Additionally, Council and staff are committed to pursuing various strategic goals which are reliant on communications with the community.

Staff and Council will review this plan annually to assess its current state and to align with any changes to Council's initiatives and goals. Depending on budgets, staff capacities, and timelines, action items may have to be adjusted accordingly. The timelines in the appendices are set as the desired period of implementation but are flexible, which is required given evolving priorities in the community.

Success for this Communications Plan and communications in general for the Township of Hamilton relies heavily on the collaboration between all staff and Council, and the community. We all have a role to play in telling the story of why life is better in the Township of Hamilton.

“The Township is committed to building a strong community to encourage social connections, a sense of belonging, safety and security, and participation in a community bonded by shared progressive and inclusive attitudes, values and goals for a fulfilling life.” – Township of Hamilton Strategic Plan



Our Approach to Success



1. **We will make information available to everyone**

Enhance the way we deliver our messages by providing accessible, relevant information, creating and supporting trust and mutual respect. When the community is informed, understanding of Township decisions increases. When this happens, trust and respect become an inherent byproduct of Township communications. Ensuring the Township reaches out to residents via every available avenue creates an environment for easily accessible and relevant information.

2. **Increase public engagement through positive, two-way communications**

Build a strong community by engaging residents across the Township, ensuring their voices are heard and included in the decision-making process. Active and open two-way communication builds relationships. Invitations to join the conversation and engage people in meaningful communication allows the Township to make decisions with broader community input. When communication is open, dialogue on important sensitive issues is more productive and conducive to favourable outcomes.

3. **Sharing our story in positive ways**

Strengthen the ways in which we share positive stories through our own voice, energizing staff and the community to become ambassadors for the Township and one another. Telling the story of the Township and the people who live here is important to keeping our rural feel. Highlighting our successes and our people creates a sense of pride, unity, and most importantly, community. Our communications are not just about us; they are about our residents, businesses, and service clubs who make the Township of Hamilton a desired place to live, work, play, and visit.



Current Communication Tools

The Township of Hamilton currently employs the regular use of the following communications tools throughout multiple departments, with the intention of expanding the multi-media toolbox through increased use of social media and customer service technology:

Print Communications

- Resident Newsletter
- Water User Newsletter
- Tax Inserts
- Posters and Rack Cards
- Direct Mail
- Budget Document
- Agendas and Minutes (printed upon request)
- Wayfinding and facility signage
- Promotional Inserts (tourism publications)

Digital Communications

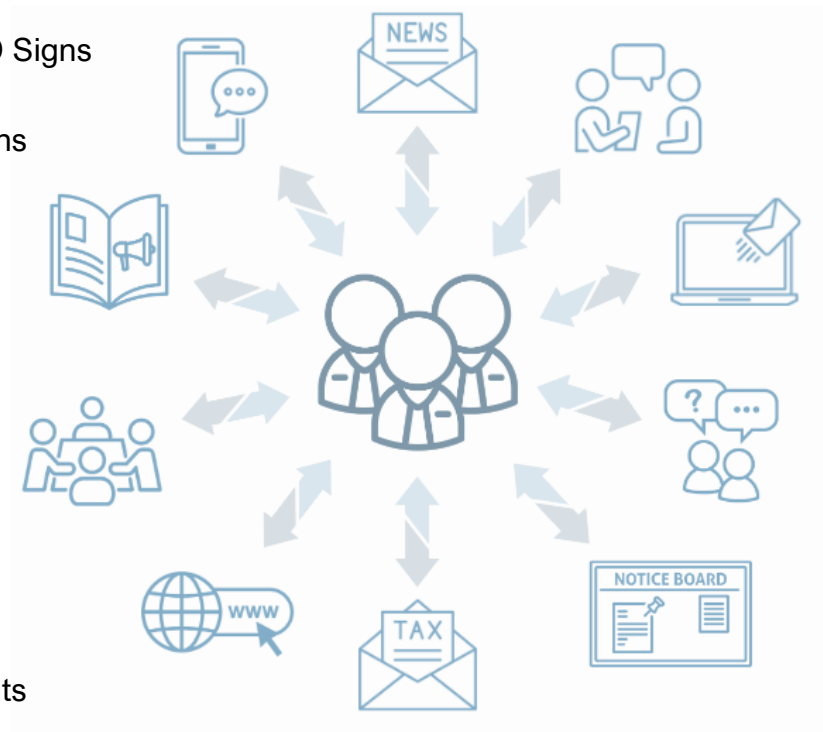
- Township Website
- Staff Newsletters
- Email
- Information Display Screens/LED Signs
- Surveys
- GIS Online Permitting Applications
- Online Service Requests
- Social Media
 - Facebook
 - YouTube

Media Communications

- Media Releases
- Public Notices
- Radio Interviews and Ads

Public Relations Communications

- Networking Functions
- Community Engagement at Events
- Public Meetings

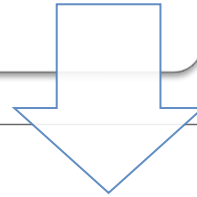




The Plan

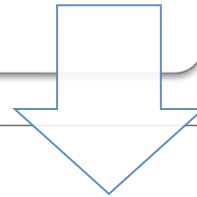
Priorities:

The overarching results we would like to achieve over the next four years through the implementation of the Communications Plan.



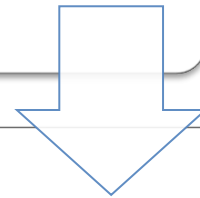
Goals:

Specific targets the Township should work towards to contribute to the Priorities.



Action Items:

The specific tasks required to take place to reach our communications goals.



Success Measures:

These are the items that can be measured to evaluate and determine whether the Priorities and Goals have been achieved.



Priority 1: An Informed and Engaged Community

Goal 1.1: The Township proactively provides accurate and timely information to advise residents and encourage engagement.	
Action Items	Success Measures
Increased social media posts related to Council meetings and decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track social media posts and views to identify interesting and effective content. Schedule known updates in the Social Media Calendar. Share significant upcoming agenda items and outcomes on social media.
	Timeline: Implement alongside website development in Q1 2025.
Follow issue and announcement cycles to identify and hear citizen concerns and prepare public information in advance to address questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement timely campaigns to raise awareness of service changes or council decision topics. Track requests and complaints to predict regular or seasonal issues and address communication proactively. Develop a content management system for social media with a schedule of announcements and news updates. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Media Calendar identifies planned internal and external communication initiatives; community events, holidays, celebrations, media releases, news, council updates, public works maintenance, etc.)
	Timeline: Implement alongside website development in Q1 2025.
Provide communications in various formats to reach all citizens.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continual review of Communications Toolkit with consideration of new residents and diverse population.
	Timeline: Subject to annual review.



Goal 1.2: The Township employs the use of a wide range of communication channels to maximize the reach of our messages.

Action Items	Success Measures
Expect employees to use various types of consultation methods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys, public meetings, form submissions, open house, workshops are used consistently. • Attendance and participation is benchmarked to measure effectiveness. <p>Timeline: Implemented alongside Public Engagement Policy approval. Target Q3 2025.</p>
Continue to explore best practices in public engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement content monitoring tools to become more effective and build audiences, such as social media and website analytics. <p>Timeline: Implemented alongside Public Engagement Policy approval. Target Q3 2025.</p>
Website redevelopment project, including new content management system, refreshed navigation and enhanced tools (use of newsfeed, calendars, forms, subscriptions).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the website is compliant with the AODA Standards. • Explore centralizing content around easy-to-recognize user themes and customer-focused content categories. • Municipal website will connect to the County’s vision with the community’s voice, fostering awareness, understanding, transparency, and engagement. <p>Timeline: Project underway in 2024. Expected launch of new website in Q3 2025.</p>
Utilize volunteers from Advisory Committees to help get the message out.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee Administrators share Council highlights to Advisory Committee members. • Advisory Committee members participate in public consultation for various municipal projects. <p>Timeline: Review in Q1 2025.</p>



Goal 1.3: Information is provided to residents and businesses on the services the Township offers and how they can access them.

Action Items	Success Measures
<p>Ensure staff contact directories and departmental information is up to date and easy to find.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff Directory is reviewed and updated regularly to ensure accurate navigation. • Seasonal updates to promote relevant services through various channels including newsletters, web alerts, LED signs, etc. <p>Timeline: Implement alongside website development in Q1 2025. Review quarterly, and in coordination with Human Resources as needed.</p>
<p>Create short and informative videos outlining opportunities for participating in the public process (i.e. budget video).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Videos are shared on the municipal website and scheduled into the Social Media Calendar when applicable or shared on social media in a timely manner, as appropriate to annual initiatives. <p>Timeline: Review in Q4 2025.</p>
<p>The Township maintains transparency and accountability by making municipal reports, plans and studies, and survey results available to the public.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents are able to locate up to date plans, studies and reports by navigating the municipal website. • Documents are made available in accessible format. • Create and maintain an online library of municipal reports and studies on the website. <p>Timeline: Review in Q2 2025.</p>



Priority 2: Two-Way Communications

Goal 2.1: Enhanced Public Engagement.	
Action Items	Success Measures
Implement a Customer Service Module.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ForeAction – where people can submit a service request and reporting mechanism.
	Timeline: Implemented in 2024 under eGov.
Continue to improve processes through new technology to support customer satisfaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement new technology such as MESH – a service request and response system and proactive staff maintenance management system.
	Timeline: Implementation in 2025. Annual review of success.
Develop a Public Engagement Policy to guide the public consultation process for municipal projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior Management supports and expects deployment of a public engagement policy to create consistency across the organization.
	Timeline: Review in Q3 2025.
Provide avenues for public engagement and involvement through a variety of channels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a “How to Get Involved” section of the municipal website. Promote the webpage, generating awareness and encouraging future participation. Public engagement, feedback and summary of results opportunities are made available. Distribute “How to Get Involved” print material. Collect preferred method of communication from residents to improve cost efficiency and effectiveness.
	Timeline: Underway in 2024.
The Township actively cultivates trusted collaboration with Indigenous residents and neighbouring First Nations communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate with sensitivity to cultural values and beliefs.
	Timeline: Ongoing commitment.



Goal 2.2: Township staff identifies issues proactively and responds in a thoughtful, coordinated and timely fashion.

Action Items	Success Measures
Develop a Customer Service Strategy with response expectations and key performance indicators for monitoring customer service requests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff are clear about the expectations, standards and processes for inter-department and communications collaboration. Customer Services Standard will include expected response timelines.
	Timeline: Review in 2025
Improve community partner relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage groups and organizations from across the Township in order to better understand interests and concerns.
	Timeline: Ongoing commitment.

Goal 2.3: Two-way communication is enhanced between the Township and the community to build trust, strengthen relationships and support service excellence.

Action Items	Success Measures
Customer/Citizen satisfaction tools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate feedback tools (surveys, website forms, etc.) into newsletter and other external communication channels to encourage feedback.
	Timeline: In use currently. Annual review of success.
Establish communications with neighbourhood groups, boards, and agencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan events (open houses, public engagement) far enough in advance that they can be included on community calendars or upcoming event notices.
	Timeline: In use currently.
Communications with the community are full-circle. Staff share how input was used to make a decision or direction and how the outcome impacts the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media posts, website notices and alerts, newsletter, and LED signs.
	Timeline: In use currently. Expand processes for consistency across departments.



Priority 3: Strong Sense of Community and Identity for the Township

Goal 3.1: Develop new Visual Identity through rebranding.	
Action Items	Success Measures
Develop Corporate Communications Standards for internal and external facing documents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create templates applying revitalized brand and visual standards. • Templates, reports, letters, etc are consistent with Branding Standards.
	Timeline: 2025
Develop key messages for municipal programs, services and priority topics for Council and all residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard messaging templates are used in alignment with Branding Standards for use in media releases, public alerts, social media, etc.
	Timeline: 2025
Develop image and video bank, including photos and videos of key municipal services, residents, local attractions and events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on visual and video storytelling when appropriate and leverages the strengths of each corporate channel to deliver content that is most relevant and useful to the audience.
	Timeline: 2025
Refresh logo and corporate branding that promotes a feeling of community spirit and a sense the community is one unit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a workplan or phasing for visual identity, inclusive of public engagement and unveiling. • New Brand Standards to align with refreshed logo. • Revitalize existing social media channels through brand alignment. • Develop graphic templates to be used for various social media channels, wayfinding signage, and municipal fleet.
	Timeline: Subject to annual review and consideration.



Goal 3.2: Highlight our successes and our people creating a sense of pride, unity, and community.

Action Items	Success Measures
Showcase good news and actions of Township staff, including acts of kindness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Township focuses on sharing authentic stories that resonate and build trust. Communications success should be shared with staff. Success can include positive media coverage, feedback from the community, engagement from the community, event attendance, positive community initiatives, etc. <p>Timeline: 2024-2027</p>
Recognize compliments paid to Township staff by residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formally express appreciation to residents for compliments provided to Township staff through direct connection. <p>Timeline: 2024-2027</p>
Share good news stories from the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commemorative certificates upon request. Celebrate local resident achievements. Showcase the Township’s Community Recognition Program. <p>Timeline: 2024-2027</p>
Promote Township commemoration events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlight when Township takes action to commemorate acts of importance (such as national holidays: Remembrance Day; National Day for Truth and Reconciliation). <p>Timeline: 2024-2027</p>



Priority 4: Internal Communications

Goal 4.1: Build capacity within the organization for clear, consistent and collaborative communications in support of the Township’s vision, strategic priorities and goals.

Action Items	Success Measures
Update the Social Media Policy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise the Policy to ensure collaboration, creativity, consistency across all departments.
	Timeline: Q1 2025
Make a conscious effort to share information amongst employees of matters affecting them before informing the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff have access to the information they need, when they need it. They feel valued and heard and report an improvement in organizational listening and timely information sharing – measured through the Township’s annual Employee Survey and other tools.
	Timeline: Ongoing commitment.
Provide front-line staff with information and updates on topics of strong public interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frontline staff are provided Council highlights, debriefed regularly by management on current issues relevant to public interest, and notified of legislative changes that impact processes.
	Timeline: Ongoing commitment.
Identifying one person per department to serve as the communications lead will provide corporate communications with a simple way to connect with the entire organization and share information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications leads in each department come together to formalize a network for regular and purposeful collaboration.
	Timeline: 2024 – Q1 2027
Establish regular interaction with communication leads and Senior Management to map out communications needs and opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications leads meet quarterly with Senior Management to ensure regular flow of information.
	Timeline: Q1 2025



Goal 4.2: Communications becomes an integral part of project and initiative planning and implementation.

Action Items	Success Measures
Coordinated response across departments with communications developed by subject matter experts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate communications reminders, touchpoints, etc. into regular processes. <p>Timeline: Ongoing commitment.</p>
Encourage opportunities for employees across the organization to collaborate through cross-departmental projects, initiatives, and teams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize collaboration internally at Senior Management and Coordinator meetings. <p>Timeline: Ongoing commitment.</p>
Communications is embedded as part of corporate-wide initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be considered as part of the Customer Service Strategy. <p>Timeline: 2024-2027</p>
Increase communication skills and enhance the communications capacity of the organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer training to staff for design, layout, and communications technology to build capacity for visually engaging communications. Provide staff with training on creating accessible communications. <p>Timeline: 2024-2027</p>