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## **Enhancements in Communication and Public Engagement in the Town's Capital Projects Information Report**

Report Number: 2018-26

Department(s): Engineering Services

Author(s): Director, Engineering Services

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In accordance with the Procedure By-law, any member of Council may make a request to the Town Clerk that this Report be placed on an upcoming Committee of the Whole agenda for discussion.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to apprise Council of innovation and improvements made by Engineering Services to increase the frequency and quality of communications with, and engagement of, Town residents who may be impacted by our capital infrastructure projects.

### **Background**

Throughout 2017, Engineering Services (ES) made strides towards successfully improving the performance, workmanship and quality in materials and services delivered by contractors and engineering consultants hired for our capital infrastructure projects. Information Report No. ES 2016-55, dated December 8, 2016, outlined eighteen (18) new checks, balances and quality control measures that Engineering Services implemented to improve performance by the Town's contractors and consultants.

With these control measures now solidly in place, the focus in 2018 shifted to Community Engagement, which is one of Council's top five (5) strategic priorities for the current term. To help advance this strategic priority, several new methods were implemented by ES to boost resident engagement in the Town's capital construction programme and to enhance communications with those who are inconvenienced by road reconstruction.

## Discussion

Using the Town's desire for innovation and creativity, ES came up with five (5) new ways to enhance communications and engage residents in the delivery of our capital infrastructure programme. These are:

1. Construction Liaison Committees / Resident Ambassador Programs
2. New Public Consultation Centres (PCC's) before any design begins
3. Branding of the Historic Downtown Newmarket area
4. Construction Corner bi-weekly newsletters
5. Even Better Delivery of Notices to Residents

Each is described in more detail below.

### **1. Construction Liaison Committees / Resident Ambassador Programs:**

It became apparent during our construction projects that the most vocal residents on streets being reconstructed are those who want details about the project or who feel a need to voice opinions and share concerns regarding the work being done on their street. These individuals are usually natural leaders who are very good at rallying their neighbours and becoming the "informal spokespersons" for groups of residents.

ES decided to provide a better opportunity for those voices to be heard by creating a "Construction Liaison Committee" for each road reconstruction project. As each project is set to begin, ES sends out an invitation to all residents on the street to become a "Resident Ambassador" to serve on a "Construction Liaison Committee". As part of that volunteer "position", Ambassadors are invited to participate in bi-weekly site meetings with the construction team (Contractor, Consultant and Town) to bring forth concerns that they or their neighbours have. It also offers an opportunity for the Ambassador to ask questions and to hear what the plans are in moving the project forward. The Ambassadors can then share the information with their neighbours through casual conversation. All Ambassadors must agree to share their contact information (phone numbers and e-mail addresses) with all residents on the street. Residents still have the other conventional contact options, including the Town's ES Project Manager and the Consultant's site inspector. Many still prefer talking to their Ward Councillor, but talking to a neighbour through the Ambassadors program offers one more point of contact. Ward Councillors affected, including the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, would be advised of whom the Ambassadors are and how to contact them.

## **2. New Public Consultation Centres (PCC's) Before Any Design Begins:**

Traditionally, ES has held Public Information Centres (PIC's) when a project reaches the ninety percent (90%) design stage. Occasionally, residents will provide some information at the 90% stage that would have been useful had it been known prior to beginning the design (e.g.: a tree that is diseased and should be taken down and replaced; or a traffic condition that they have observed that could be attenuated through a proper design). For this reason, and also to value their input, ES decided that it would be useful to engage residents before starting a road construction design, in addition to the conventional PIC at the end of the design. The first such PCC was held a few weeks ago for the Niagara Street and Simcoe Street Reconstruction project. The session was very well attended and quite successful. Residents had many questions that were answered at the PCC and provided information that will be useful for the consulting engineer's design. ES is now looking to put an "iWonder" spin to the PCC's in order to engage residents with specific consultation activities in an effort to continue with the iWonder theme that ES recently adopted for Public Consultation processes with the Wayne – Waratah Drainage project.

## **3. Branding of the Historic Downtown Newmarket Area:**

As part of the Park Avenue Reconstruction Project starting in 2018, ES spearheaded the development of a concrete imprint stamp in the form of a heritage crest with the words "Historic Downtown Newmarket" inside the crest. This stamp will provide placemaking to display the fact that a location is within the heritage district of Historic Downtown Newmarket. Concrete sidewalks within the designated area will be permanently imprinted using the stamp. The Communications Department and several other Town staff involved in heritage preservation were consulted for their input on the development of this stamp.

## **4. "Construction Corner" Bi-Weekly Newsletter:**

The Construction Corner is published every two (2) weeks for every road reconstruction project where residents are inconvenienced by capital construction works. The newsletter was devised to inform, educate and entertain residents regarding the construction that is going on at their doorstep. It tells them, in plain language, about what they have seen happening on their street over the past few weeks and what equipment and processes they should expect to see over the next few weeks. It also provides residents with a snippet of trivia about road construction or a historic fact about their street, a traffic safety tip from Safety Cone Sam, and a Sudoku puzzle for their enjoyment (with the hopes of keeping the newsletter hanging around the household for a few days). Residents can opt to receive the Construction Corner by email if they prefer.

## **5. Even Better Delivery of Notices to Residents:**

Many notices to residents are mailed by Engineering Services through Canada Post. However, notices that are more time-sensitive are hand-delivered door-to-door at the site of the capital works project. In the past, hand delivery was done either through a technical student employee, or by the site inspector when necessary. Having specialized technical staff or site inspectors delivering notices was not found to be an efficient or effective use of their time. Technical staff should always be closely watching the contractor's activities to ensure that the work is being done to Town standards and specifications and they should not be delivering notices.

In an effort to be more consistent and rapid in the delivery of notices, ES has now assigned the door-to-door delivery of capital construction notices to an administrative staff member. ES administrative staff already have all of the necessary personal protective equipment ("PPE" - i.e. hardhat, safety boots, reflective vest, etc.) and this activity proves to be a rewarding and educational experience for administrative staff who can now attend construction sites and learn about the equipment and processes that are the subject of many phone calls or emails that they receive. The timing of deliveries has greatly improved. We are also looking at email delivery of such notices and are looking to put a system in place to obtain permission to contact residents by email. Hand delivery will still be an option for those who do not use electronic devices.

## **Conclusion**

In order to support Council's Strategic Priority of bettering communications and public engagement, ES has implemented five strategies to enhance resident participation and their receipt of information about Capital Infrastructure projects. These methods engage residents earlier in the design process, provide consistent and timely communication, educate residents about the construction process and help alleviate concerns and questions that residents have about the construction that is impacting their lives.

## **Business Plan and Strategic Plan Linkages**

This report links to Newmarket's Strategic Plan direction, Well Planned & Connected, by protecting vulnerable road users and improving travel within Newmarket.

This report also aligns with Council's 2014-2018 Strategic Priority on enhanced community engagement by aligning ourselves with communications best practices and engaging our changing resident demographics.

## Consultation

No consultation was undertaken in the preparation of this report. However, ES continually solicits input from residents on these new methods of engagement and communication.

## Human Resource Considerations

Not applicable to this report.

## Budget Impact

Operating Budget – Not applicable to this report.

Capital Budget – Not applicable to this report.

## Attachments

None

## Contact

For more information on this report, please contact Rachel Prudhomme, at 905-953-5300, extension 2500 or [RPrudhomme@Newmarket.ca](mailto:RPrudhomme@Newmarket.ca)

## Approval



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