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**TO:** Committee of the Whole                      **MEETING:** April 9, 2019

**FROM:** Lisa Moilanen  
Communications Coordinator                      **FILE:** Not applicable

**SUBJECT:** Continuing the Conversation: Best Practices for RDN Communications and Engagement

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**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

That the Board approve the communications and engagement tools.

**SUMMARY**

The Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) is committed to continually providing timely, accurate and relevant information about RDN projects, services and initiatives to its residents. Two-way communications and the engagement of residents are important aspects of the commitment to thorough, timely communication. In support of this, a review of the current tools used by the RDN has been conducted.

**BACKGROUND**

Reviewing the tools used to communicate with and engage residents is important to ensure they are the most effective in sharing information, reaching the intended audience and providing information in a timely manner.

By way of definition, “communication” refers to passive or one-way approaches to provide information to the public. “Engagement” refers to active or two-way approaches specifically designed to gather feedback from the residents. This is a subtle but important distinction, as engagement requires a case-by-case review of a particular project in order to determine the best tools and techniques to gather input. As an example, the Board’s new strategic plan is based on engagement with the community.

Board members communicate and engage residents using different forums and resources. Some tools and techniques used in the past have included emails to residents, community open houses or coffee talks, and articles and ads in the newspaper. The RDN supports these initiatives with a \$750 annual budget per Electoral Area Director. These tools are not directly supported by staff.

In 2018, a variety of tools and techniques were used to reach out to RDN residents. The following is a summary of 2018 RDN outreach including communication and engagement tools and techniques used in order of the most frequent or widely used across the organization:

**Communication** – the sharing of information about RDN projects and initiatives

### Indirect

- 1) RDN [website](#) – includes service or project [notices](#), [news releases](#), general project and service information
- 2) Printed [monthly newspaper ads](#) – RDN Updates ads in the Nanaimo News Bulletin, Parksville Qualicum Beach News and Gabriola Sounder
- 3) Printed newspaper ads – for individual projects or initiatives
- 4) Social media ([Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) primary, [Instagram](#) secondary) – typically used 4-10 weekly with original informative posts about project and initiatives; more frequently used during storm events or EOC's
- 5) Radio ads – for individual projects or initiatives
- 6) [News releases](#) – sent electronically directly to all local and island media
- 7) RDN Bus Ads – for individual projects or initiatives
- 8) Community notice boards in Parksville and Qualicum Beach – for individual projects or initiatives
- 9) Board agendas and minutes – posted in advance of the meeting for the agenda's and following the meeting for the minutes in a central [database](#)
- 10) Mailed newsletter or updates – for individual projects or initiatives, sometimes region wide or to a specific area
- 11) [Recreation Active Living Guide](#) – printed and distributed twice a year, spring and fall; highlighting all RDN Recreation opportunities
- 12) [Parks & Trails Guide](#) – rebranded, printed and distributed to highlight RDN regional parks and trails
- 13) [Perspectives](#) – annual region-wide publication, wrapped on the outside of the Nanaimo News Bulletin, Parksville Qualicum Beach News and Gabriola Sounder
- 14) Electoral Area Updates – mailed through Canada post directly to each EA home twice a year in past; content decided on by each EA Director and then also posted on their EA webpage; Spring only in 2018 as the fall was the election period
- 15) Handouts at facilities – for individual projects or initiatives
- 16) Traveling display – for individual projects or initiatives
- 17) Articles in journals – requests made by organizations or publications on a project or initiative

### Direct or in-person

- 18) RDN Transit NextRide – real-time technology to find where a bus is or a stop
- 19) Stakeholder or other Council/Board Presentations – for individual projects or initiatives
- 20) Student/School Presentations – for individual projects or initiatives
- 21) Curbside outreach – mandated to do it with contract with Recycle BC for what goes in or not in your bin; conducted in the summer as an opportunity to share information and give a face for residents to ask questions directly
- 22) RDN Curbside App – tool downloaded on mobile devices, provides the ability to search items to determine where it goes and to sign-up to receive a reminder for your pick up-date; also have the ability send out notices of service changes directly by route or area
- 23) Connect Rocket – notifications sent related to emergencies in the region for residents to receive for selected areas within the RDN using various methods including phone call, text and email
- 24) Direct email notifications – for specific project or initiatives that emails have been directly collected for

- 25) Community training – youth and seniors for specific project or initiatives such as using transit
- 26) Parades – RDN Transit bus participating in parades
- 27) Site visits with community – for individual projects or initiatives
- 28) Expo – for individual projects or initiatives

**Engagement** – all used for individual projects or initiatives

- A. Open houses or Info sessions
- B. Get Involved RDN Projects
- C. Pop-up offices
- D. Public hearings
- E. Public Information Meetings
- F. Focus group/workshop
- G. Survey

Many of the tools listed above will continue to be used in 2019 by the departments on a specific project or initiative basis. Additional tools, such as videos, will also be used in the year ahead to share information. Each project or initiative lead is encouraged to ensure their communications and engagement plans consider who the audience is, to use more than one tool to share information or engage including direct and indirect tools.

Strengthened by the diversity of tools mentioned above, the following are recommended to be the primary focus of communication and engagement efforts in 2019

- 1) Website – expand current use of by:
  - a) Creating Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds to send and allow residents to sign-up to receive direct emails for news releases, service alerts, job postings and bid opportunities
- 2) Monthly RDN Updates ads in the Nanaimo News Bulletin, Parksville Qualicum Beach News and Gabriola Souther and posted on the RDN website and promoted on Facebook and Twitter – expand current use of by:
  - a) Providing to Directors via email for them to distribute and/or post on notice boards in their communities
- 3) Social Media
  - a) Continue to increase Did You Know posts to share general info about the RDN rather than an active project or initiative
- 4) News releases
- 5) Get Involved RDN – all projects with engagement

Moving forward, the annual Perspectives or semi-annual Electoral Area Updates are not recommended as they are not an effective and do not provide current information to residents.

The information that those publications share is information that has already been shared using one or more of the tools recommended.

Staff is also currently preparing a report on the cost of implementing the webcasting of Committee of the Whole and Board meeting, as well as all public meetings in the Board Chambers.

## **ALTERNATIVE**

1. That the Board approved the proposed communication and engagement tools.
2. That the Board provide alternate direction.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The recommended communications and engagement tools are included in the 2019 financial plan.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLICATIONS**

Focus On Relationships- We Will Focus On Improved Two-Way Communication Within The Regional District And With Our Communities.

Reviewing and revising communications and engagement tools to ensure they reflect current and best practice, support the most efficient and effective focus on continuous improved two-way communication with our residents and communities, as well as maintaining alignment with the RDN's strategic plan.



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Lisa Moilanen  
[lmoilanen@rdn.bc.ca](mailto:lmoilanen@rdn.bc.ca)  
March 21, 2019

Reviewed by:

- D. Wells, General Manager, Corporate Services
- P. Carlyle, Chief Administrative Officer