

# Township of Southgate

## Communications and Community Engagement Strategy

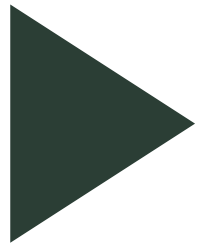
2024-2027

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# Introduction

# About the Communications and Community Engagement Strategy Project



- On November 1, 2023, Council adopted the **Community Strategic Plan** as a guiding document for this term of Council, until 2027. The Plan identified **13 priority areas, one of which states the Township's desire to improve community engagement.**



- Each priority includes numerous action items. Priority 13 includes five action items. Action items a) and b) **include the development of a community engagement strategy** to increase citizen participation, and developing a communications plan to identify opportunities to engage with residents.



- On August 7, 2024, **Council received the Foundations Report**, which **provided five recommendations** regarding what the final strategy should include. The Report also provided some key statistics about Township communications, demographics, and psychographics.



# Scope

# Focus Areas of the Strategy

This Strategy will be a guiding document for all corporate communications and community engagement exercises, across all departments and focus areas.

Communications	Community Engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Communications with residents through all municipal-controlled mediums (i.e.: the website, social media, and newsletters).</li><li>- Communications with residents through all third-party sources, including media and through other governmental organizations.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Statutory and non-statutory community consultation processes (to a lesser degree).</li><li>- Audience identification for community consultation processes.</li></ul>

# Out-of-scope

This Strategy does not do the following:

- Lower community consultation standards for statutorily-mandated community consultations (i.e.: those required for land-use planning matters)
- Remove the municipality from any required communications standards as mandated by the *Municipal Emergencies Act* or other relevant legislation.
- Limit how Councillors can represent their views in the media or through personal channels, within the parameters of the Code of Conduct.



# Methodology



# Research Phase Methodology

After adoption of the Project Charter, staff began work on the research phase of this project, which included the following:



- A comprehensive **communications audit of all municipal communication sources**, with a data reporting period of January 1, 2024, to June 5, 2024, with data predating this period included as necessary.



- An **audit of past community engagement techniques** employed by the Township, along with an inventory of available community data.
- A **community survey**, which was fielded from June 6, 2024, to June 25, 2024. **138 responses** were collected.



# Key Facts

# Key Facts – Municipal Communications

- 8,716** Total Southgate residents
- 2,685** Audience size on Meta platforms
- 33.7k** Projected annual website views
- 71%** Share of the Township's audience that is female
- +14%** Audience growth since January 1, 2024
- 13** Print media campaigns in 2024





# Section 1: Municipal Communication Standards

# Municipal Communications Mediums

The Township has developed a robust suite of communications tools for resident communications. The table below summarizes them:

Medium	Distribution	Emergency Adaptability	Cost Effectiveness
E-Newsletter	Strong	Very adaptable	Very effective
Media release	Varies	Very adaptable	Very effective
Meta platforms	Moderate	Very adaptable	Effective
Print Newsletter	Strong	Not adaptable	Not effective
Voyent Alert	Weak	Very adaptable	Effective
Website	Moderate	Adaptable	n/a

# Types of Municipal Communications

The Township communicates with residents in the following ways:



- **Educational/Awareness**



- **Emergency Communications**



- **Service Disruption**



- **Service Update**

Each type of communication requires its own strategy and resourcing. Depending on the type of communication, varying degrees of interdepartmental coordination are also required.

# What are our Communication Subtypes?

The table below provides more information on each subtype of communication carried out by the Township:

Subtype	Description	Frequency	Urgency	Challenges
<b>Educational/ Awareness</b>	Informing the public about Township services, events, etc.	Common	Low	Making information digestible for the public
<b>Emergency Communications</b>	Informing the public of a civic emergency	Rare	Severe	Getting the message out broadly, while ensuring accuracy
<b>Service Disruption</b>	Informing the public of a disruption to a municipal service (unplanned)	Common	High	Getting the message out to users as fast as possible
<b>Service Update</b>	Informing the public of changes to a municipal service (planned)	Frequent	Moderate	Getting the message out to users

# When do we see these Subtypes?

Dealing with issues that fall into these subtypes is part of Township staff's day-to-day lives. Below shows an example of each type of communication subtype in reality:

Subtype	Description	Example
<b>Educational/ Awareness</b>	Informing the public about Township services, events, etc.	Informing residents of a new by-law regulating the ignition of fireworks
<b>Emergency Communications</b>	Informing the public of a civic emergency	A wildfire is posing a threat to a population centre
<b>Service Disruption</b>	Informing the public of a disruption to a municipal service (unplanned)	A road is closed due to a washout after a severe rainstorm
<b>Service Update</b>	Informing the public of changes to a municipal service (planned)	A road will be closed two weeks from now so the yellow line can be re-painted



# Which Tools to use When

The Township has a diverse set of communication tools at its disposal. The following table shows which tools will be utilized for each situation (note: this can be amended discretionarily as needed):

Subtype	E-Newsletter	Media Release	Meta Platforms	Print Newsletter	VoyentAlert	Website
Educational/Awareness	X	X	X	X		X
Emergency Communications	X	X	X		X	X
Service Disruption	X		X		X	X
Service Update	X		X	X		X

Please note that for all issues, **the discretion of the Communications Officer and respective Department Head will be leveraged as well**, to ensure the response meets the needs of the situation (i.e.: a Boil Water Advisory may include methods beyond what is shown above, such as targeted canvassing, etc.)



## **Section 2: Communications Enhancements**

# 1. Establishing a Monthly e-Newsletter



1. Create and publish an e-newsletter, to be sent out by email, to residents who subscribe on a monthly basis.

**Description:** Many municipalities have established a monthly e-newsletter to help keep residents informed. This includes programming updates and periodic seasonal reminders for residents. This mailing list can also be used for important messages as they arise.

**Resourcing:** One mailing list management program, 6-hours of staff time monthly.

**Costs:** ~\$1,000-per-annum, plus staff time

**Timeline:** Completed by mid-Fall 2024

## 2. Sending Newsletters via Mail to Tenants



2. Allow residents who are tenants to “opt-in” to receive the newsletter that usually goes out with tax bills to increase the reach and distribution of the print newsletter.

**Description:** The Township newsletter is sent out with property tax notices, and as a result, residents who rent their properties do not receive this notice. Adopting this recommendation will allow residents who do not receive property tax notices to receive the newsletters via regular mail. If the resident has an email account on file, this will be the default method of delivery in order to reduce costs.

**Resourcing:** ~5-10 hours of staff time per newsletter.

**Costs:** up to \$1,000-per-annum.

**Timeline:** 2025 taxation year.



# Section 3: Community Engagement Standards

# How the Township Engages with Residents

Resident engagement is a critical component of policymaking, and this is no different for the Township. There are many different ways that the Township can engage with residents and stakeholders in its decision-making processes:

- Corresponding with Township officials
- Open houses
- Public meetings
- Stakeholder meetings
- Surveys and questionnaires



# When do we engage the community?

The table below summarizes the types of matters that we engage the community on:

Matter	Description	Example	Challenges
<b>Policy Changes</b>	The Township seeking to adopt or change a policy that will impact residents or stakeholders	The Township is considering adopting a by-law regulating the discharge of fireworks	Getting representative feedback from the public on the matter
<b>Service Changes</b>	The Township is considering adopting a new model or procedure for existing services	The Township is considering changing the way it grants burn permits to a fully online system	Getting feedback from the right policy communities on the matter
<b>Long-term Visioning</b>	Creation of long-term documents (i.e.: Strategic Plan, Official Plan, etc.)	The Township seeks input for the drafting of a new Strategic Plan	Thorough community engagement while facing resource constraints

# How do we Engage with the Community?

There are numerous ways the Township can engage with its residents. The table below summarizes various traits of these engagement mediums:

Medium	Description	Quantity of Engagement	Quality of Engagement
<b>Correspondence</b>	Residents corresponding with Councillors and/or staff	Varies	Varies
<b>Open houses</b>	Informal meetings where residents and municipal officials can have a candid conversation about an issue	Low	Strong
<b>Public meetings</b>	Structured meetings where residents share feedback on a proposed matter	Moderate	Moderate
<b>Stakeholder meetings</b>	Like an open house, but focused on a specific issue with only stakeholders (i.e.: farmers)	Low	Strong
<b>Surveys</b>	Questions fielded to the public for a set period of time	High	Moderate



# Annual Engagement Targets

The Township has made increasing opportunities for residents and stakeholders to engage with decisionmakers regarding issues before Council, as well as opportunities to interact with Council, a top priority. The table below demonstrates our commitment to engagements for upcoming years in this strategy:

Medium	Description	Amnt. / Year
<b>Open houses</b>	Informal meetings where residents and municipal officials can have a candid conversation about an issue	2
<b>Public meetings</b>	Structured meetings where residents share feedback on a proposed matter	As needed
<b>Stakeholder meetings</b>	Like an open house, but focused on a specific issue with only stakeholders	2
<b>Surveys</b>	Questions fielded to the public for a set period of time	4



## **Section 4: Commitments and Implementation Timeline**

# Communications Commitments to the Public

The Township is committing to use the following mediums when communicating events of the following natures to the general public:

Subtype	E-Newsletter	Media Release	Meta Platforms	Print Newsletter	VoyentAlert	Website
<b>Educational/Awareness</b>	X	X	X	X		X
<b>Emergency Communications</b>	X	X	X		X	X
<b>Service Disruption</b>	X		X		X	X
<b>Service Update</b>	X		X	X		X

# Community Engagement Commitments

The Township is committing to use the following forums for community engagement. Though this list is nonexhaustive, it provides a benchmark in the years to come:

Medium	Description	Amnt. / Year
<b>Open houses</b>	Informal meetings where residents and municipal officials can have a candid conversation about an issue	2
<b>Public meetings</b>	Structured meetings where residents share feedback on a proposed matter	As needed
<b>Stakeholder meetings</b>	Like an open house, but focused on a specific issue with only stakeholders	2
<b>Surveys</b>	Questions fielded to the public for a set period of time	4

Some groups that will be targeted for stakeholder meetings include: farmers, commercial road users, downtown business owners, and young residents.

# Communications Enhancements



1. Create and publish an e-newsletter, to be sent out by email, to residents who subscribe on a monthly basis.

**Description:** Many municipalities have established a monthly e-newsletter to help keep residents informed. This includes programming updates and periodic seasonal reminders for residents. This mailing list can also be used for important messages as they arise.

**Timeline:** Completed by mid-Fall 2024



2. Allow residents who are tenants to “opt-in” to receive the newsletter that usually goes out with tax bills to increase the reach and distribution of the print newsletter.

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**Timeline:** 2025 taxation year.