

FINAL REPORT
APRIL 18, 2013



HURON
C O U N T Y

UNIVERSITY
of GUELPH

DEVELOPING A SOCIAL MEDIA
STRATEGY FOR THE COUNTY OF HURON

PREPARED BY: MITCHELL AVIS
DANIEL DELAQUIS
MOLLIE KUCHMA
JESSICA MARTIN

Developing a Social Media Strategy for the County of Huron
Planning & Development Department

Prepared for
The County of Huron Planning & Development Department

By
RPD 6280, Advanced Planning Practice
Rural Planning & Development
University of Guelph, ON

April 2013

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors of this report would like to give recognition to the partial funding assistance provided by the Knowledge Translation and Transfer (KTT) program of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (OMAF) and Ministry of Rural Affairs (MRA). In addition, the authors would like to thank and acknowledge the following people for their contributions to the project.

University of Guelph:

Dr. Wayne Caldwell, Professor

Paul Kraehling, PhD Student

County of Huron:

Rebecca Rathwell, Project Manager

Denise Van Amersfoort, Planner

Monica Walker-Bolton, Planner

Sandra Weber, Senior Planner

City of Brantford

Tara Tran, Policy Planner

City of London

Sean Galloway, Manager, Urban Design

United Counties of Leeds Grenville

Ann Weir, Economic Development Manager

Municipality of Meaford

Rob Armstrong, Director

Liz Buckton, Planner II

Laurie Mitchell, Economic Development & Communications

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Social Media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc) are becoming more popular by the day. The County of Huron has identified this trend as an opportunity to better connect its residents with information on the projects happening throughout the County. This report has been prepared to explore the potential of adding a social media component to the Huron County Planning & Development Department.

In Ontario, over 200 municipalities are using social media in some way¹. Research has shown that the size of a municipality is linked to the amount and type of social media use. For example, it was found that smaller municipalities tend to use Facebook whereas larger municipalities are more inclined to use Twitter. The advantages of social media include reaching a large number of people (particularly the younger generations), increasing transparency, transferring information at a rapid rate and introducing a new medium to interact with the public. Challenges of social media include the time and cost to monitor the sites, issues with misinformation and the need to constantly provide new content.

Of all the municipalities identified by Redbrick Communications Inc. only a small number were municipal planning departments. From this, five case studies were completed to focus on specific municipal planning departments and examine their experiences with social media. Case studies included:

- ReThink London
- Municipality of Meaford – Planning & Building Department
- Leeds Grenville Integrated Community Sustainability Plan
- Collingwood Planning Services
- City of Brantford Policy Planning Department

Through these case studies, several successes and lessons were shared with regards to integrating social media into planning department practice. As a result, the authors of this report

¹ “Municipal Social Media Survey,” Redbrick Communications Inc., published October 2012, <http://www.redbrick.ca/resources.asp>.

have provided a series of recommendations for the Huron County Planning & Development Department:

- a) Develop a social media strategy prior to implementation;
- b) Develop a social media platform for the upper-tier;
- c) Prioritize social media in the workplace;
- d) Develop multiple social media platforms as trends change;
- e) Establish a primary social media account prior to introducing project specific pages;
- f) Make everything available online; and
- g) Ensure citizens know that engaging in social media does not replace the statutory public notice requirements as per the *Planning Act*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
2.0 BACKGROUND	1
2.1 HOW WE WERE RETAINED	1
2.2 PURPOSE.....	2
2.3 GOALS.....	2
2.4 OBJECTIVES.....	3
2.5 INTENDED AUDIENCE.....	3
3.0 HURON COUNTY.....	3
3.1 LOCATION	3
3.2 DEMOGRAPHICS	3
3.3 CURRENT SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM	4
4.0 METHODOLOGY	5
4.1 LITERATURE REVIEW	5
4.2 CASE STUDIES.....	6
4.3 INTERVIEWS.....	7
5.0 TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA	7
5.1 FACEBOOK	7
5.2 TWITTER	8
5.3 YOUTUBE	8
5.4 FOURSQUARE	9
5.5 ALTERNATIVE MEDIA.....	9
6.0 FINDINGS	10
6.1 SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS IN ONTARIO GOVERNMENTS.....	10
6.2 BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA	12
6.3 CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA.....	14
7.0 DISCUSSION OF CASE STUDIES.....	15
7.1 GENERAL SOCIAL MEDIA GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES	16
7.1.1 CASE STUDY I: RETHINK LONDON	17
7.1.2 CASE STUDY II: MUNICIPALITY OF MEAFORD- PLANNING & BUILDING DEPARTMENT.....	19
7.1.3 CASE STUDY III: LEEDS GRENVILLE INTEGRATED COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY PLAN.....	21
7.2 PLANNING-RELATED CASE STUDIES	22
7.2.1 CASE STUDY IV: COLLINGWOOD PLANNING SERVICES	23
7.2.2 CASE STUDY V: CITY OF BRANTFORD POLICY PLANNING DEPARTMENT.....	24

7.3 STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY	26
7.3.1 MEETING STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS FOR PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENTS	26
7.3.2 SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY	27
8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS	28
9.0 REFERENCES	31
APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE	33

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Planning Departments play a very important role in the development of cities, towns and villages. Decisions that are made by planners at all levels of government influence development and can have implications on the surrounding environment for years to come. It is crucial to involve the public in local planning decisions to ensure the community can contribute and provide important opinions towards how their municipality is to be developed.

In the County of Huron, like many other municipalities in Ontario, it is important for the Planning Department to reach all members of the community. Traditional public engagement strategies may change as technology continues to evolve and the need to be connected at all times continues to increase. As society is constantly connected to phones, tablets and computers, this introduces a very useful platform for not only informing the public of local planning issues, but also getting their input and opinions on some of the most important issues in the community. As technology continues to become more user-friendly and people from all age demographics continue to get connected, the use of social media in planning decisions will continue to provide a greater opportunity to bridge the gap between local government and the community.

With all of this in mind, there is an opportunity to explore what other Ontario municipalities are doing with respect to social media in their public engagement processes. This report will look at research previously conducted on the use of social media in planning departments. Additionally, five case studies will be conducted to explore specifically what some municipalities are doing in Ontario. This report will conclude with a set of recommendations on how social media can be implemented in the practices of the County of Huron Planning & Development Department.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 How we were retained

This project originated from a call for proposals from our University of Guelph Professor, Dr. Wayne Caldwell, in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Agricultural and Food and the Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs. The County of Huron expressed interest in partaking in the

project and suggested the opportunity for students to develop a social media strategy for the Planning & Development Department. In January 2013, Masters students from the Advanced Planning Practice (RPD 6280) class in the Rural Planning & Development program at the University of Guelph were retained to complete the project. Initial consultation began in January and the project was completed over the course of the Winter 2013 semester. Three assumptions were made for the completion of this project:

- Assume that social media will engage all demographics;
- Assume that all social media platforms will maintain relevance over time; and
- Assume that outreach will increase public participation.

2.2 Purpose

Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) are becoming increasingly popular by the day. The County of Huron has identified this trend as an opportunity to better connect residents with the projects happening throughout the County. This project will examine how social media can be incorporated in the practices of the Planning & Development Department. In particular, three areas will be focused on:

- 1) Development and implementation of County documents such as the Huron County Sustainability Plan;
- 2) Review, notice, and approval of Planning Applications (e.g. official plan amendments, zoning by-law amendment applications, severances and minor variances);
- 3) Potential ability of social media or other innovative ways to fulfill Statutory Notice Requirements under the *Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990*.

The purpose will be to see how feasible it would be to incorporate social media in each of those areas in Huron County, through the Planning and Development Department.

2.3 Goals

The goals of this project are to:

- 1) Identify social media approaches to better engage the public; and
- 2) Recommend a strategy to incorporate social media at the Planning & Development Department.

2.4 Objectives

The objectives of this project are to:

- Explore public management tools used by other jurisdictions and analyze how social media is incorporated into their Planning & Development Departments; and
- Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of social media approaches and public consultation.

2.5 Intended Audience

The intended audience of this report includes the County of Huron Planning & Development Department and all staff (Clerks and Chief Administrative Officers) at the lower tier level within the County. Although this report is written specifically for the County of Huron, it is anticipated that other municipalities in Ontario will be able to learn from the results and adapt the recommendations for their own needs.

3.0 HURON COUNTY

3.1 Location

The County of Huron, otherwise known as Ontario's West Coast, is located in Southern Ontario along the Lake Huron shoreline. This county is home to a diverse and unique population with a large agricultural presence in the community. With the city of London to the South and Waterloo Region to the east, this location is ideal for property owners that prefer a rural landscape, but have access to large city centres when required.



Figure 1.0: Location of the County of Huron in Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2012).

3.2 Demographics

The County of Huron, as are many other rural areas in Ontario, is experiencing a decrease in the number of young residents and an increase in the amount of older population. According to

Statistics Canada, the population in 2011 in the County of Huron decreased by 0.4% to a population of 59,100 from 59,325 in 2006². The median age of the population in the County of Huron is 45 years old, which is older than the median age in the province of Ontario of 40 years old³. The County continues to see a trend in the increasing age of its residents, as the median age of the population in 2006 was 42 years old⁴.

Due to the vast amount of shoreline present in the County of Huron, several citizens are seasonal cottagers with recreational homes and properties along the Lake Huron shoreline. Because of this, a portion of the population experiences seasonal fluxes. There are approximately 4,000 seasonal dwellings in the County of Huron that provide seasonal accommodation for residents in the form of cottages, mobile homes and other short-term accommodations⁵. With this seasonal flux in residents, the use of social media by the County of Huron Planning Department could be beneficial for those that do not live in the County permanently. Many of the planning applications that occur during the spring and summer months are from seasonal cottagers along the Lake Huron shoreline that are looking to construct or renovate existing structures. Social media provides another opportunity reach to those demographics that are not living in the County of Huron permanently.

3.3 Current Social Media Platform

Currently, the County of Huron is using several social media platforms primarily through the Tourism Department, by creating the brand 'Ontario's West Coast'. Since tourism and the Lake Huron shoreline is a large attraction in the county, social media is an important factor in influencing tourists to visit County attractions. Other departments within the County of Huron make use of various webpages to educate visitors and inform citizens.

² "Huron," Statistics Canada, Census Profile 2011, accessed April 1, 2013, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ "Huron," Statistics Canada, Census Profile 2006, accessed April 1, 2013, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/prof/92-591/>.

⁵ Ibid.

The researchers were able to obtain website traffic data for the sites ran by Mark Hussey in the Planning & Development Department. As a brief overview, the *Ontario's West Coast* webpage had 37,700 page visits between March 1, 2012 and March 1, 2013 (M. Hussey, personal communication, March 20, 2013). The *Shop in Huron* has been successful obtaining 10,709 page visits, followed by *Huron Manufacturing* with 4,542 page visits, *Invest in Huron* with 3,810 page visits and *Make Huron Home* with 2,061 page visits⁶. The *Shop in Huron* site experiences the highest number of pages per visit, with the average number of visitors viewing 4.39 pages each time they access the website⁷. As indicated by the amount of page visits for each of these websites, residents and visitors to Huron County are using the sites currently available to them. Website traffic data for the official County of Huron page and the Planning & Development page were not able to be obtained.

The Tourism Department is heavily engaged in various forms of social media including an RSS Feed, Facebook (Ontario's West Coast), YouTube (Ontarioswestcoast), Vimeo (Huron County), Twitter (@onwestcoast) and Posterous (ontarioswestcoast.posterous.com). Currently, the Tourism Department is currently the only department within the County of Huron that has a social media presence.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Literature Review

Prior to beginning this project, a review of previous studies and statistics of social media change was completed. This provided preliminary background information on the use of social media in both a general and government specific context. This search included primarily internet sources, and both academic and Government documents. Particularly, it was important to understand the scale, types, and avenues in which social media might be used to influence public participation in planning processes. Exploring and consulting previous studies allowed for a better understanding of the benefits and challenges of social media. This review included:

⁶ Mark Hussey, e-mail to authors, March 20, 2013.

⁷ Ibid.

gathering statistics on growth of social media within Ontario, using previous academic literature to gather information on the benefits and challenges, as well as to identify case studies.

4.2 Case Studies

Redbrick Communications Inc. is a company that specializes in communications services. Founded in 2002, they have provided a broad range of services to both the public and private sectors. From experience with a wide variety of companies, they have perfected their ability to reach media, council, key leaders, and consumers. Redbrick Communications published the Municipal Social Media Survey in May of 2012, which outlined growth, benefits, and challenges that have been experienced by municipalities utilizing social media platforms, specifically from 2010 to 2012⁸.

Redbrick Communications Inc. was consulted for the purposes of this project to develop a list of potential case studies. In Ontario, over 200 municipalities are engaged on social media. However, very few municipal planning departments are. Redbrick Communications Inc. was able to provide us with a list of municipal planning departments in Ontario engaged in social media. In addition to consulting Redbrick Communications, the research team also did an Internet based search to seek out any additional planning departments on social media. The results of this research demonstrate that there are few planning departments utilizing social media daily. Instead it is more often used as a tool for specific projects within the planning department (e.g. an official plan review, a sustainability plan, a transportation plan, etc.). Although not an exhaustive list the following planning departments and projects were identified:

- City of Brantford Policy and Planning Division
- Town of Collingwood Planning Services
- United Counties of Leeds and Grenville Integrated Community Sustainability Plan
- Meaford Planning and Building Services

⁸ "About Us," Redbrick Communications Inc., accessed April 3, 2013, <http://www.redbrick.ca/about.asp>.

- City of London Master Plan – ‘ReThink’ London

4.3 Interviews

Interviews were conducted with planning professionals that were selected from the case studies. The interviews were approximately an hour long and each interview was conducted via a teleconference or by email communication. Pre-designed questionnaires, attached in Appendix 1, were prepared prior to the interviews and in some cases were provided ahead of the interview process for the convenience of the informants. In order to create a more natural atmosphere, a semi-structured interview approach was used. This was beneficial as it allowed for the sharing of some interesting stories of both successes and failures that would likely not have been gained if the interview followed a more stringent process. These interviews provided a more in-depth perspective on aspects such as: background information that led to the decision to embrace social media, the benefits and challenges of using social media, measuring success, lessons learned, and future direction in terms of experimenting with various social media platforms.

5.0 TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

5.1 Facebook

Facebook was launched on February 4, 2004 by Harvard University students Mark Zuckerberg, Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes. It was initially launched as a program for Harvard College students and it was quickly expanded to include other American, and subsequently Canadian, Universities over the course of 2004. In 2005, the service was expanded to include high school students, and on September 26, 2006, Facebook was opened to any member of the general public with a valid email address. In addition, the service is also open to businesses and other organizations, allowing them to establish pages or groups from which they can broadcast information and solicit people to ‘like’ or join granting them a platform to reach a broader audience with information pertaining to a cause or product, for example. With the addition of paid messaging in December 2012, it is possible for anyone or organization to send a message to any audience they wish to target. In order for information contained on Facebook pages to be viewed, users must be logged into the service; in some cases, users must be ‘friends’ or part of certain groups or pages in order to view information,

depending on privacy settings. As of October 2012, Facebook had over 1 billion users worldwide⁹.

5.2 Twitter

Providing anything from information to mindless banter 140 characters at a time, Twitter launched on March 21, 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams and Biz Stone. Dorsey has said the name Twitter was chosen because “The dictionary definition of twitter is ‘a short burst of inconsequential information,’”¹⁰. However, this tool can be used to spread very vital information and has been adopted by businesses, organizations, and governments to broadcast information from sales to donation solicitations to warnings or imminent natural disasters, as was done with the 2011 tsunami in Japan. The length limitation (140 characters) can be both positive and challenging as it can force succinct, effective communication but also has the ability to cause issues where information cannot be expressed in a short format. Twitter does allow for the inclusion of web links to pictures, videos and websites to allow users to provide additional information available elsewhere. This service also allows for certain topics to ‘trend’ with the ability of users to tag their ‘tweets’ with a ‘hashtag.’ Twitter messages may be private or public and allows users to broadcast information to select users or to the general public. As of June 2012, Twitter had over 500 million users¹¹.

5.3 YouTube

The website which encourages you to “broadcast yourself” was founded on February 14, 2005 by three former PayPal employees. This form of social media differs from Twitter, Facebook and other services in that it is based on videos rather than text based communications. This platform allows users to establish profiles from which they can view, download and upload video content. However, this platform also allows users without profiles to view and download

⁹ “Facebook: One Billion and Counting,” Geoffrey A. Fowler, The Wall Street Journal, published October 4, 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390443635404578036164027386112.html>.

¹⁰ “A Short Burst of Inconsequential Information?,” Anne Weiler, Wellpepper, published March 3, 2013, <http://wellpepper.com/a-short-burst-of-inconsequential-information>.

¹¹ “Analysis: Twitter Passed 500M Users in June 2012, 140M of them in US; Jakarta ‘Biggest Tweeting’ City,” Ingrid Lunden, Techcrunch, published July 30, 2012, <http://techcrunch.com/2012/07/30/analyst-twitter-passed-500m-users-in-june-2012-140m-of-them-in-us-jakarta-biggest-tweeting-city/>.

video content, thus allowing for increased accessibility of YouTube content. A service that is free to use, there are over 800 million “unique user visits” every month according to YouTube’s statistics¹².

5.4 Foursquare

Launched in March of 2009 by Dennis Crowley and Naveen Selvadurai, and similar to the ‘check-in’ feature available on Facebook, Foursquare is all about where you are and where you want to go. It also allows users to track where their friends have been in an effort to allow users to discover new places, or use their friends’ experiences as a recommendation of where to go (or not) from restaurants to museums, to other places, like where to go on vacation. As of January 2013, there were 30 million private users and one million “merchant users”¹³. Users can be awarded points, badges or mayoral status based on check-ins.

5.5 Alternative Media

There are other media platforms that may prove to be useful to municipalities in advertising and consultation outside of the formats currently used. A website or blog can be a simple and effective way to provide information specific to planning applications that is easily accessible to the general public. Commercials on local television channels and radio stations (where they exist) might be effective in reaching a very broad audience. Email blasts may work for broadcasting information to select groups of people. With advances in Internet technology, geolocation may allow for information to be broadcast to select areas. With many telecommunication carriers offering unlimited incoming text messages, text message blasts may be effective in providing timely information on various projects. Lastly, podcasts represent the opportunity for information to be broadcast at a user’s leisure and provide information in a format that many people are familiar with like radio.

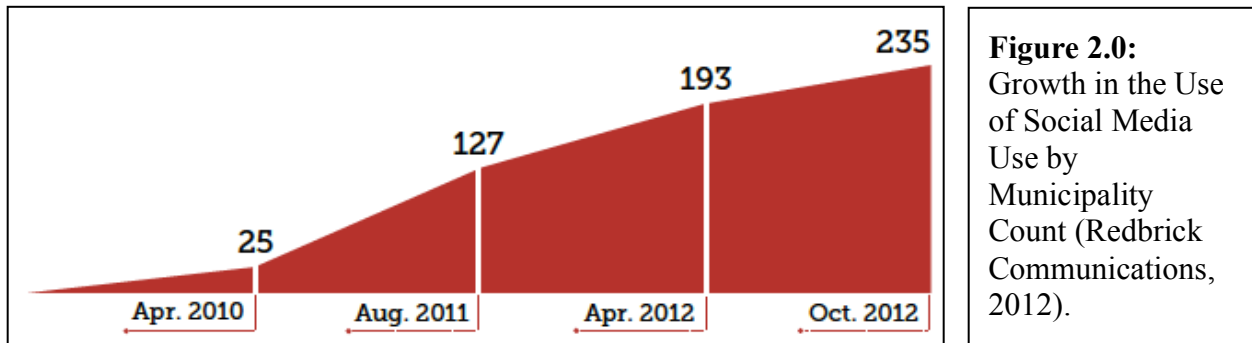
¹² “Statistics,” YouTube, accessed March 30, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html>.

¹³ Ibid.

6.0 FINDINGS

6.1 Social Media Trends in Ontario Municipalities

Perceptions of social media by senior levels of government (federal, provincial) have transitioned as these levels of government have begun to understand and value their ability to create more effective communication avenues with citizens in today's modern society. The Federal Economic Development Agency of Southwestern Ontario promotes the use of social media as a communication platform, however it does not consider the use of social media as an acceptable form of authoritative use for new policy or for outlining guidelines of various services. Though various departments of the Government of Ontario use social media platforms, accounts are not displayed on Government websites and are also subject to a lengthy list of privacy clauses exempting responsibility for privacy breaches¹⁴ (FedDev Ontario, 2012). Municipalities within Ontario have experienced an increased presence of social media tactics particularly within the past decade as it has become recognized as a powerful tool for communication. Redbrick Communications Inc. produced a series of social media survey's that indicated that 235 municipalities were using social media; this represents a 672% increase in social media over approximately two years¹⁵.



There are 444 municipalities in Ontario, all of which were included in the social media surveys conducted by Redbrick Communications Inc. In 2010, there were 25 Ontarian municipalities

¹⁴ "FedDev Ontario Social Media Protocol," FedDev Ontario, published February 28, 2012, <http://www.feddevontario.gc.ca/eic/site/723.nsf/eng/00713.html>.

¹⁵ Redbrick Communications Inc., "Municipal Social Media Survey."

that recognized an official presence of social media within their jurisdictions. In 2011, an additional 75 municipalities joined the motion, totaling 100 signed municipalities that acknowledged social media. Finally, by 2012 approximately 200 municipalities were using social media in some way¹⁶.

Trends in Ontario show that social media use is closely linked with the size of population; as population increases so does the use of social media. Central Ontario experiences the highest use of social media (approximately 71% of municipalities), whereas Western and Eastern Ontario report closer to 44%¹⁷. On the contrary, Northeastern Ontario has the lowest percentage of use, at 18%, of all other regions in the province¹⁸.

Facebook and Twitter are the most dominant forms of modern social media in Ontarian municipalities. Upon the first adoption of social media of various municipalities, Facebook proved to be the choice of initial form of social media, whereas Twitter was a secondary choice after becoming experienced with Facebook. Though Facebook is the choice of social media to provide a baseline, Twitter is the dominant form of social media used by municipalities in Central Ontario; this is the only region where Twitter records surpass Facebook records¹⁹. Figure 3.0 shows the findings from Redbrick Communications while it displays the various levels of use from different sized municipalities.

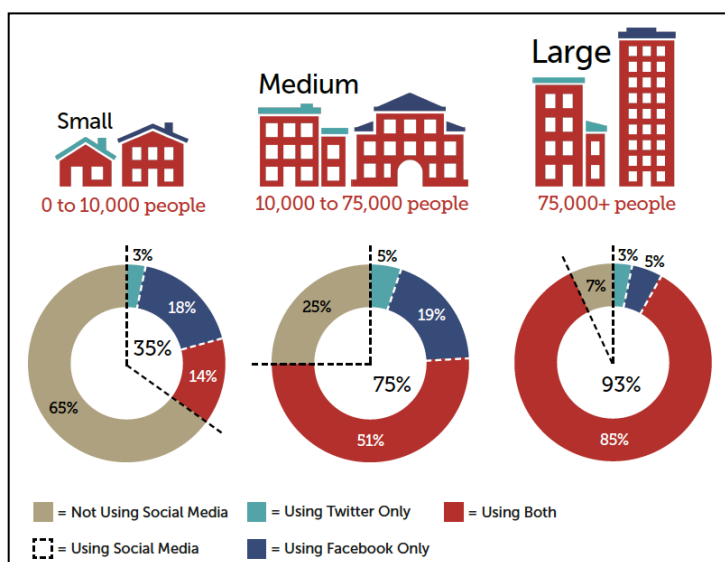


Figure 3.0: Graphics displaying the use of social media in various sized municipalities (Redrick Communications, 2012).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The opportunity to use several accounts via a tool such as Twitter, shows varying results for municipalities within Ontario. Several accounts can be activated for a single municipality, which offers the ability to target audiences on specific topics. Results show that approximately 33% of municipalities that use Twitter chose to activate a single account for each type of social media platform²⁰.

6.2 Benefits of Social Media

Many organizations such as municipalities have begun to adopt the use of social media for its many benefits. As an alternative communication platform, social media enables organizations to reach more individuals, encouraging engagement and participation from community stakeholders²¹. Particularly with younger generations, social media caters to their faster-paced lifestyles because updates on current news or notifications of events within their communities can be disseminated quickly. In addition, younger generations may not be interested or be aware that public meetings are held, which is where social media can be beneficial for spreading current news updates to those that are more difficult to reach²². Social media avenues also allow for connections with new audiences at larger geographic distances, increasing the ability to reach those outside the realm of traditional communication methods²³.

Most importantly, an increase in the use of social media improves the sharing of information to a much broader spectrum of people that allows local governments to be perceived as more transparent. Social media can be considered social software that encourages people to connect, collaborate, and share through a user-generated content²⁴. The distribution of information through social media is not only concentrated at a community scale, but is also recognized for its ability to communicate national and global events. In addition, Redbrick Communications

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "Online Communications Strategy," City of Kitchener, accessed March 27, 2013, http://www.kitchener.ca/en/insidacityhall/resources/online_communications_strategy.pdf.

²² Andrea L. Kavanaugh, Edward A. Fox, Steven D. Sheetz, Seungwon Yang, Lin Tzy Li, Donald J. Shoemaker, Apostol Natsev, Lexing Xie, "Social media use by government: From the routine to the critical," *Government Information Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2012): 480-491.

²³ "Pros and cons of social media," Canada Business Network, accessed April 3, 2013, <http://www.entreprisescanada.ca/eng/page/2655/sgc-59/>.

²⁴ Kavanaugh et al., "Social media use by government: From the routine to the critical," 480-491.

found that use of social media by Mayors and Councillors has increased rapidly since 2010, which demonstrates an increased effort to engage in updated means of communication²⁵.

In addition, the sharing of information is disseminated at a speed unlike traditional forms of communication²⁶. As highlighted by Kavanaugh et al., various platforms of social media are important in times of crises, as studies show that certain applications can provide community resilience in crisis situations with the ability to spread news quickly and succinctly²⁷. Methods such as Twitter, that limit character length, force individuals to be short and succinct in messages that results in the most important information being posted.

Enabling residents to voice their opinions, post comments, and ask questions is also beneficial for the municipality as it provides an avenue for community promotion and can function as a monitoring indicator of possible growing issues within the community. Kavanaugh et al. discusses how social media can improve the quality of life, as social media trends and patterns of the question and response relationship can be monitored by municipalities²⁸. As shown

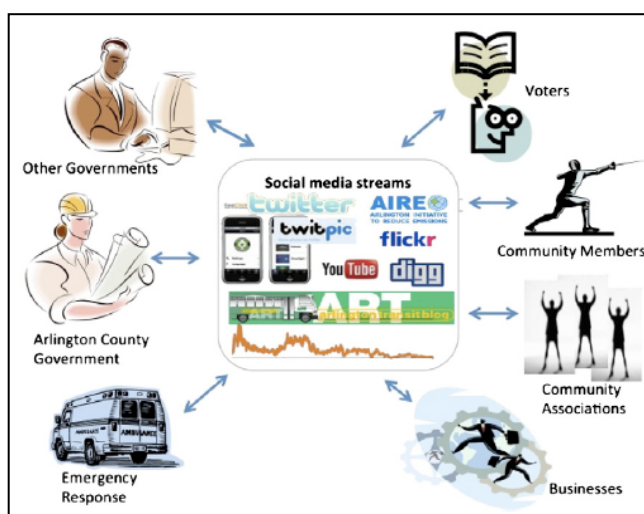


Figure 4.0: Streams of Communications via Social Media Platforms (Kavanaugh et al., 2012)

in Figure 4.0, social media can be used by various forms of governmental departments that, in conjunction, can create increased quality of life, more effective emergency management, and improved public safety²⁹.

²⁵ Redbrick Communications Inc., "Municipal Social Media Survey."

²⁶ Redbrick Communications Inc., "Municipal Social Media Survey.,"; Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, "Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media," *Business Horizons* 53, no. 1 (2010): 59-68.

²⁷ Kavanaugh et al., "Social media use by government: From the routine to the critical," 480-491.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

6.3 Challenges of Social Media

Since social media platforms have been adopted, necessary steps for monitoring are required. This requirement poses challenges to smaller municipalities where Communications Departments do not exist and the task of monitoring is placed on top of daily responsibilities for different staff personnel. Monitoring of social media platforms that are used by Government is necessary in order to maintain information credibility. Because social media can attract complaints or bad reviews from passionate people, plans are needed to minimize negative publicity that can affect both the image and credibility of the municipality³⁰. Negative publicity can occur as a result of disagreement between users, prompting an increase in monitoring and resolution required.

Issues with misinformation can also be a result of the use of social media as comments are user-generated³¹. Much effort is required to recognize relevant versus irrelevant information in a timely manner in order to remove it prior to it being re-distributed to individuals viewing the site³². For those that are not entirely familiar with the functionality of various forms of social media platforms, conflicting views that may be posted on various sites such as Facebook or Twitter can lead to difficulty in discerning the truth.

The need to continue to provide fresh content in order to maintain attention from users and/or followers can lead to increased time commitment³³. Most municipalities use several forms of social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter represent the more common platforms) that add to the complexity of monitoring. For example, 'tweets' can be made on Twitter and posted on Facebook, which can then be commented on. This can result in many posts in a short period of time that can cause confusion for the monitoring agency³⁴.

³⁰ Canada Business Network, "Pros and cons of social media."

³¹ Kavanaugh et al., "Social media use by government: From the routine to the critical," 480-491.

³² Ibid.

³³ Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, "Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media," *Business Horizons* 53, no. 1 (2010): 59-68; Redbrick Communications Inc., "Municipal Social Media Survey,"; Canada Business Network, "Pros and cons of social media."

³⁴ Kavanaugh et al., "Social media use by government: From the routine to the critical," 480-491.

Social media policies, or at a minimum strategies, are required for security reasons as information shared online can include sensitive material³⁵. As social media use has become acceptable by government departments, it becomes necessary to create policy or at a minimum a strategy that governs the content and use of various platforms. Because social media is now being used at both the personal and work level, there is a risk of those lines becoming blurred³⁶. This also highlights other challenges with social media standards, as those that monitor the availability of online information can be caught in a questionable position of mitigating risk versus enabling their enterprises³⁷. Further, Redbrick Communications emphasized the importance of social media policy in government use of social media to guide employees as they speak on behalf of the municipality they are representing³⁸.

Lastly, measuring success of incorporating social media platforms is a challenge. Although it is possible to measure the increase in attention through web-based tracking, it is very difficult to determine if the social media activity increases public participation³⁹. Social media sparks feedback on interests that are posted by municipalities but the increased participation may not be a representative sample, i.e. it could be skewed by a particular demographic. In addition, the quality of information posted on various platforms may not be useful because it is user generated⁴⁰.

7.0 DISCUSSION OF CASE STUDIES

As discussed in Section 4.2, five case studies have been identified for this project:

- City of Brantford Policy and Planning Division
- Town of Collingwood Planning Services
- United Counties of Leeds and Grenville Integrated Community Sustainability Plan

³⁵ Canada Business Network, "Pros and cons of social media."

³⁶ "Province of Ontario's social media policy evolves," Patricia MacInnis, published September 27, 2011, <http://www.itworldcanada.com/news/province-of-ontarios-social-media-policy-evolves/144016>

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Redbrick Communications Inc., "Municipal Social Media Survey."

³⁹ Ibid.; Canada Business Network, "Pros and cons of social media."

⁴⁰ "Social Media Primer for Municipal Governments," Hana Embaye, Peter Navratil, Dorothy Ng & Steve Yang, Local Government Management Association, Accessed March 29, 2013, <http://www.lgma.ca/assets/Misc/Social-Media-Primer-Research-Paper.pdf>.

- Meaford Planning and Building Services
- City of London Master Plan- ‘ReThink London’

Many municipalities who activate social media components for specific projects (e.g. in the public consultation phase) delete those pages when the project is complete. Therefore, only current projects are included in the case studies. This section will describe in depth each municipal case study identified above. Through consultation with the County of Huron the research team has broken up the case studies into three groups that cover the kind of work the Planning & Development Department are involved in daily. These three groups are general social media government initiatives, planning-related development application case studies, and statutory planning application notice requirements.

7.1 General Social Media Government Initiatives

The first case study category examined was specific projects. Specific projects include those undertaken by a municipality with a start and end date and involve public consultation either on a voluntary basis or as required through statutory requirements in the *Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990*. Examples of specific projects that have occurred in the County of Huron include, but are not limited to the:

- Take Action for Sustainable Huron: Community Sustainability Plan;
- Take Action for Sustainable Huron;
- Transportation Demand Management Plan; and
- Huron County Official Plan.

The purpose of this section is to find specific projects in Ontario that have a strong social media component. Three case studies were selected for this report: ReThink London, the Municipality of Meaford Planning and Building Department, and the Leeds Grenville Integrated Community Sustainability Plan.

7.1.1 Case Study I: ReThink London

Fast Stats:	 @ReThinkLdn 1,676 Followers	 ReThink London 213 Likes
-------------	--	---

ReThink London is the brand name of the Official Plan review process currently being undertaken by the City of London. It began in 2012 and is expected to finish by the end of 2013. The goal of ReThink London is to develop a vision for the City through public consultation. The information learned through this consultation will influence City politician and staff decisions. The visioning process will provide the backbone for London's progress as a City over the next 20 years⁴¹.

ReThink London represents the largest public engagement program in Canada having, at present time, engaged 10,000 people with the project still ongoing until December 2013⁴². The City of London knew they could go the traditional public engagement route and meet with known stakeholder groups, ratepayer groups and developers. However, they made the decision to try a proactive approach to public participation and they wanted to include different generational categories. Their goal is to reach as many people as possible on their own terms⁴³.

The public process began with a launch event on May 3, 2012 featuring Peter Mansbridge of the CBC. The talk lasted one hour and 1,300 people attended helping to start the buzz surrounding the project. Since the launch, ReThink London has hosted many public forums and one more guest speaker, Brent Toderian, to engage the public. Throughout this entire process social media and innovative ways to engage the public have been prevalent. The younger generation was very receptive to the City having screens at the guest speaker presentations displaying a live Twitter feed. The City of London has even utilized PollEverywhere (www.poll Everywhere.com), which allows citizens to participate in a vote through texting their

⁴¹ "ReThink London," City of London, Accessed March 26, 2013, www.rethinklondon.ca.

⁴² Sean Galloway (Manager of Urban Design, City of London), interview by Mitchell Avis, Mollie Kuchma, Jessica Martin, phone, March 19, 2013.

⁴³ Ibid.

preference and the results are shown in real time (almost like Who Wants to Be a Millionaire ask the audience)⁴⁴.

The public engagement process does not even end when the public meetings do. The City of London, through grant money, was able to hire a consultant to run their Facebook and Twitter pages through the first year of the process⁴⁵. These forms of social media have been instrumental in providing information to the public and encouraging feedback. Many times, they provide links to the ReThink London website (www.rethinklondon.ca), which acts as the central hub of information. Through the website citizens can view draft sections of the plan and participate in the process through surveys. For example, at the time of writing this report there is a *Visual Preference Survey* available on the website asking citizens to rank visual elements of the City.

Several challenges were identified by the City of London with respect to their emphasis on social media. First, it is very time consuming. The contract with the consultant to run their social media pages ends in June 2013 and they are now in the process of weighing their options for the remainder of the process. Interestingly, some community members have shown interest in keeping the social media aspect going. Second, there is a need to acknowledge the generational differences via different forms of social media. ReThink London has made an effort to still use traditional forms of communication to reach an older population while at the same time using innovative social media techniques to reach the younger generation⁴⁶.

The City of London provides two lessons for municipalities thinking of engaging in social media. First, make sure you have someone available on staff full-time to devote to social media. London did not have anyone in the Planning Department to fulfill this and this is why the consultant was hired. Second, before you engage in social media use make sure you have established the key messages you want to portray to the public. This was another reason the

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

consultant was hired because they were able to provide the relevant information to the system ('to fuel the engine' as Sean Galloway said)⁴⁷. Third, they recommend having a social media policy for the specific project. This would outline the do's and do not's for online conduct of the project⁴⁸.

The momentum ReThink London has been able to build is something the City of London wants to maintain. They have plans of updating their Zoning By-law in the near future and want to use a similar process. They are also attempting to find a way to harness the interest in planning they have built and use it to increase interest in daily Planning applications (e.g. zoning by-law amendment, official plan amendment, consent).

7.1.2 Case Study II: Municipality of Meaford - Planning & Building Department

Fast Stats:	 Municipality of Meaford 303 Followers	 Planning & Building Services 36 Likes
-------------	--	--

The Municipality of Meaford is a small municipality located on the shores of Georgian Bay in Grey County. It is bordered by Owen Sound to the west and the Town of the Blue Mountains to the east. The rural municipality has a population of 11,100⁴⁹. The Municipality of Meaford has their own Facebook page with 303 'likes'. This page is the most active and because it has the most followers many planning related matters are shared on this page as well. There is also a direct connection from the Municipal page to the Planning & Building Services page, which has 36 'likes'. Primarily used by the planning staff, this Facebook page is used mainly to advertise public meetings regarding the current review of the Official Plan.

Both Facebook sites were launched in 2010. The Economic Development Coordinator had attended several conferences where communication and social media was stressed. She brought

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "Meaford," Statistics Canada, Census Profile 2011, accessed April 1, 2013, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.

what she had learned back to the Municipality where they acknowledged that it was time to have a social media presence. They often saw themselves as a Municipality that was behind the times and that they needed to have the online presence. Originally, the Economic Development Coordinator was the only one updating the Facebook pages and they started off slow. More recently, the pages have seen more activity and are seeing an increase in participation⁵⁰.

In addition to Facebook, the Municipality of Meaford has created a blog for the purpose of educating citizens on the Official Plan update (<http://meafordopreview.blogspot.ca/>). To avoid any confusion, a disclaimer is included at the top of the blog stating:

“Welcome to the Municipal Blog relating to the 5 Year Review of the Municipality of Meaford Official Plan. Please note that this blog is not intended to replace formal public consultation under the Planning Act but it is instead meant to be a forum of information sharing on topics and ideas relating the review and community planning in general. Feel free to post comments or questions!”⁵¹.

Staff acknowledged that some citizens may be confused as to what is considered formal public consultation. It was mentioned that they attempt to respond to all comments offering more information and ensuring the citizen is aware they must also submit comments in writing or verbally at a public meeting. Since the blog was created, staff at the Municipality described a decrease in the number of citizens stopping into their offices looking for documents. Instead, the blog and links to the Municipal website have increased access and decreased confusion⁵². Although the articles on the blog were written a year ago they are still gaining internet traffic.

The biggest challenge the Municipality of Meaford expressed is the human capital required to keep the sites updated. As a small municipality, Meaford does not have the luxury to hire a full time employee to focus on social media. Instead, they must rely on current staff and fit it into

⁵⁰ Rob Armstrong (Director of Planning, Municipality of Meaford), Liz Buckton (Planner II, Municipality of Meaford), & Laurie Mitchell (Economic Development & Communications, Municipality of Meaford), Interview by Mitchell Avis, Mollie Kuchma, Jessica Martin, phone, March 19, 2013.

⁵¹ “Meaford’s Official Plan Review,” Municipality of Meaford, Accessed March 28, 2013, <http://meafordopreview.blogspot.ca/>.

⁵² Rob Armstrong, Liz Buckton, & Laurie Mitchell, Interview, March 19, 2013.

their daily schedules. Currently, they have two staff (one economic development coordinator and one planner) spending approximately four hours to a whole day per week dedicated to social media. Another challenge is the need to link all the pages (many other departments also have Facebook pages) and forms of social media⁵³. The Municipal staff acknowledged that a more centralized approach would be more efficient.

Moving forward, the Municipality of Meaford wants to grow their presence on social media. For example, they do have some promotional videos on YouTube. In the future, they would like to record Council meetings and public meetings in the Council chambers and upload these to the Internet. They like that online tools help people know where to find the appropriate information and that when they do engage in the public process they are more informed. Municipal staff recommended that for other municipalities looking to expand into social media that they develop social media policies to guide behavior⁵⁴.

7.1.3 Case Study III: Leeds Grenville Integrated Community Sustainability Plan

Fast Stats:



Leeds Grenville ICSP

39 Likes

The United Counties of Leeds and Grenville are located in eastern Ontario along the St. Lawrence River and the 1000 Islands between Kingston and Ottawa⁵⁵. Currently, the population of the United Counties is 99,306⁵⁶. In 2011, the United Counties began a yearlong process to develop a Regional Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP)⁵⁷. The ICSP is not a statutory document but the hope is that it will help influence and guide decision-making in the

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ "Community Sustainability," United Counties of Leeds and Grenville, Accessed March 30, 2013, <http://www.leedsgrenville.com/en/invest/ouruniqueadvantage/communitysustainability.asp>.

⁵⁶ "Leeds-Grenville," Statistics Canada, Census Profile 2011, accessed April 1, 2013, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.

⁵⁷ United Counties of Leeds and Grenville, "Community Sustainability."

community⁵⁸. The United Counties wanted, from the beginning, to create the ICSP through a public consultation process. In the end, the ICSP would address culture, the economy, society and the environment⁵⁹.

The ICSP social media presence on Facebook was created specifically to gain youth input on the Plan. The consultant working on the plan suggested that Facebook would be the most effective way to engage the young generation⁶⁰. They used the Facebook page to ask questions relating to the Plan. As an incentive, they offered a grand prize for all those that participated including a \$100 iTunes gift card and a \$25 gift card to a local restaurant.

The Facebook page only has 37 ‘likes’ on it and the United Counties, looking back on the project, were not satisfied with the activity on the page. They recognize that you need to have previous relationships with the community already established to have successful public engagement⁶¹. It takes time to establish a social media presence – it does not happen overnight. The United Counties believed that they could have had more success if they could have collaborated with an established County social media network⁶². This would have allowed them to ‘piggyback’ on their followers and have a more established following for their project.

7.2 Planning-Related Development Application Case Studies

The second case study category involves planning related applications. One of the many daily responsibilities within a municipal planning office is to process and comment on the various types of applications submitted for decision. Examples of planning related applications in Huron include:

- Official Plan amendments
- Zoning By-law amendments

⁵⁸ “Integrated Community Sustainability Plan: Process Report,” Dillon Consulting, November 22, 2012, http://www.leedsgrenville.com/en/invest/resources/Leeds_and_Grenville_Regional_ICSP_Process_Report_DRAFT_Nov_22_2012.pdf.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ann Weir, e-mail to authors, March 20, 2013.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Dillon Consulting, “Integrated Community Sustainability Plan: Process Report.”

- Consent applications
- Minor variances
- Subdivision and condominium applications

For each type of application the *Planning Act* and the *Planning Act* Regulations identify the criteria for public participation. For example, a Zoning By-law amendment requires a public open house a minimum of seven days prior to the public meeting (*Section 34 (14)*) and a public meeting is required within 20 days of giving notice (*Section 34 (14.1)*). The notice of public meeting for Zoning By-law amendments is regulated through *O. Reg. 545/06 S.5 (1)* and offers a minimum level of notification often through traditional means such as mail and the newspaper. The following pages will examine, through case studies, how certain municipalities are attempting to go beyond the minimum notice communication standards and reach their residents through social media to increase participation.

7.2.1 Case Study I: Collingwood Planning Services

Fast Stats:



Collingwood Planning Services

112 Followers

Collingwood is located along Georgian Bay about 50 kilometers west of Barrie. Currently, the population is 19,241 and continues to increase⁶³. They have created a Facebook page titled Collingwood Planning Services and have 112 ‘likes’ at the time of writing. Collingwood uses their Facebook page primarily as a way to disseminate information to the public about projects and applications throughout the Town. In addition to Facebook, many of the posts provide a link to a specific blog that has been created for that application or project. For example, there is an application for the property located at 10 Sandford Fleming Drive to permit a brewery use. The Collingwood Planning Services has created a blog for this specific proposal, which can be found at: <http://newdevelopmentzba113brewery.blogspot.ca/>. On this site they have posted the notice of complete application and public meeting for the proposed Zoning By-law amendment,

⁶³ “Collingwood,” Statistics Canada, Census Profile 2011, accessed April 1, 2013, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.

location map, and any additional studies and/or justification reports that have been completed. They invite the public to provide comments through the blog or they have also provided the contact information for the Collingwood Planning Services to further discuss the proposal.

As of February 27, 2013, the various Collingwood Planning Services blogs have generated almost 43,000 page views⁶⁴. This is a fantastic accomplishment in terms of public engagement. A secondary use of the Facebook page is to post links to external articles that may be of interest to the citizens of Collingwood. This is a good education opportunity to show citizens what is happening elsewhere in the world. Due to scheduling conflicts and time constraints, an interview with the Collingwood Planning Services was not possible.

7.2.2 Case Study II: City of Brantford Policy Planning Department

Fast Stats:



City of Brantford Policy Planning Division

43 Followers

The City of Brantford is located in Southwestern Ontario between Woodstock and Hamilton and south of Cambridge. Currently, the City has a population of 93,650⁶⁵. In 2011, the City of Brantford Policy Planning Division decided that they wanted to expand the ways in which they engage with the public. At the time their communication and outreach ‘toolbox’ included public meetings, letter notifications, their website, and access by phone and e-mail⁶⁶. They decided to add social media to that list and more specifically Facebook.

The goal of the Facebook page is to provide another medium of communication between the Planning Division and the public to engage in a conversation. More specifically, they viewed the

⁶⁴ “Collingwood Planning Services,” Collingwood Planning Services, accessed March 29, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/CollingwoodPlanning?fref=ts>.

⁶⁵ “Brantford,” Statistics Canada, Census Profile 2011, accessed April 1, 2013, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.

⁶⁶ Tara Tran, e-mail to authors, March 25, 2013.

page as a way to communicate more dynamically and through pictures. A specific example was when they posted a photo album with a variety of street furniture options and the public was asked to 'like' and comment on the items they liked the most, which started a discussion⁶⁷.

The Policy Planning Division uses their Facebook page to post meeting notices, project updates and any other relevant articles, videos or links that may be of interest. Through co-ordination with the City's Information Technology department the City's main website would continue to be the primary source of information to the public. The Facebook page often provides links to the City website where the public can find more information on the specific topic. So far, this process has worked well⁶⁸.

The biggest issue relating to social media expressed by the Policy Planning Division is the staff time required to keep the pages and sites up to date and engage in conversations online. They mentioned that their Facebook page has not been as effective as they would like because they have not been able to dedicate the necessary time. Their budget does not allow them to hire someone specifically for social media so for the immediate future that work becomes an additional task for a current employee. Since the goal of social media is to maintain on-going conversations with the public they believe that any time they can devote to conversing through social media is still better than nothing⁶⁹.

In the upcoming year the City of Brantford will begin the process of a five-year Official Plan review and they hope to use their Facebook page as part of the public engagement process. They have no intention of using Twitter because it demands more dedication (you are expected to respond and engage more frequently). They do, however, want to expand onto YouTube and post some videos from a recent brownfield workshop⁷⁰.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

7.3 Statutory Planning Application Notice Requirements and Social Media Policy

7.3.1 Meeting Statutory Requirements for Planning and Development Departments

A. Planning Act:

At this time, there is limited information available to understand or interpret the role of social and online/alternative media in meeting the statutory requirements of the *Planning Act*, as the Act is very prescriptive on the formats in which notice and consultation must be conducted depending on the type of application. However, as social and alternative media become more utilized by local (and provincial governments), there is the opportunity for municipalities to lobby the province to amend the *Planning Act* to speak to alternative formats of notice and consultation regarding how it may be utilized in the future in meeting statutory requirements under the Act. Currently, social media may only be used in supplementing notification and consultation by municipalities, and identified thusly, as has been done by the Municipality of Meaford in Section 7.1.2 of this report.

B. Municipal Engineers Association Class Environmental Assessment:

The Municipal Engineers Association Class Environmental Assessment (MEA Class EA) is a process used by municipal planning and development departments, or public works departments (depending on municipality) used in decision making for municipal infrastructure such as, but not limited to, roads, sewers and water. Like the *Planning Act*, this process also has mandated points of contact and notification, and also like the *Planning Act*, social media is also not permitted as allowable channel for public consultation, and may only be used to supplement traditional formats such as newspaper ads or neighbourhood flyers. However, the Conservation Ontario Class Environmental Assessment will be amended to allow for Conservation Authority's (at their discretion) to use social media in meeting their consultation requirements in concert with other traditional formats⁷¹. With upcoming amendments expected of the MEA Class EA, we may see a similar provision extended to this process as well. Future amendments to the Class EA may give municipalities the ability to request that the MEA allow social media to count as meeting consultation requirements.

⁷¹ "Five-Year Review Report (2007-2011)," Conservation Ontario, published January 31, 2012, <http://www.conservationontario.ca/projects/documents/FinalClassEA5YearReview2007-2011.pdf>.

7.3.2 Social Media Policy

When municipalities are establishing social media policies, there are a few key considerations, namely who will be using it and how it will be used. Slowly, but surely, municipalities in Ontario are developing policies that speak to the social media and the online presence of their organization and staff. These policies have been born out of the recognition that social media is evolving and establishing a stronger presence in the overall dissemination of information, i.e. proving to be an invaluable tool in strengthening the interaction between municipalities and their residents.

A. Formation of Social Media Strategies and Policies:

The increasing use of social and alternative media by public, commerce and governments, has led to the need to establish formal policies on how these media are used in conveying information. Without social media policies, the use of social media by municipal staff may be spotty or haphazard, and in addition, this use is not governed by guidelines that ensure that users are appropriately representing the organization or that the materials posted are appropriate. In developing a strategy and policy to address social media use, it is important to gauge the applicability of particular social media platforms to your purpose and demographics. For example, consideration should be given to the age, gender or location of the intended audience that may dictate which platforms are most effective. To develop an effective social media presence, staff time must be devoted to maintain accounts and monitor the accounts for inquiries and comments that arise from information posted.

B. Social Media Policies for Municipalities and Municipal Staff Users

The use of social media by municipal and organizational staff needs to be informed by a formal social media or online communication strategy. This strategy needs to address two main components of the account: the users and the content. Policies should identify proper employee conduct while they are working on the accounts and should be consistent with other employee conduct guidelines that the municipality may have for staff working with the public; because, after all, social media can be a very public forum. Secondly, the content uploaded to the site must be formatted in a way that speaks to the individual platform. For instance, information posted on Twitter must be succinct to adhere to a 140 character limit, but can link back to other

information on the municipality's website. While being brief, the content must also be timely to be effective; luckily the often-instantaneous posting of information allows for updated information to be spread quickly⁷².

C. Case Study in Social Media Policy Development: Kitchener

The City of Kitchener has recognized that using social media will ensure that the City evolves with trends in communicating with its residents. To that end, Kitchener has developed an Online Communication Strategy. Their "strategy is about better balancing and integrating all of the communications tools used by the City for maximum benefit and results. It is not about getting rid of traditional forms of communications – many of which have benefits and reach audiences where online communications do not"⁷³. This strategy makes an interesting point, in that the introduction of social/online media is meant to enhance the communications toolkit and not replace traditional communication formats. Kitchener's strategy also recognizes that the format in which online and social media communications may vary and has identified the need for training in effective web writing and graphic display for these contents. This policy also recognizes the every changing landscape of social and online media and has incorporated a feedback loop to determine to gauge platform usefulness, or to identify new or emerging platforms, which may better suit the needs of the municipality. Most importantly, this policy spells out the municipality's expectations for staff conduct while using these platforms as an organization representative.

8.0 RECOMENDATIONS

After reviewing literature and applicable case studies, several recommendations are offered to the County of Huron to make use of social media within the Planning Department. These recommendations reflect lessons learned from the literature and various case studies and should be taken into consideration as social media is introduced to the County of Huron Planning Department.

⁷² "Top ten tips for managing your organization's social media presence," Jenn Nelson, The Social Studio, published November 25, 2012, <http://thesocialstudio.ca/2012/11/25/top-ten-tips-for-managing-your-organizations-social-media-presence/>.

⁷³ City of Kitchener, "Online Communications Strategy", 4.

- a) Develop a Social Media Strategy: A social media strategy needs to be developed prior to implementation to ensure agreement among all parties involved. This strategy should include the goals and objectives of social media for the County of Huron Planning Department, as well as any other information clarifying who will be involved, how it will be carried out, and address any issues that may arise from the use of social media in planning applications.
- b) Develop a Social Media Platform: It is recommended that a social media platform be established for the upper-tier (County of Huron) Planning Department, which can subsequently provide the opportunity to integrate information to lower tier municipality platforms within the county. The social media platform should be developed as a tool to disseminate information to the public and essentially work as the conduit in directing County of Huron citizens to the Planning Department webpage, where information on Planning applications and issues will be provided in more detail.
- c) Prioritize Social Media: Prior to establishing a social media platform, staffing to operate social media should be discussed. In an effort to use this tool to its full potential, it is important that a dedicated staff member(s) be aware of the commitment and requirements of maintaining a social media account; for example, a planner who spends half of their time in a municipality and half of their time as a social media coordinator. Dedicated staff time needs to remain consistent and on a regular basis.
- d) Develop Multiple Social Media Platforms: Social media is constantly changing. Be innovative, but be simple and convenient. Make use of multiple social media platforms to ensure that all demographics are being reached. In a study by Red Brick Communications, it was identified that rural municipalities are more inclined to use Facebook as their primary social media platform, however many municipalities have opted to use both Facebook and Twitter. Further, it was identified that municipalities with

a population under 10,000 are almost 10 times more likely to choose Facebook as their primary social media platform⁷⁴. Forms of social media platforms that can be explored with the County of Huron Planning Department include Facebook, Twitter feeds, YouTube videos, blogs, etc.

- e) Establish a Primary Social Media Account Prior to Introducing Project Specific Pages: It is important to establish a solid foundation in social media prior to establishing project specific initiatives. First, a County of Huron Planning Department account should be created on various social media platforms to establish a fan base. From here, project-based initiatives can be linked to the existing established platforms to strengthen the audience for smaller planning initiatives.
- f) Make Everything Available Online: Use social media as the link to detailed information available on the County of Huron Planning Department Website. Use social media as the approach to increase traffic to this webpage where further detailed information can be accessed. By using social media to introduce planning issues, applications and topics, interested readers can easily find more information on the Planning Department website. This detailed information can be accessed through a newsfeed or documents on daily planning applications, etc. The more accessible the information is, the more likely citizens are to read it.
- g) Statutory Requirements: Citizens must be made aware that engaging in social media does not replace statutory requirements as per the *Planning Act*. This is meant to supplement consultation and information, not substitute it. Formal comments as prescribed by the *Planning Act* still apply.

⁷⁴ Redbrick Communications Inc., "Municipal Social Media Survey."

9.0 REFERENCES

- Andrea L. Kavanaugh, Edward A. Fox, Steven D. Sheetz, Seungwon Yang, Lin Tzy Li, Donald J. Shoemaker, Apostol Natsev, Lexing Xie, "Social media use by government: From the routine to the critical," *Government Information Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2012): 480-491.
- Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, "Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media," *Business Horizons* 53, no. 1 (2010): 59-68.
- Canada Business Network. "Pros and cons of social media." Accessed April 3, 2013.
<http://www.entreprisescanada.ca/eng/page/2655/sgc-59/>.
- City of Kitchener. "Online Communications Strategy." Accessed March 27, 2013.
http://www.kitchener.ca/en/insidecityhall/resources/online_communications_strategy.pdf.
- City of London. "ReThink London." Accessed March 26, 2013. www.rethinklondon.ca.
- Collingwood Planning Services. "Collingwood Planning Services." Accessed March 29, 2013.
<https://www.facebook.com/CollingwoodPlanning?fref=ts>.
- Conservation Ontario. "Five-Year Review Report (2007-2011)." Published January 31, 2012.
<http://www.conservationontario.ca/projects/documents/FinalClassEA5YearReview2007-2011.pdf>.
- Dillon Consulting. "Integrated Community Sustainability Plan: Process Report." Published November 22, 2012.
http://www.leedsgrenville.com/en/invest/resources/Leeds_and_Grenville_Regional_ICSP_Process_Report_DRAFT_Nov_22_2012.pdf.
- Embaye, Hana, P. Nayratil, D. Ng, & S. Yang. "Social Media Primer for Municipal Governments." Local Government Management Association. Accessed March 29, 2013.
<http://www.lgma.ca/assets/Misc/Social-Media-Primer-Research-Paper.pdf>.
- FedDev Ontario. "FedDev Ontario Social Media Protocol." Published February 28, 2012.
<http://www.feddevontario.gc.ca/eic/site/723.nsf/eng/00713.html>.
- Fowler, Geoffrey A. "Facebook: One Billion and Counting." *The Wall Street Journal*. Published October 4, 2012.
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390443635404578036164027386112.htm>.
- Lunden, Ingrid. "Analysis: Twitter Passed 500M Users in June 2012, 140M of then in US; Jakarta 'Biggest Tweeting' City." *Techcrunch*. Published July 30, 2012.
<http://techcrunch.com/2012/07/30/analyst-twitter-passed-500m-users-in-june-2012-140m-of-them-in-us-jakarta-biggest-tweeting-city/>.
- MacInnis, Patricia. "Province of Ontario's social media policy evolves." Published September 27, 2011. <http://www.itworldcanada.com/news/province-of-ontarios-social-media-policy-evolves/144016>
- Municipality of Meaford. "Meaford's Official Plan Review." Accessed March 28, 2013.
<http://meafordopreview.blogspot.ca/>.

- Nelson, J. "Top ten tips for managing your organization's social media presence." The Social Studio. Published November 25, 2012. <http://thesocialstudio.ca/2012/11/25/top-ten-tips-for-managing-your-organizations-social-media-presence/>.
- Redbrick Communications Inc. "About Us." Accessed April 3, 2013. <http://www.redbrick.ca/about.asp>
- Redbrick Communications Inc. "Municipal Social Media Survey." Published October 2012. <http://www.redbrick.ca/resources.asp>.
- Statistics Canada. "Census Profile 2011." Accessed April 1, 2013. <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.
- Statistics Canada. "Census Profile 2006." Accessed April 1, 2013. <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/prof/92-591/>.
- United Counties of Leeds and Grenville. "Community Sustainability." Accessed March 30, 2013. <http://www.leedsgrenville.com/en/invest/ouruniqueadvantage/communitysustainability.as>.
- Weiler, Anne. "A Short Burst of Inconsequential Information?." Wellpepper. Published March 3, 2013. <http://wellpepper.com/a-short-burst-of-inconsequential-information>.
- YouTube. "Statistics." Accessed March 30, 2013. <http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html>.

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. You have had your (insert social media medium) page since (year). Why did you decide to create a social media presence? Why (insert social media medium)?
2. What is your goal for the (insert social media medium) page?
3. Generally, what do you post to the page? (e.g. projects? Applications? Public meeting notices? Etc?)
4. You have (number of likes/followers) on your page. Are you satisfied with the activity on the page? Have you received feedback from the public on the success of the (insert social media medium) page?
5. I notice many of your posts include links to external websites (often the official municipal site). Can you touch on the idea that your municipal website contains the information for citizens but (insert social media medium) is a way of disseminating it to the public.
6. Has the (insert social media medium) account been effective in engaging (insert municipality) citizens – has it translated into increased participation?
7. Do you see social media as being an important tool in the planning process now and in the future?
8. Do you expand on expanding your social media presence?
9. Would you change anything in the approach to using (insert social media medium) for planning related projects?
10. Would you recommend other municipal planning departments use social media?