

City of Sarnia



Corporate Communications Plan

Prepared By: City of Sarnia
Corporate Communications Project Team

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CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

1.0 CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

1.1 Introduction

The City's Corporate Strategic Plan identified a number of objectives, strategies and actions designed to improve internal and external communications. Council's consolidated goals for 2002-2003 included a goal to define and implement a strategy to improve communications with the public. The principal success indicator for these communication initiatives is the preparation of a Communications Plan.

The City, with the assistance of a staff Corporate Communications Project Team (CCPT) and the use of outside communications specialists and references, undertook a review of current corporate communications practices and developed a Corporate Communications Plan to support the City's strategic objectives.

1.2 Plan Objective

The purpose of this Plan is to ensure that communications across the City of Sarnia are well co-ordinated, effectively managed and responsive to the information needs of City Council, municipal employees and the public.

1.3 The Process

The following six step process is being followed for this communications initiative:

- Step 1 Establish a Corporate Communications Project Team and Set a Mandate/Terms of Reference
- Step 2 Set up and Conduct Internal Surveys (City Council and City staff)
- Step 3 Set up and Conduct External Surveys (Public, User Group/Organization and Business Opinions)
- Step 4 Prepare Communications Plan
- Step 5 Build City Council and Senior Management Commitment
- Step 6 Implement Initial 3 Year Plan
- Step 7 Monitoring, Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Step 1 Establish a Corporate Communications Project Team(CCPT) and Set a Mandate/Terms of Reference

A Corporate Communications Project Team was established in October 2002 to assist in the preparation of a Corporate Communications Plan. A terms of reference for the CCPT was prepared to guide the work of the Team (see Appendix A).

The Team was made up of both union and non-union staff from across the municipality. A list of the members of the CCPT is attached as Appendix B.

The City Manager appointed the Director of Planning and Building as the lead person responsible for the preparation of the Communications Plan and to act as Chairperson for the CCPT.

Step 2 Set up and Conduct Internal Surveys

The CCPT developed 2 internal surveys (See Appendices C and D). One survey was distributed to the Mayor and City Councillors, while the second survey was distributed to all municipal employees except for staff at the Police Services Department.

The purpose of the internal surveys was to identify major strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and concerns related to communications activities within the City. The surveys also attempt to obtain input on possible solutions to any identified areas of concern and ways to improve internal communications.

Step 3 Set up and Conduct External Surveys

To help develop an accurate picture of City communications, we needed to know what the general public, business community, and user groups/organizations think about our City's communications efforts to date, along with possible opportunities for improvement.

The purpose of the external surveys was to identify major strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and concerns related to communications activities by the City. The surveys also attempt to obtain input on possible solutions to any identified areas of concern and ways to improve external communications.

The CCPT developed 2 external surveys (See Appendices E and F). One survey was designed for distribution to a random sample of City households (2,000 surveys) and also as a non-scientific survey placed on the City's Website and made available at the reception desk at City Hall for other persons interested in participating in the communications initiative. The second survey was designed and distributed to user groups/organizations and the business community. Lists of known user groups and organizations dealing with City Departments were produced. A total of 321 groups and organizations were then provided with surveys. The Sarnia-Lambton Chamber of Commerce agreed to distribute approximately 730 copies of the business survey to their members.

Step 4 Prepare Communications Plan

Based on the various survey submissions, the CCPT prepared a background report summarizing the issues, trends and suggestions provided. The background report was used as a basis for developing the Communications Plan including the actions recommended for implementation.

Step 5 Build City Council and Senior Management Commitment

The success of the Communications Plan will hinge on City Council and Senior Management commitment to the Plan. There will be personnel and budget considerations which will need to be addressed. Once the Plan is approved, it will be important that City Council and management fully support and understand the Plan, so informed decisions can be made to implement the various actions recommended in the Plan.

There will be the need to have a staff person assigned the responsibility for developing a strategy to build City Council and management support for the Plan's implementation.

Step 6 Implement Initial 3 Year Plan

With consideration for City resource capabilities and limitations, it is proposed that the initial phase of the Plan be implemented over a three-year period, commencing immediately. Plan elements have been developed to address the key issues identified by the CCPT during the survey evaluation process and are intended to benefit a broad cross-section of internal and external stakeholders.

The initial 3-year Plan emphasizes communications skills development, in varying degrees, for all employees, and particularly for those in leadership roles, along with the establishment of various stakeholder communications mechanisms. Improving communication skills related to such matters as conducting effective employee and public information exchange forums, working with the news media and providing superior customer service, will support senior City managers' efforts to progressively apply and promote effective two-way communications internally and externally. The establishment of appropriate communications mechanisms, including regular information exchange forums, standardized operating procedures and expanded computer-based applications, will contribute to the consistency, efficiency and effectiveness of program delivery.

Step 7 Monitoring, Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Following acceptance of the Communications Plan by City Council, senior managers and select staff should be assigned job performance-based responsibilities for developing, implementing and monitoring the progress of various components of the Plan. Plan implementation by the Departments should be reviewed with the City Manager on a routine basis each month. In addition, over the first year of Plan implementation, the CCPT should meet quarterly to conduct an evaluation of the Plan, making recommendations for adjustment and improvement to the City Manager.

The internal and external surveys should be conducted again within the 12 months following implementation of the 3-year Plan. Repeating the survey will offer a measurement of the City's efforts to improve internal and external communications and relationships.

2.0 INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

2.1 Introduction

While technology has opened up new possibilities for communicating with staff, in practice, the best results are often achieved through a mix of traditional and contemporary media. If internal communications are to be fully effective, management has to have a genuine commitment to creating a dialogue with staff that involves, as well as informs them.

All organizations aspire to create better workplaces with open employee communications, continuous learning and training opportunities, along with high morale and retention rates. The contribution that clear and effective channels of communications can make to the realization of such a positive work environment is substantial. Through effective communications, employees are better able to understand, appreciate, contribute to and support Council's goals and objectives and can be motivated to achieve maximum performance and provide superior, cost-effective service.

To be effective, communication needs to be conducted as a carefully considered process, with clearly identified and measurable objectives. It is not difficult to broadcast information. However, it takes strategic planning, with a focus on achievable objectives, well-defined stakeholders, the sensible use of appropriate tools and the application of an evaluation mechanism to communicate in a manner that fosters common understandings and desired responses.

In this section, we will outline the survey techniques used to obtain input from City Council and City staff, as well as positive comments, notable issues and suggestions for improvements from the survey responses.

2.2 Internal Staff Survey

2.2.1 Survey Technique

An internal employee survey was undertaken in November of 2002. A total of 386 questionnaire surveys were distributed to City employees. A return rate of 39.6% (153 surveys) was achieved. The information provided in the surveys was tabulated, analyzed and incorporated into a background report (See Appendix G).

The following is a summary of the return rates for each Department:

Department	# Distributed	# Returned	% Return Rate
Administration*	9	3	33%
Clerks	16	9	56%
Community Services	49	24	49%
Engineering/Public Works/Water Pollution Control	83	20	24%
Finance	27	14	52%
Fire	115	45	39%
Human Resources	5	3	60%
Parking Services	7	5	71%
Planning and Building	15	13	86%
Transit	60	17	28%
TOTAL	386	153	39.6%

Note: Administration includes the following: Mayor's Office, City Manager's Office, Legal Department, and the Economic Development and Corporate Planning Department.

2.2.2 Positive Feedback

Some of the input provided by City employees was in the form of positive feedback. One area where positive input was evident was the effectiveness of Department or Section staff meetings. Staff in those Departments which schedule regular Department meetings view these meetings as an effective communication method. The Planning and Building, Clerks and Transit Departments hold regular staff meetings. Newsletters are also seen as an effective means of communicating internally. The only Department which regularly uses newsletters as a method of communication is the Transit Department.

Regular staff meetings are viewed by staff as an effective communication mechanism because they provide up-to-date information, an emphasis on person-to-person communications, opportunities for immediate feedback and input at early project/issue stage and they encourage common understandings. Newsletters are effective because they provide up-to-date information to staff.

2.2.3 Notable Issues

The survey results reveal a number of obstacles to good internal communications from the employee perspective. The CCPT has identified a series of possible outcomes associated with each of the communications issues identified in the internal staff survey. The issues and possible outcomes are shown in the following Table:

Notable Issues	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of regular staff meetings in many City departments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> employees unclear of the status of various projects employees are unaware/have no common understandings of department- and City-related issues, projects and procedures employees misinformed or are unable to respond positively to questions from fellow employees/public opportunity to strengthen team approach is lost reduces employee morale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absence of an effective orientation and introduction program for new municipal employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> new employees require more task-related supervisory direction/peer support, taking longer to “get up to speed” with job duties and administrative procedures new employees not always aware/clear about available support services new employees develop their own methods and procedures, rather than following those prescribed employee embarrassment of not knowing new staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of Corporate and Department operating procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> employees run the risk of using unsafe or inefficient practices inconsistent practices contribute to inconsistent, unplanned use for/demand on City resources inefficiencies result from employee concerns/confusion about not knowing the “right” procedures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor employee morale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increased risk of employee injury and absenteeism reduced levels of employee productivity and customer service lack of employee input leading to innovation and continuous improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of effective communications between City Departments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teamwork is limited and associated opportunities lost contributes to increased cost and reduced work efficiency due to lack of co-ordinated effort lack of/limited information available to distribute externally
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information about employee issues flows to the news media and external stakeholders before employees advised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduces employee morale employees feel/appear less knowledgeable about issues affecting them results in untimely/inappropriate input from other stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of effective supervisor/employee communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduces employee morale inconsistent practices teamwork is limited and associated opportunities are lost employees unclear of supervisor expectations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of customer service training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduces employee morale known poor practices/habits will continue and may worsen lost opportunity to improve public perception of the Corporation’s customer service perpetuates public perception that customer service is poor throughout the organization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open Communications within Department is lacking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduces employee morale teamwork is limited and associated opportunities are lost

2.2.4 Potential Improvements to Internal Communications

A number of suggestions were made to improve internal communications (Note: the number in the brackets following each suggestion, is the frequency of response). The CCPT has identified a series of possible outcomes associated with each suggested improvement. The suggestions and the possible outcomes are included in the following Table:

Suggestions	Outcomes
Provide open lines of communication for information sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhanced employee morale • enhanced levels of employee productivity • positive employee input leading to innovation and continuous improvement • helps builds a strong team approach to service delivery
Provide current events through a newsletter and information boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • better informed staff • enhanced employee morale
Inform staff of matters affecting them before informing the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhanced employee morale • strengthens the “team” approach • enhanced levels of employee productivity
Strengthens “team approach”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhanced employee morale • better internal communications • improved employee productivity • positive employee input leading to innovation and continuous improvement
Develop and implement a comprehensive new employee orientation and introduction program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new employees better informed about City policies, procedures and the City in general • existing staff better informed about new employees • enhanced employee morale
Require all Departments to schedule regular Department meetings to inform staff of Corporate & Department matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staff better informed about Department & Corporate matters • enhanced employee morale • positive employee input leading to innovation & continuous improvement • better internal communications
Provide a customer service training program for employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • better customer service • higher level of customer satisfaction
Improve employee recognition practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhanced employee morale • enhanced levels of employee productivity • enhanced levels of employee productivity
Provide all employee groups with access to a computer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhanced employee morale • better internal communications • staff better informed about Department & Corporate matters
Hire a Communications specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • better internal & external communications • helps to ensure the Communication Plan is implemented, monitored, reviewed & improved • development of Communications Policies • more effective public consultation programs
Establish and/or standardize operating procedures within & between	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consistent practices in dealing with the public • staff more efficient • enhanced employee morale

2.3 City Council Survey

2.3.1 Survey Technique

A survey of the Mayor and City Council was undertaken in February 2003. A questionnaire survey was provided to each Councillor and the Mayor. A total of 5 completed surveys were returned of the 9 questionnaire surveys distributed. The information provided in the surveys was tabulated, analyzed and incorporated into the background report (See Appendix H).

It is difficult to draw accurate conclusions and identify significant trends from the survey responses because the return rate was low for this small sample size. Although the information is limited, it can be used to identify some general concerns and suggestions.

2.3.2 Positive Feedback

The members of City Council provided the following positive feedback:

- General satisfaction with budget updates, staff reports and e-mailed information;
- High level of agreement that staff are helpful, knowledgeable and courteous;
- The highest rated input methods in terms of importance were special Council meetings, and regular Council meetings; and
- Staff was identified as a strength in customer service.

2.3.3 Issues

There were no communications issues identified by more than one member of City Council. Consequently, there are no strong trends evident in the responses. Some of the concerns pertaining to communications that were identified by City Council included:

- Reporting needs to be streamlined;
- Lack of understanding of the media;
- Ineffective verbal input from staff at Council meetings;
- Staff should be more assertive when Council decisions are going to be detrimental; and
- Need for consistency in dealing with issues.

2.3.4 Potential Improvements to Communications

The following potential improvements were provided by City Council:

- Provide more training to staff;
- Adopt a prioritized response philosophy;
- Staff be permitted direct contact with Councillors;
- Staff person to develop information/communications (Communications Officer);
- More special meetings dealing with issues and professional development.

3.0 EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

3.1 Introduction

External communications are central to the success of the City of Sarnia and the well-being of its citizens. As a function of good government, open and proactive communications ensure that the public receives clear, relevant and timely information from the municipality regarding what must be known (e.g. By-Laws and regulations), what should be known (e.g. principal City Hall contacts, procedures for voting in municipal elections) and what is nice to know (e.g. schedule for major community events).

At the same time, mechanisms must exist to invite, receive and integrate input and feedback from the public into the planning, management and evaluation of City policies, programs, services and initiatives. Through such a process, citizens can be confident that their involvement in civic affairs is having a positive impact on the effectiveness of local government and the quality of community life.

External communications within the City is a shared responsibility involving the Mayor and City Council as well as municipal employees at all levels. Effective policy and program development, organization and administration require co-operation and co-ordination throughout the City.

Co-operation and co-ordination between Departments are also necessary to better serve and inform the public. They ensure that municipal themes and priorities are clearly and consistently reflected in the information and messages communicated to the public.

In this section, we will outline the survey techniques used to obtain input from the public, user groups, organizations and businesses as well as positive comments, notable issues and suggestions for improvements from the survey responses.

3.2 Random Public Survey

3.2.1 Survey Technique

A random public survey was mailed to 2,000 households in the City in February. A postage paid return envelope was provided to help encourage a high return rate. A total of 391 completed surveys were returned, representing a response rate of 19.6 %. This is considered to be an exceptional rate of return for a survey of this nature. Optional information provided in the surveys revealed that 48% of the respondents were 60 years of age or older. By comparison, this group makes up only about one-third of the City's adult population. As a result, it might be argued that the views of other age groups are being overshadowed in the survey. At the same time, one could also consider the practical relevance of the survey's age-weighted responses, since those over the age of 60 comprise a significant portion of the local population that is actively involved in civic affairs and community volunteerism. Despite the age-weight imbalance in the responses and other possible statistical flaws, we believe that a number of valid conclusions can be drawn from the survey results. A summary of the survey results are provided in Appendix I.

3.2.2 Positive Feedback

The respondents provided the following positive feedback:

- 7 in 10 people having contact with a City employee during the past year indicated they were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the manner they were treated;
- the sources of information available to the public which received high scores included; direct contact with staff, direct contact with the Mayor and Council, the daily newspaper and radio and television news;
- the highest rated methods to provide input to City staff included; the telephone, counter inquiries, direct mail and special public meetings;
- 72% of the respondents rated the ease of obtaining information as a 3 or higher on a scale of 1 (being extremely difficult) to 5 (being extremely easy);
- there were high levels of satisfaction expressed for the following areas in regards to staff responses to questions/problems/concerns: courtesy, friendliness, knowledge and overall helpfulness and interest in solving problems or concerns;
- respondents made 124 positive comments regarding City staff's strengths in communications efforts to date (Note: the numbers in brackets show the frequency of response). The strengths most frequently mentioned included the following: helpful/willing to assist (37), knowledgeable (17), courteous (15), prompt (11), friendly (9), caring/listening (8), informative (7), open and receptive (6), and accessibility/availability (6).

3.2.3 Notable Issues

Despite the positive experiences expressed by a majority of the respondents, inconsistent customer service practices continue, including (Note: the numbers in brackets show the frequency of response):

- lack of prompt follow up to information requests (14);
- poor customer service (8);
- lack of sympathy/interest (8);
- poor manners exhibited when dealing with the public (2);
- poor listening skills (2); and
- a total of approximately 80 negative weakness comments were made by respondents when asked to identify what they believed to be staff's greatest weakness in communications efforts to date. The most frequently mentioned weaknesses included: lack of follow-up on complaints (14), lack of sympathy and interest in helping with problems (8), poor customer service (8), lack of knowledge with respect to the job (6), and lack of common sense and the will to make a decision (4).

3.2.4 Suggested Improvements to External Communications

The most frequent suggestions made by the respondents for improving external communications in the City were:

- training in customer service and job responsibilities should be provided (16);
- provide prompt follow-up to complaints and information requests (13);
- to make frequent information bulletins, flyers, inserts, etc. available on the City's Web site, in the newspaper, in water/tax bills and/or as mail-outs (7)
- staff should improve their listening skills (3);
- seek public input/opinions (3);
- staff should show interest in citizen problems (3); and
- reduce reliance on voice-mail (3).

3.3 Non-Random Public Survey

3.3.1 Survey Technique

Household surveys were made available on the City's Web site and at the reception desk at City Hall (switch board operator), in February, for any persons wishing to participate in the external survey. It should be noted that while this survey is not a scientific survey and the results are not statistically valid, self motivated citizens often offer insightful suggestions, having given considerable thought to issues with which they have had personal experiences. A total of only 22 non-random surveys were received. Given the low response rate, strong trends were not evident from the data. The data from the non-random survey results is summarized in Appendix J.

3.3.2 Positive Feedback

The positive feedback included the following comments:

- staff's willingness to share information (2); and
- knowledgeable staff (2).

3.3.3 Notable Issues

There were no specific issues identified by more than one respondent. Consequently no notable trends were evident from the non-random survey. The following communication issues were identified:

- lack of follow up to complaints;
- staff's lack of knowledge/experience;
- lack of a medium to relay messages to all citizens; and
- lack of empowerment to solve problems.

3.3.4 Suggested Improvements to External Communications

The most frequent suggestions made by the respondents for communications improvements were:

- provide improved follow up to citizen questions and complaints (3); and
- provide customer service and job training (2).

3.4 User Group, Organization and Business Survey

3.4.1 Survey Technique

City Departments identified user groups and organizations which they frequently deal with. A total of 321 groups and organizations were identified and mailed surveys in February. The Sarnia-Lambton Chamber of Commerce distributed approximately 730 surveys to their members in February. A total of 38 user group and organization surveys were returned, representing a return rate of 11.8%. A total of 17 completed business surveys were returned, representing a return rate of only 2.3%. The return rate from the business community was considered to be rather disappointing. A summary of the survey results are provided in Appendix K.

3.4.2 Positive Feedback

The most frequently mentioned positive feedback included the following comments:

- that staff are friendly, helpful, courteous and/or professional (7);
- availability of staff (5); and
- prompt responses (2).

3.4.3 Notable Issues

The most frequently identified communication issues were:

- staff have a lack of time to consult and with groups and organizations (3); and
- insufficient communication and not frequent enough (2).

3.4.4 Suggested Improvements to External Communications

The suggestions most frequently made by the respondents for communications improvements were:

- that staff meet more frequently with community groups and business organizations (2);
- that the City's customer focus be enhanced (1);
- that consideration be given to changing the hours of operation to be user friendly (consider Saturday morning openings) (1); and
- that the City's web site be enhanced to provide more information (1).

4.0 GUIDING COMMUNICATIONS PRINCIPLES

The following communication principles are recommended to guide the City in the development of a strong communications function.

4.1 Identify and address communication needs and issues routinely in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, programs, services and initiatives.

Communication enables the exchange of information that the public and the municipality rely upon for an effective partnership. Gathering and providing information of importance to the public requires strategic decision-making, professional tools and resources as well as effective and accountable management. Specific internal and external communications objectives must be identified and met when planning, managing and reviewing policies, programs, services and initiatives. Responsible use of public funds and resources to obtain maximum value for taxpayers is a fundamental requirement in all communication activities.

As a result of its legislated and assumed responsibilities, the City takes on the task of communicating a large volume of information, as part of the on-going process of informing and educating its citizens about a wide spectrum of issues. To ensure the effective management of its projects and issues, the City should implement a strategic planning process that would encompass a number of components and decision points.

4.2 Provide the public with timely, accurate and clear information about City policies, programs, services and initiatives.

The municipality has a responsibility to explain its policies and decisions and to inform the public of its priorities for the community. Information is necessary for the public individually or through special interest groups to participate actively and meaningfully in the municipal decision making process. Information is also required for access to City sponsored programs and services.

4.3 Ensure that City Departments are visible, accessible and accountable to the public.

To be accessible and accountable, City Departments must be visible and recognizable wherever they are present. Clear identification allows the public to see the municipality at work, to access its programs and services and to assess its activities. Communicating through many channels including; the telephone, mail, print and broadcast media, the Internet and World Wide Web; the City should identify itself in a distinct, consistent way the public can recognize in all circumstances. Corporate identity programs encompass: vehicles and equipment, employee uniforms, exhibits, signs, advertisements, correspondence and publications, business cards and letterhead.

4.4 Use a variety of ways and means to communicate and provide information in multiple formats to respond to diverse needs.

City information must be broadly accessible throughout the community. The needs of all members of the community, whose perceptual or physical abilities and language skills are diverse, should be recognized and accommodated where feasible. Information must be accessible so citizens may be aware of, understand, respond to and influence the development and implementation of policies, programs, services and initiatives. Where appropriate, information should be made available in multiple formats to ensure equal access. A wide variety of communications, ranging from traditional methods to new technologies, should be used to reach and communicate with the community.

4.5 Consult the public, listen to and take account of people's interests and concerns when establishing priorities, developing policies and planning programs and services.

Seeking input and feedback from citizens is an important function of an effective and responsible municipal government. The City must apply appropriate methods to research and evaluate public needs, expectations and opinions of its services, programs, projects and initiatives as an integral part of its ongoing management practices. As such, a dialogue between the municipality and its citizens must be a continuous process.

4.6 Deliver prompt, courteous and responsive service that fulfills the needs and concerns of the public.

Information services should be managed in a citizen-centered and client-focused manner that achieves results for the community. Timely and convenient access to municipal information and services should be available to the public. Access to information and privacy rights should also be respected at all times.

4.7 Encourage municipal employees to communicate openly with the public about policies, programs, services and initiatives.

Openness in municipal government promotes an employee base and citizenry that are more knowledgeable, trusting and contributing. It enables informed public participation in the development of policy, ensures fairness in decision making and enables the public to assess performance. Employees serve the public best by communicating openly and responsively about the policies, programs, services and initiatives they help to administer and by ensuring citizens have ready access to similar sources of information in other Departments.

4.8 Ensure all City Departments work collaboratively to achieve coherent and effective communications.

As a core activity and shared responsibility touching all aspects of policy and program administration, the communications function involves employees throughout the City working together. Co-ordination within, between and among City Departments is imperative to ensure coherent and consistent communications City-wide. Delivering information services in the best interests of the community, meeting internal and external communication needs efficiently and effectively, is a co-operative endeavour.

4.9 Respect the rights of employees and citizens to information and privacy.

An open municipal government implies that all employees must respect privacy rights, Council confidences and Department responsibility while treating sensitive information with the discretion it requires. Employees must be properly trained to know the extent and limits in each area. Employee access to information and privacy rights should also be respected at all times.

5.0 KEY POLICY AREAS

The following key policy areas have been identified and a series of communications objectives and activities associated with these policy areas are recommended for consideration.

5.1 Informing and Serving the Public

The City must provide the public with open access to information about policies, programs, services and initiatives. Information for public use should be distributed or made readily available using a variety of appropriate media.

To assure quality service that meets the information needs of the community, it is recommended the municipality ensure that:

- trained and knowledgeable staff provide information services to the public;
- service is timely, courteous, fair, efficient and offered with all due regard for the privacy, convenience, and needs of the public;
- a variety of new and traditional methods of communication are used to accommodate the needs of the public;
- published information is available on request in multiple formats to accommodate persons with disabilities where practical;
- information requests or inquiries from the public are responded to promptly;
- prompt and clear explanations are provided when information requested by the public is unavailable;

- information is available on the standard of service the City provides to the public, including timelines for responding to inquiries, mail and complaints;
- opportunities are available for the public to provide feedback on major policies, programs, services and initiatives and that such feedback is carefully considered in reviews or evaluations to help make improvements;
- public trust and confidence in the integrity of the City are upheld;
- useful, timely, accurate, clear, consistent and complete information is provided to the public;
- open communications are maintained with the public and proactive strategies are developed for assessing and addressing public concerns; and
- communications programs and activities be evaluated against planned objectives and adjustments or improvements are made as needed.

5.2 Plain Language

The City's responsibility to inform the public includes the obligation to communicate effectively. Information about policies, programs, services and initiatives must be easy to understand, relevant, consistent and useful.

To ensure clarity and consistency of information, plain language and proper grammar must be used in all communications with the public. This principle also applies to internal communications, as well as to information prepared for Council.

The following guidelines are recommended:

- Use an appropriate type style. Consideration should be given to establishing a uniform standard by designating "Times Roman" as the preferred serif typeface and "Arial" as the preferred san serif typeface. (Use at least a Font of 12, larger if for seniors or persons with low vision)
- Use bold text, do not use italics.
- Have adequate "white space" – ample margins and fairly short paragraphs.
- Use graphics to accompany text whenever possible.
- Avoid frequent changes in type style and style of graphics.
Directions often seem simpler if instructions are given in point-form in a vertical list and in the order they are to be carried out.

- Avoid writing too far above a grade six level (a grade nine level is the maximum recommended).
- Use short sentences.
- Use simple words where feasible. If a technical term is truly necessary, use it several times so that it becomes familiar.
- Instructions should be positive rather than negative.
- Writing should be in the active voice, not the passive voice.
- Writing should seem personal and direct, not impersonal and remote (avoid the third person).
- Use relevant and interesting examples.
- Present ideas clearly in a logical sequence.
- Use simplified, economical style, rather than padded or long-winded style.
- Where possible and practical, have a member of the intended audience review and comment on a draft version of the information to be released.

Sources: Organization for Literacy, Sarnia-Lambton.
 Literacy Coalition of Kitchener-Waterloo.

It is recommended that the City:

- Advocate on behalf of those who will or should receive information to ensure its clarity and usefulness for the end user; and
- Recognize the special needs of many citizens, including literacy levels and perceptual or physical challenges, and design and deliver communication tools where practical, to respond to those needs.

5.3 Corporate Identity and Visibility

A clear and consistent corporate identity should be considered to assist the public in recognizing, accessing and assessing the policies, programs, services and initiatives of the City of Sarnia.

To maintain a recognizable and unified corporate identity throughout the Corporation, Departments should ensure that their buildings, facilities, programs, services, and activities are clearly identified. Departments should manage communication design and presentation along common lines and in a co-ordinated manner consistent with an approved City policy.

It is recommended that the City:

- Enable the public to recognize clearly the activities of the City of Sarnia and its Departments by means of consistent identification; and
- Develop a corporate identity program to provide common presentation standards for all aspects of visual identification and communications by the City.

5.4 Public Consultation

Communication requirements must be taken into account in the planning, management and evaluation of public consultation initiatives. Open and responsive communications integrated into the earliest stages of the process are critical to the success of public consultations.

The City should inform the public about opportunities to participate in public consultation. This may be done through the City's Website, letters of invitation, notices to the media, paid advertising and other vehicles normally used by the City to communicate with the public, including publishing notices in the City Council agendas.

Ranging from well-established community service organizations to informal gatherings of a few, like minded individuals, a variety of special interest groups exist within the City. Whether representing an array of long-term interests, or a single issue with a short lifespan, special interest groups comprise unique stakeholder forums which can assist the City to understand citizen concerns and interests, engage in meaningful discussion and efficiently communicate its messages to large numbers of stakeholders. As part of the research component of the communications planning process, efforts should be made to identify and include affected special interest groups among the list of plan stakeholders.

It is recommended that the City:

- Continue to refine its understanding of the views, priorities, needs and expectations of its citizens and special interest groups through various formal and informal input and feedback mechanisms, including surveys, special meetings, news media coverage analysis, one-on-one interviews, focus groups and web based tools;
- Establish program standards and practices for fostering public input and feedback, in order to enhance public access to, as well as awareness, use and value of municipal policies, programs, services and initiatives; and
- Establish regular fact-finding and information-sharing meetings with external labour and business representatives and special interest groups.

5.5 Management and Co-ordination

The City should integrate communications into corporate management processes and procedures. Communications are a shared responsibility that must be co-ordinated with other areas of management and applied vertically and horizontally across the organization.

Senior managers and supervisors must commit to communicate with employees openly, frequently and, except in exceptional circumstances, before the public. Training in communications must be available to senior managers and supervisors to help ensure they are effective communicators and process managers.

Clear working links must be maintained at all times between communications and other core functions: policy and program management, service delivery, human resources management, information management and the management of information technology. Given the broad sphere of influence of the communications function and its potential impact on the City's ability to successfully meet its objectives, consideration should be given to securing the services of a Communications Specialist, who could guide and assist with the development and implementation of associated program activities.

It is recommended that the City:

- Ensure the communications function – as outlined in this Plan –has the management support and resources needed to fulfill the requirements of the 3-Year Action Plan;
- Ensure that staff at all levels receives appropriate orientation and training to carry out their unique role in, and shared responsibilities for, delivering and improving municipal communications;
- Examine ways to increase efficiency in responding to communication issues, and adjust and simplify approval processes as necessary;
- Ensure the coherence and consistency of information and messages across all channels of communication, from in-person service, telephone and mail, to facsimile, and the Internet;
- Establish Department performance standards and develop and implement communications plans – including internal and external issue/project research and analysis, identification of stakeholders, determination of specific objectives, development of key messages, priority ranking, communications tools for stakeholder input/information dissemination/feedback, method of evaluation, implementation schedule, cost estimate and assignment of responsibilities – in support of municipal policies, programs, services and initiatives;
- Integrate corporate communication planning with the annual budgeting process; and
- Integrate all communication activities, including internet applications, advertising, and media relations to promote consistent and well co-ordinated communications with the public.

5.6 Internal Communications

Communication among senior managers and employees must be open, timely and collaborative to achieve municipal goals and to ensure quality communications services for the public.

Internal communication must be a two-way process. Inviting and listening to employee ideas, concerns and suggestions for achieving results, avoiding and resolving problems and improving service are important and proven management practices that can contribute to the maximization of staff performance and workplace satisfaction. Actively engaging employees in the processes of public communications and continuous improvement allows the City to tap into a vast pool of intelligence, knowledge and expertise. Positioned to contribute to the successful growth of the organization, employees can be valuable allies in the implementation of external communications initiatives.

To build and foster their practical knowledge, employee training, orientation and involvement in internal communications must encompass the entire process, from issue/project identification to responsibility for plan implementation. The skills development process must also involve a working appreciation for a range of communication tools, including published materials, visual elements, computer-based applications, oral presentations, staff forums and educational events. Representation on newsletter editorial boards and internal advisory committees provide additional avenues to engage senior managers, supervisors and employees in process implementation.

Internal communication activities and processes must be reviewed from time to time to evaluate results, to identify areas for improvement and to make adjustments as needed.

It is recommended that the City:

- Develop and implement a plan to communicate the Corporate Communications Plan findings and recommendations to all City staff;
- Conduct internal communications audits through each Department to initially determine their top 4-6 issues/project needs and priorities for the preparation and implementation of associated internal communications plans. To facilitate the planning process, identify and assign corporate and Department responsibilities to various individuals for ensuring adherence to set standards and practices, keeping information current, and co-ordinating and implementing plan activities;
- Conduct quarterly/annual employee meetings;
- Expand mechanisms to encourage employee input and feedback;
- Develop an inventory of those in the corporation who do not have access to computers so that other communication tools can be identified to communicate more effectively with these staff;
- Provide a variety of ways that staff can access information;

- Establish standard protocols for the release of information to employees;
- Ensure that directions, decisions and initiatives are communicated to all City staff;
- Improve information exchange between Departments on a regular basis;
- Require Departments to conduct regular staff meetings;
- Establish an e-Communications Task Force to investigate and recommend a plan for expanded employee access to, and proficiency in, computer-based communications tools, including self-directed mechanisms such as e-mail, Internet and Intranet services;
- Establish and conduct for Council and affected staff an orientation session outlining staff roles and responsibilities at City Council meetings.
- Provide annual Department reports to the City Manager and City Council;
- Complete an inventory and audit of the corporate communications to include messaging, literacy levels, etc. and develop an inventory of what is currently being done;
- Identify corporate responsibility for keeping information current through review and/or development of standards that will address consistency, literacy, format and style;
- Establish applicable protocols and guidelines for Councillors in contacting City staff for City business or general questions;
- Provide news media spokesperson training opportunities for Councillors;
- Advise on and assist in the development of internal communication strategies and activities that recognize and support the role all employees have in communicating with the public;
- Support an open, co-operative and consultative culture throughout the workplace, which includes being open to the views and concerns of employees regarding workplace issues;
- Conduct City Manager briefings for senior managers and associated Departments as needed to keep employees apprised of emerging, ongoing issues of importance to the municipality; and
- The City Manager and Department Heads develop and maintain an issues management plan for the strategic management of emerging, ongoing issues of importance to the City.

5.7 Training and Professional Development

The City should provide its senior managers and employees at all levels with an orientation of the communications function and planning process, as well as of their associated role and responsibilities. Incoming employees should also be oriented on the City's communication function and informed about their roles and responsibilities.

It is recommended that the City:

- Plan for employee communication training requirements, allocate adequate resources for staff training and development and evaluate the effectiveness of training programs;
- Facilitate communications training for employees and senior managers, particularly those responsible for program and service delivery who work directly with the public, to assist them in developing the skills needed to be effective communicators for their Department; and
- Provide training on such topics as media relations, e-writing skills, business writing skills, etc. and to provide other tools and templates to assist in the City's communication efforts.

5.8 Technological Innovation and New Media

The City should maintain a capacity for innovation and stay current with developments in communications practice and technology. As the City adopts new means of communication, it must continue to reach, in a timely manner, citizens whose access to technology may be limited or who prefer to receive municipal information through more traditional means.

Investments in new communications technology should serve to:

- Enhance public access to information, programs and services;
- Achieve efficiencies in the preparation, accessibility and dissemination of information, while preserving its availability to current and future generations; and
- Represent value to the community, in terms of fostering public consultation, the sharing of information, the expansion of educational opportunities and the development and delivery of programs, services and initiatives.

5.9 Internet and Electronic Communication

The Internet, World Wide Web and other means of electronic communication are powerful enablers for building and sustaining effective communications within the City and with potential business interests and tourists across Canada, the United States and around the world.

An important tool for providing information and services to the public, the Internet facilitates interactive, two-way communication and feedback. It provides opportunities to reach and connect with many members of the public and to deliver personalized services.

The City must maintain an active presence on the Internet to enable 24-hour electronic access to municipal information. E-mail and the City's Website should be used to enable direct communications between the public and business community and the municipality and among employees.

It is recommended that the City:

- Assign personnel in each Department to ensure that Internet-published information on policies, programs, services and initiatives is regularly updated, accurate, easy to understand and accessible in multiple formats for persons with disabilities;
- Ensure that printed material for public distribution is published concurrently on the Internet;
- Incorporate mechanisms into on-line services for receiving and acknowledging public feedback; and
- Advise on information management to ensure effective use of information technologies and electronic communications.

5.10 Media Relations

Journalists, reporters and other media representatives play an important role in the communications process; providing the public with news and information about the municipality and reporting on the public's views and opinions of the municipality. The City should continue to cultivate proactive relations with information media outlets to ensure public safety and promote awareness and understanding of City policies, programs, services and initiatives.

The City needs to operate and respond effectively in a 24-hour media environment. The City should also be able, on short notice, to reach and inform the media on issues of importance to the public. The City engages the media using a variety of communication tools, including news conferences, interviews and news releases.

A Communications Officer responsible for media relations can ensure that media requests, particularly for interviews or technical information on specialized subjects, are directed to knowledgeable staff designated to speak as official representatives of the City.

It is recommended that the City:

- Continue to build and maintain effective relations with reporters, journalists and other communicators;

- Continue to effectively facilitate information or interview requests from the media, and manage plans and strategies for communicating with the media; and
- Ensure processes and procedures are in place to assist appropriate employees in responding to media calls.

5.11 Intergovernmental Relations

The Corporate Strategic Plan identified a number of actions designed to enhance external relations with various levels of government. The actions approved in the Strategic Plan have been incorporated into the Communications Plan.

It is recommended that the City consider the following actions from the Strategic Plan:

- Pursue opportunities to develop closer ties with Federal and Provincial Ministers and senior staff members and continue to host regular tri-level meetings;
- Further develop relationships with our American counterparts and the United States Government at the State and Federal level, particularly in the areas of transportation, customs, immigration and tourism;
- Expand partnerships with the County in areas such as training, education and licensing;
- Seek and share more information at the staff level with the County and other local municipalities;
- Continue to meet regularly with the Aamjiwnaang First Nation Band Council and Band Administration.

5.12 Access to Information and Respect for Privacy

An open municipal government implies that all employees must respect privacy rights Council confidences and Department responsibility while treating sensitive information with the discretion it requires. Employees must be properly trained to know the extent and limits in each area. Employee access to information and privacy rights should also be respected at all times.

It is recommended that the City:

- Provide staff orientation and training with respect to the handling of confidential/privacy matters;
- Develop and make available to staff, policies and procedures that are clear and transparent respecting confidential/privacy matters; and

- Conduct a regular review and evaluation of issues, practices and problems related to confidential/privacy matters.

6.0 THREE YEAR ACTION PLAN

6.1 Introduction

The following Section outlines the various communications initiatives recommended by the CCPT to initiate improvements to the City's communications function. The Action Plan is designed to be implemented over a three year period beginning immediately. The section is divided into three sets of recommendations. There are recommendations which pertain to communications generally and there are sets of recommendations specifically directed at both internal and external communications.

6.2 General Recommendations

6.2.1 Corporate Communications Officer Position

This recommendation is considered by the CCPT to be the most important recommendation in the Communications Plan. It is our opinion that implementation of an effective municipal communications function will require the expertise of a professional communications officer.

Based on the information collected from other municipalities, many municipalities have developed Communications Plans and employ communications staff to implement and monitor their corporate communications strategies (See Appendix L). A common suggestion made by survey respondents is that the City hire a Communications Officer. Given the importance of the communications function to the municipality and the absence of qualified internal staff to perform the role of a Communications Officer, the CCPT is recommending that City Council approve the creation of a Communications Officer position in 2004, on a full-time contract basis (two years), initially. It is estimated that an annual budget of between \$70,000 and \$90,000 will be required. The status of the position should be reviewed after the two year contract period. It is further recommended that this position report directly to the City Manager.

The responsibilities for a Corporate Communications Officer could include the following:

- Implement the Corporate Communications Plan and Strategy and monitor its effectiveness;
- Contributing to the development of Communications Policies;
- Media relations (including preparation of resources for media);
- Co-ordination of advertising;
- Internal communications (newsletters, Intranet);

- External Communications (newsletters, content of Website);
- Staff training on communications initiatives;
- Advise and assist staff in the development of effective public consultation processes;
- Conduct customer satisfaction surveys as well as follow up internal and external surveys, two years from the date of implementation of the Corporate Communications Plan, to evaluate the City's effectiveness as a communicator, both internally and externally;
- Conduct an internal audit of the City's correspondence with respect to literacy levels, and consistency;
- Assisting in the development and monitoring of a consistent corporate identity (communications); and
- Providing support to special corporate initiatives.

6.2.2 Corporate Communications Project Team

It is recommended that the CCPT be retained for the first year of the Plan's implementation. It is proposed that the CCPT meet quarterly during 2004 to evaluate progress with the Plan's implementation and if required, make recommendations for adjustments and improvements to the City Manager. It is further recommended that the CCPT be chaired by the Corporate Communications Officer.

6.3 Internal Communications Initiatives

In this section, a detailed description of the key recommended communication initiatives designed to improve internal communications are outlined. Table 1 (next page) summarizes all of the various communications initiatives which are recommended for implementation in order to raise staff awareness, reinforce messages and provide opportunities for City Council, Department Heads and senior managers to listen and respond to employee feedback.

6.3.1 Employee Newsletter

The City's Corporate Strategic Plan identifies the development of a corporate newsletter as long term action, designed to help enhance internal communication. The employee survey results show this action to be a high priority among City staff.

It is recommended that this item be given a short term implementation objective. Responsibility for this initiative could be assigned to the proposed Communications Officer Position. It is recommended that the newsletter be published quarterly and mailed internally to all employees and City Council. The newsletter can be made informative and useful by reporting general City business, personnel changes, staff achievements, the latest City initiatives and other matters of interest to City staff.

**Table 1 - Communications Plan
Profile of Recommended Actions - Internal Communications**

Actions	Stakeholder(s)	Message(s)	Methods	Timing	Cost Estimate	Expected Outcome(s)	Monitoring and Evaluation
Provide Positive Reinforcement where Appropriate	- City Council - Senior management & supervisors	- recognition for a job well done	- performance reviews - letters of recognition - verbal feedback	- immediately	- N/A	- increased productivity - improved staff morale - employee retention - happier employees - increased employee loyalty & commitment - enhanced quality of work	- employee feedback program - internal survey
Regular Department/Section Meetings	- Department Heads - Supervisors	- share general City & department business information - FYI - discuss corporate matters & department matters	- monthly or bi-monthly meetings as required	- 3 rd quarter 2003	- N/A	- better informed staff - enhanced team concept - improved employee morale - open employee communication - improved performance - better workplace - enhanced quality of work	- employee feedback program - internal survey - performance reviews
Prepare & Distribute a Corporate Policies and Procedures Manual to all Departments	- Human Resources	- up to date inventory of corporate policies and procedures	- binder to be provided in each department and satellite facility	- 3 rd quarter 2003	- \$500	- employees better informed of corporate policies and procedures - open employee communication - enhanced quality of work - improved staff attitude towards the organization - higher staff morale	- employee feedback program - internal survey
Make Effort to Advise Employees on Significant Matters Before or at Same Time Information is Communicated to the Public	- City Manager	- open communications with employees on matters affecting their work	- email - correspondence - web site (material access)	- 4 th quarter 2003	- N/A	- strengthens 'team' concept - improved morale - increased productivity - improved staff attitude towards the organization	- employee feedback program - internal survey
Develop & Introduce an Employee Feedback Program	- Communications Officer - Human Resources	- opportunity for staff to provide feedback to senior management	- make a feedback forum available twice each year for employee feedback	- 1 st quarter 2004	- \$100	- identify issues needing to be addressed - enhanced internal communications - improved employee morale - improved performance	- level of employee participation in the program
Staff Training in Communications	- Human Resources - Communications Officer	- to be effective communicators	- training seminars - video library	- 1 st quarter 2004	- \$500	- improved customer service - improved staff morale - enhanced internal & external communications - improved customer satisfaction	- employee feedback program - internal survey - external survey - public comments/feedback
Corporate Newsletter (internal)	- Human Resources - Communications Officer	- general City business - personnel changes - municipal events - staff achievements	- quarterly newsletter mailed to all employees - intranet	- 3 rd quarter 2004	- \$1,000 / year	- staff better informed - improved morale - improved communication	- employee feedback program - internal survey
Formalize an Orientation Program for New Employees	- Human Resources - Department Heads	- who we are - what we do - organizational structure - City policies & procedures	- information sessions twice a year as required - educational CD/video - taken on a tour of appropriate departments and introduced to employees by HR staff and Department Head - include brief introduction in corporate newsletters, email and correspondence	- 2005	- N/A	- improved familiarity with roles of City departments and staff - improved understanding of corporate policies & procedures - employees are better informed - improved employee morale	- follow up interviews with all new employees - employee feedback program - internal survey
Provide all Employee Groups/Sites with Access to a Computer	- Financial Services (Information Services)	- strong 'team' emphasis	- each separate municipal satellite facility supporting a staff group be provided with a personal computer	- 2005	- initial capital costs \$25,900-\$38,500 - annual maintenance costs \$16,000-33,600	- improved morale - staff better informed - improved internal communications - improved staff attitude towards the organization	- employee feedback program - internal survey
Standardize Operating Procedures within & between Departments	- City Manager - Department Heads	- all singing from the same song sheet - strong 'team' emphasis	- operating procedures manual	- 2005	- \$500	- improved productivity - better customer service - stronger team building - improved communications	- employee feedback program - internal survey

It is recommended that each Department assign a staff person to be responsible for gathering and summarizing appropriate material, for submission to the Communications Officer. A staff editorial committee comprised of approximately 3 persons should also be considered that would assist the Communications Officer in publishing the newsletter.

An opportunity also exists to explore the development of an employee e-newsletter and City Intranet site to help improve internal information sharing.

6.3.2 New Employee Orientation Program

The internal survey results revealed a desire to have the City improve the orientation for and the introduction of new employees. This initiative is also identified in the City's Strategic Plan. The CCPT agrees that it is important for all new employees to be properly introduced to existing staff, understand our organizational structure, know what we do and be familiar with City policies and procedures.

It is proposed that regular information sessions be held as required (at least twice per year) with new employees. New employees should also be formally introduced to fellow employees as appropriate. New employees should also be briefly introduced in a corporate newsletter and through internal e-mail. It is also recommended that the City purchase/develop appropriate educational tools such as CD's and videos to assist in the orientation of new employees.

It is recommended that the new orientation program be introduced in 2004.

6.3.3 Regular Department/Section Meetings

One of the most frequently mentioned internal communication weaknesses identified by staff is the lack of regular Department/Section meetings. These meetings are seen to be excellent vehicles for staff to be better informed of City business and Department business and for strengthening the "team approach" to the delivery of municipal services. Department/Section meetings will also facilitate open employee communication and help improve employee morale.

The CCPT is recommending that regular Department/Section meetings be mandatory and that Department Heads and Managers be evaluated on this initiative through the performance review process. We are suggesting that these meetings be held either monthly or bi-monthly as required. It is recommended that these meetings be initiated in the third quarter of 2003.

6.3.4 Advising Employees before the General Public

The internal survey results revealed that employee morale is negatively affected when information related to their work is released to the media/public before they are advised. The CCPT is recommending that the City make every effort to advise employees on significant matters that affect their work before or at the same time information is communicated to the public. Methods which should be used to distribute information on a timely basis include e-mail, internal correspondence and the City's web site.

Providing significant information to staff before or at the same time it is made public will help to improve employee morale and strengthen the “team approach” to service delivery. It is recommended that this initiative be implemented immediately.

6.3.5 Standardize Operating Procedures within and Between Departments

This is another initiative which will help to improve the “team approach” to service delivery. This initiative is also contained in the City’s Corporate Strategic Plan. An important component of this action is the development of an operating procedures manual which is made available to all City Departments. All staff should be trained on the operating procedures. Common operating procedures will assist staff to provide improved and consistent customer service. It is recommended that the operating procedures manual be made available to all Departments in 2005.

6.4 External Communication Initiatives

In this section; a detailed description of the key recommended communication initiatives which are designed to improve external communications are outlined. Table 2 (next page) summarizes all of the communications initiatives which are recommended by the CCPT for implementation in order to provide opportunities for City Council, and City staff to inform, listen and respond to the public.

6.4.1 City-Wide Newsletter

We are recommending a communication initiative for City Council. This initiative is to address a concern from some members of the public that they are not fully aware of Council’s activities. The media tends to focus on matters they want to communicate about and in some instances it is not sufficient to reflect the work of the Mayor and City Council.

An initiative to improve this situation is to produce and distribute a City Council newsletter. This newsletter is recommended to be published up to six times per year. The newsletter can be mailed to all homes in the City and posted on the City’s Website.

All City staff should be provided with a copy of the newsletter either through correspondence or e-mail.

The newsletter can be made informative and useful by promoting upcoming events and the latest City initiatives. A message from the Mayor can be included in each newsletter. A calendar can also be placed in the newsletter to highlight feature events and activities for the upcoming two month period.

The production of the newsletter should be made the responsibility of the proposed Communications Officer position. It is recommended that this initiative be launched in 2004.

**Table 2 - Communications Plan
Profile of Recommended Actions
External Communications**

Actions	Stakeholder(s)	Message(s)	Methods	Timing	Cost Estimate	Expected Outcome(s)	Monitoring and Evaluation
Provide Customer Services Training	- Human Resources	- ensure all staff are equipped to provide excellent customer service	- provide customer service training to all staff - video library	- on going	- \$20,000 - \$22,000	- improved customer satisfaction - increased productivity - improved staff morale - improved customer service	- external survey - public comments / feedback - customer satisfaction survey
Explore and Develop Alternative Formats for Town Hall Meetings	- City Council - City Manager - Communications Officer	- to foster effective public feedback on municipal matters	- research & develop alternatives to traditional City Hall 'town hall' style meetings	- on going	- N/A	- increased public participation/input - improved relations with the public - Council & staff are better informed of the public wants, needs & views	- external surveys - level of participation in meetings
Expand/Enhance use of the City's Web Site to Share Municipal Information with the Public	- senior management	- providing useful, timely, accurate, clear & complete information to the public	- posting of information regarding City policies, By-laws, fees, programs, services and initiatives	- currently under construction (on-going)	- N/A	- better informed public - increased customer satisfaction - City seen as being progressive community - enhanced exposure to potential business interests & tourists	- external surveys - level of visits to the City's web site - ongoing public feedback
Broaden Media Training to Include Other Staff Dealing with the Media	- Human Resources - Communications Officer	- ensure all staff responsible for dealing with the media are properly trained to do so	- offer training sessions as required - video library	- 2004	- \$5,000	- improved staff morale - proactive relations with the media - staff better able to handle media questions - City messages are more effectively communicated	- City Manager & Department Heads as appropriate provide feedback through performance reviews
Standardize Corporate Communications Identity	- City Manager - Communications Officer	- consistent look to City communications - unified corporate identity	- letterhead/logos - correspondence - emails - reports	- 2004	- \$10,000	- consistent corporate identity - easily recognized/identified City messages/information	- external survey - Communications Officer
Expand use of Inserts in Water/Tax Billings to Share Municipal Information	- senior management	- informing the public on various matters of general interest	- inserts in water/tax billings to inform public	- 2004	- \$130./insert publication	- better informed public	- external survey - customer satisfaction survey
Develop a Corporate Newsletter/Newspaper Insert to Share Information Concerning Municipal Policies, Programs, Services, Initiatives & Accomplishments	- City Manager - Communications Officer	- providing useful, timely, accurate, clear & complete information to the public	- monthly corporate newsletter/newspaper insert - publish on web site (Information Centre)	- 2004	- \$500	- better informed public - better relations with the public - improved customer satisfaction	- external survey - customer satisfaction survey
Take into Account the Special Needs of Many Citizens when Designing & Delivering Information to the Public	- City Manager - Communications Officer	- recognize the special needs of many citizens including literacy levels and physical challenges	- adopt guidelines to assist staff in designing & developing effective communication tools (see Section 2-plain language) - provide information in multiple formats where feasible	- 2004	- unknown	- better informed community	- external surveys - on-going public feedback
Customer Satisfaction Survey	- Communications Officer	- how well are we doing	- surveys available at all department counters	- 2004	- \$200/year	- on going public feedback - customer service adjustments as required	- level of participation - external survey
City of Sarnia Annual Report	- City Manager - Communications Officer	- highlight previous years accomplishments, department reports & financial statements	- insert in weekly newspaper - posted on web site	- 2005	- \$5,000	- better informed public - improved customer satisfaction	- external surveys - on going public feedback

6.4.2 Customer Satisfaction Survey

It is recommended that a customer satisfaction survey be developed and used by all City Departments. This would be intended to be a report card that simply asks the question “How are we doing?” and would provide respondents with a variety of ways of responding and providing ongoing feedback. It is recommended that this survey be carried out annually and be initiated in 2004.

6.4.3 City of Sarnia Annual Report

The CCPT recommend that the City publish and distribute an annual report. This report could be released in June of each year and should highlight the City’s accomplishments from the previous year.

The report should include reports from all Departments including City Committees as well as the City’s financial statement.

This report can be communicated through various local news media and posted on the City’s Website. It is suggested that the first report be produced in 2005.

6.4.4 Corporate Visual Identity Program

In examining the communication approaches adopted by other municipalities it is clear that standardizing corporate communications identity is seen as an important priority. Standardizing communications from the City will give the City a consistent identity and allow City communications to be easily recognized and identified.

An internal communications audit will be necessary for the City to identify the various formats and styles that are used to communicate City information. It is suggested that this action be carried out by the proposed Communications Officer. Once the audit is completed, work can start on the design of a standardized communications identity.

Consideration should be given to the design and development of a City logo which would be used on all City communications. City residents could, through a City wide advertising campaign, be given an opportunity to select a logo they would like to represent the City from a small group of alternatives.

6.4.5 Expand Use of Inserts in Tax/Water Billings

Several residents suggested that the City consider expanding the use of inserts in the Tax/Water Billings as a means to provide information to the public on various matters of interest. However, as with all communications tools, the communications value of billing inserts is finite. For example, mailings target only a specific portion of the population and typically at specific times of the year. As well, the format might not be conducive to all messages. As a result, guidelines for the use of billing inserts should be established and provided to all Departments.

The CCPT agrees that this is a cost effective way to provide information to the general public throughout the year. All Departments should be made aware of the availability of this communications method and encouraged to provide appropriate information for inclusion in the billings based on guidelines to be established.

6.4.6 Special Needs Considerations

It is important that the City recognize that there are many persons in the community that have various disabilities and literacy levels which do not allow them to read much of the information distributed by the municipality. We appreciate that this is a very complex matter to address given the financial constraints on the municipality.

It is recommended that the City adopt guidelines to assist staff in designing and developing effective communication tools (see Section 6.2) for persons with various literacy levels. It is also recommended that consideration be given to providing information in multiple formats where feasible.