



Corporate Communications Strategy

2024 to 2027



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*This document was received by Council March 19, 2024

About Kawartha Lakes

People of all generations are Jumping In to Kawartha Lakes. We have approximately 80,000 residents, many who enjoy a seasonal property near one of our 250 rivers and lakes. A single-tier municipality that delivers all services, we're the second largest geographic municipality in Ontario, the size of a small maritime province.

Growing Community

Over the next decade, Kawartha Lakes is poised to grow by more than 25,000 residents. Serving residents with a suite of communications tools to inform and engage is the focus of this strategy.

Rural high-speed access

Recent efforts through public-private partnerships have brought faster internet and more reliable cell phone coverage across the region. Access is not the same for all residents, however, and we realize that some households prefer to access municipal information through traditional media, by telephone or in person. Working with the Customer Service division, we aim to provide information and services in a variety of formats.

Media options

We currently have a variety of media outlets including Global Television based in Peterborough, local radio on 91.9 FM, printed magazines through the Fireside Publishing House family of magazines, among others, The Standard weekly newspaper and online news media. We will continue to monitor and adapt to changes in the local media landscape.

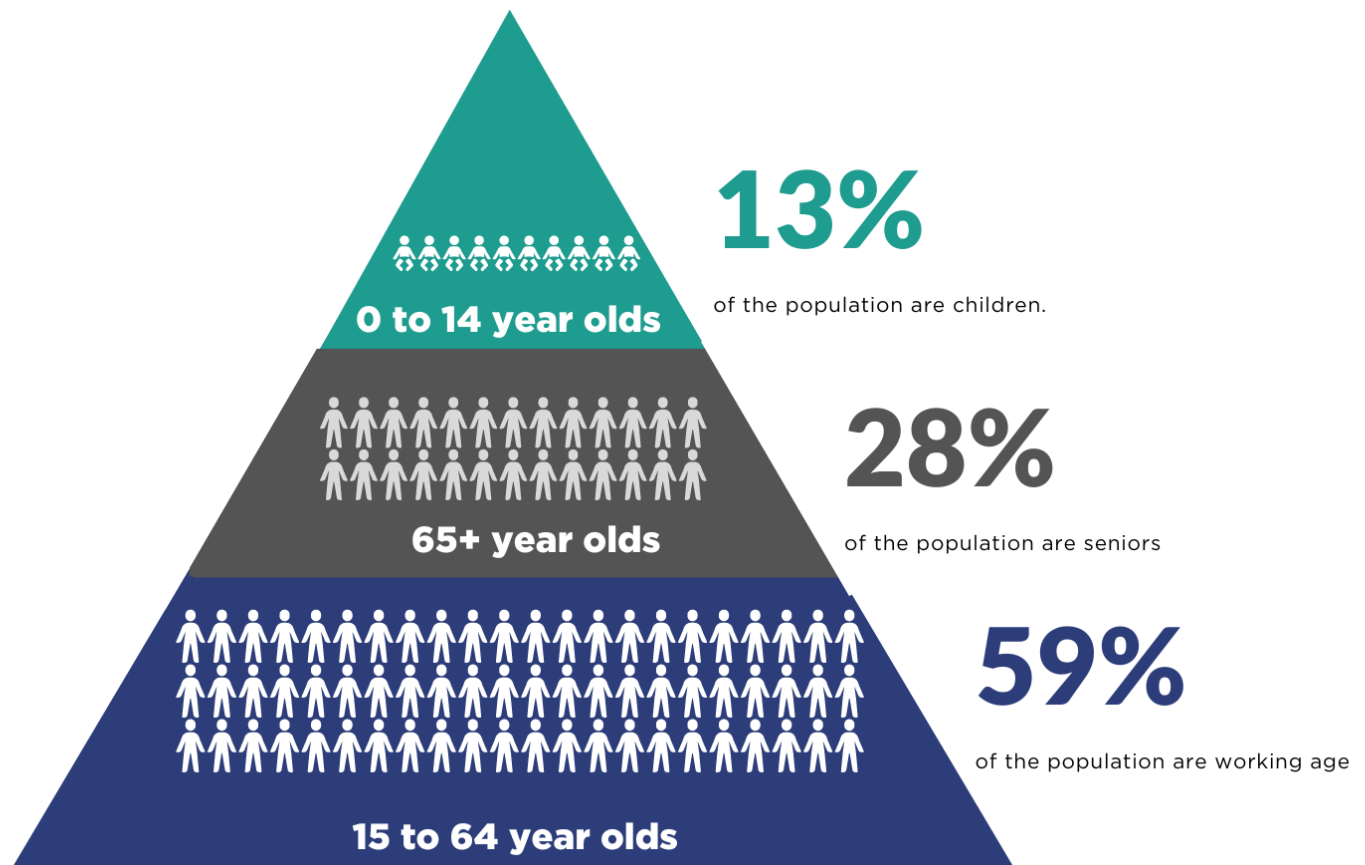


O'Brienvue Family Farm, Cameron

Demographics, Census Stats, 2021

- **Age** – the average age of residents in Kawartha Lakes is 47.4 years old, 5.6 years older than the provincial average age of 41.8
- **Income** – the median household income (midpoint of all incomes) is \$72,500 per year.
- **Languages spoken** – the majority of households speak English only, followed by English and French (4.5 percent), German, Dutch, Spanish, Italian and Polish (combined 4.5 percent)
- **Indigenous** – 2.9 percent of the population, 2,200 residents, identify as Indigenous
- **Immigrant Status** – 7.9 percent of the population are foreign-born (immigrants)
- **Education** – 15.7 percent of people aged 25 to 64 have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 36.8 percent in Ontario
- **Labour** – 17 percent of the labour market are self-employed. Top employment sectors are construction, retail, health care, social services, science and technology, transportation and agriculture.

Percentage of population by broad age groups, 2021



Where we began

Established in 2016, the **Communications, Advertising, and Marketing (CAM) division** is a central lead for corporate communications strategy, marketing, branding and creative services.

Our team of three - a manager and two officers - specializes in digital marketing, accessible communication, media relations and community engagement.



There are staff across departments with communication skills and duties specific to their service delivery. Together, we coordinate messaging that keeps our audiences informed and engaged.

The Corporate Communications Strategy 2017 to 2019 has been replaced by this Strategy, which will guide the municipality into 2027. This strategy aligns with the Kawartha Lakes Strategic Plan 2024 to 2027, specifically the goal of Good Government.

Our role

All municipal employees and official spokespersons for Kawartha Lakes communicate with our audience on a daily basis through meetings, emails, calls, open houses and service delivery. The Communications, Advertising and Marketing (CAM) division supports the organization to communicate effectively by providing:

- Management of media relations to ensure the right information reaches the public on a proactive basis
- Crisis and emergency communications management
- Communications solutions for all programs and services
- Brand management, design and creative services
- Administration of the corporate engagement platform
- Procurement and governance of all tools and technology to ensure the municipality communicates with excellence
- Negotiate, design and place advertising on behalf of the municipality
- Training and coaching staff to enhance capacity for media relations and communications

We begin every project with a strategic approach. Working with our partners across departments, we craft the message to reach the right people at the right time. Results are measured by reach and engagement so that we can continually improve our effectiveness.



Accomplishments 2017 to 2023

Building the communications anchor

The first Kawartha Lakes Communications Strategy focused on improving the quality of communications tools available. This included a complete **redevelopment of all websites** (municipal, tourism, library and staff intranet), resulting in a single platform for efficient governance and a consistent, accessible user experience on any device. A team of Website Content Contributors was developed to keep each division's webpages current and relevant.

Establishing a framework for residents to stay informed

- The new websites allowed our various audiences to opt-in to municipal, library and community news and events, delivered to their inbox. This set the stage for '**pull communications**', allowing for customized information to be available on demand.
- To keep in contact with residents off-line, we developed a twice annual mailing of a **newsletter** inside tax packages. Each January and June, residents receive an update from Council on major projects, the budget and other timely reminders. This publication is also distributed at approximately 50 municipal and retail locations across the community.

Enabling a new era of engagement

- In 2019 we introduced a new **engagement platform**, Jump In, Kawartha Lakes, to allow Council and staff to hear directly from the community on important issues. This platform has gained more than 6,500 participants and had 14,000 engagements in its first four years. This platform played an important role during the pandemic to allow two-way communication on issues such as Off-Road Vehicles, Short Term Rentals, Stray and Feral Cats, and more. It will continue to supplement in person engagement and store a history of projects.
- Live streaming of Council and Committee meetings on YouTube has increased engagement and awareness of the issues facing the municipality. This allows residents to tune in live or watch later at their convenience.

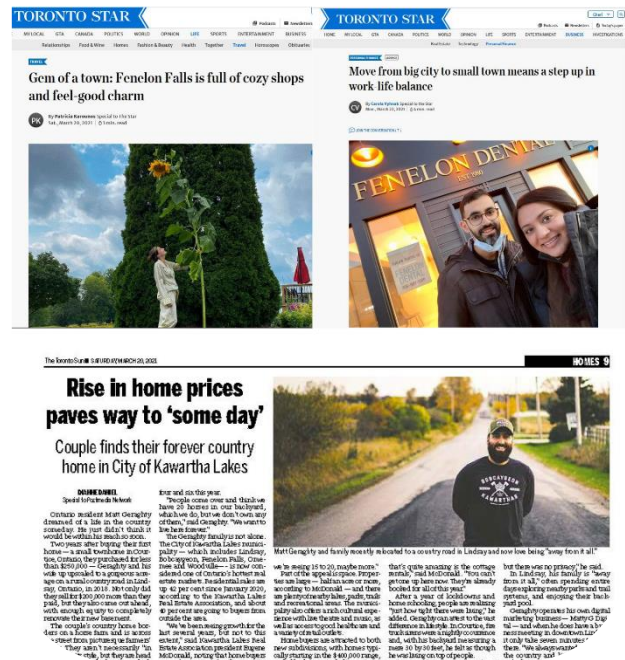


New ways to spread the word

- A **media relations policy**, spokesperson training and ongoing relationship building with media partners has contributed to positive earned media locally and across the GTA market. This exposure has helped to build Kawartha Lakes' reputation as a sought-after destination for visitors, an exceptional lifestyle for potential residents and a thriving community for businesses and community partners.
- **Social media governance** was established, with a centralized oversight role through the CAM division. This has ensured brand consistency, security and quality messaging across 20 accounts on Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube.

Media Hits - week of March 20, 2021

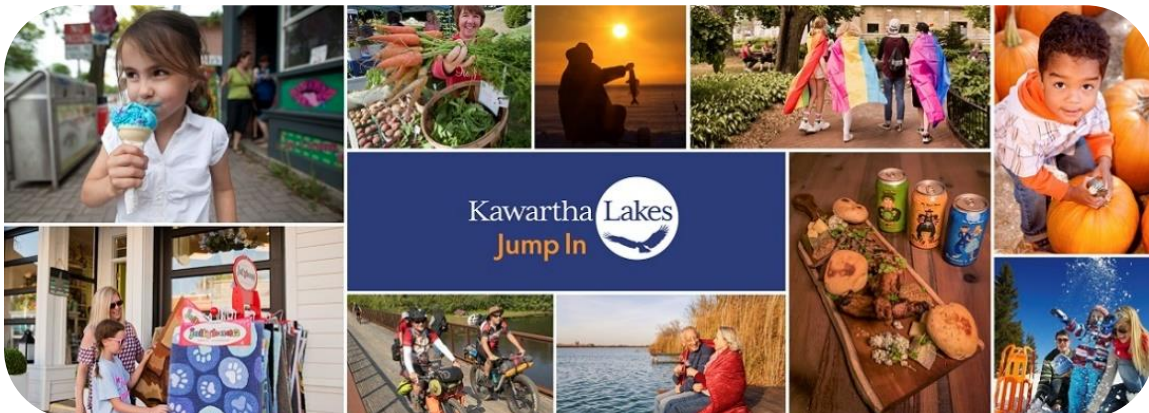
383 million potential readers
152 news hits
29,000 social shares



Earned media campaign, 2021

Refreshing the brand

In 2021, we celebrated 20 years as a municipality. This was a fitting time to refresh the brand to reflect the evolution of our community, shaped by all who visit, live and work in Kawartha Lakes. The refreshed brand includes an updated logo, the Jump In brand theme and the brand promises that came from what our community values most about Kawartha Lakes: Community, Opportunity, Naturally. Our award-winning brand book has the full story: www.kawarthalakes.ca/brand.



What we heard

Our strategy began with a comprehensive **listening approach**, prioritizing the perspectives of residents, partners and staff through electronic surveys, focus groups and community interactions.

In addition to feedback gathered through the Kawartha Lakes Strategic Planning process, we went to the community to specifically connect on communications. Through 18 pop-up engagement events at libraries, parks, beaches, recreation facilities and more, we heard first-hand what people want. We met with business leaders and senior citizens for in-depth discussions on issues important to them.

The **Did You Know campaign** led by Deputy Mayor Tracy Richardson in 2023 received more than 2000 engagements on social media, 1400 video views, and first-hand feedback from more than 300 residents as to how they want to receive municipal communications.

We also collaborated with a trusted communications consultant, **Redbrick Communications**, who held in-depth interviews with senior staff, members of Council and the media to ensure our approach aligns with current trends and effectively meets the diverse needs of our community. They shared public relations best practices and trends to guide future planning and investment.



Key themes and considerations:

One size does not fit all

- With a broad and diverse audience to reach, it's important to ensure a balance of digital, print and broadcast communications.
- Metroland ceased printing of the local newspaper in September 2023; reported as one of the top ways residents received municipal information. Providing other communication channels to fill the gap is important.
- Continue to offer a variety of online options, expanding services on the website and making it easier to opt-in to desired information.



Pop-up engagement, Lindsay Library Branch

Investment in communications to maintain and enhance services

- There is public appetite for more timely information on new developments, permits and applications, municipal improvement projects, etc.

- Large capital and growth-related projects, along with growing volume of communications demand across departments is exceeding supply of staff time.
- Invest in staffing, including training, for CAM and other staff to ensure we can meet current and future needs.

Keeping up with technology

- Continue to have flexibility in CAM to take advantage of new tools and data to drive decisions and keep abreast of a quickly changing communications technology landscape.
- Leverage new technology to ensure websites, social media platforms and other communications stay current.

Stronger together

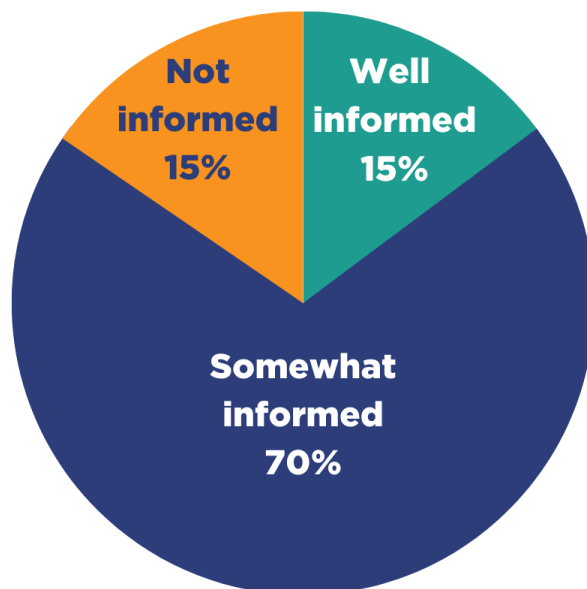
- Strengthen partnerships internally and externally to help spread messaging to underrepresented groups – more voices, same message.
- Important to be proactive to counter misinformation/disinformation.
- Align more closely with Customer Service division to keep messaging consistent and proactive based on emerging resident concerns.

Keep listening

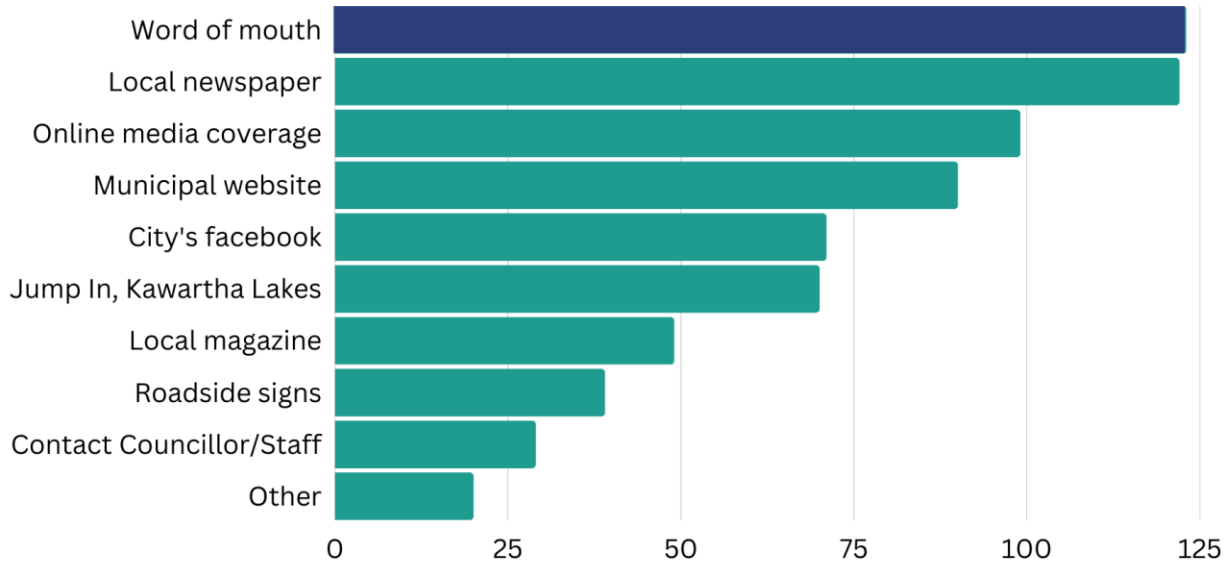
- Expand ways to listen to community needs through a variety of engagement/feedback options.

Highlights of Did You Know survey results

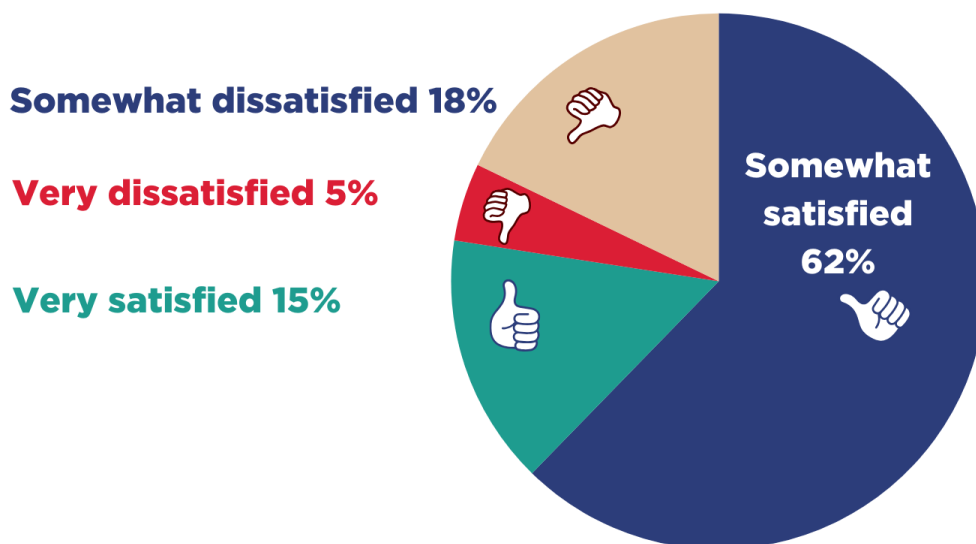
How informed do you consider yourself to be about municipal news and activities?



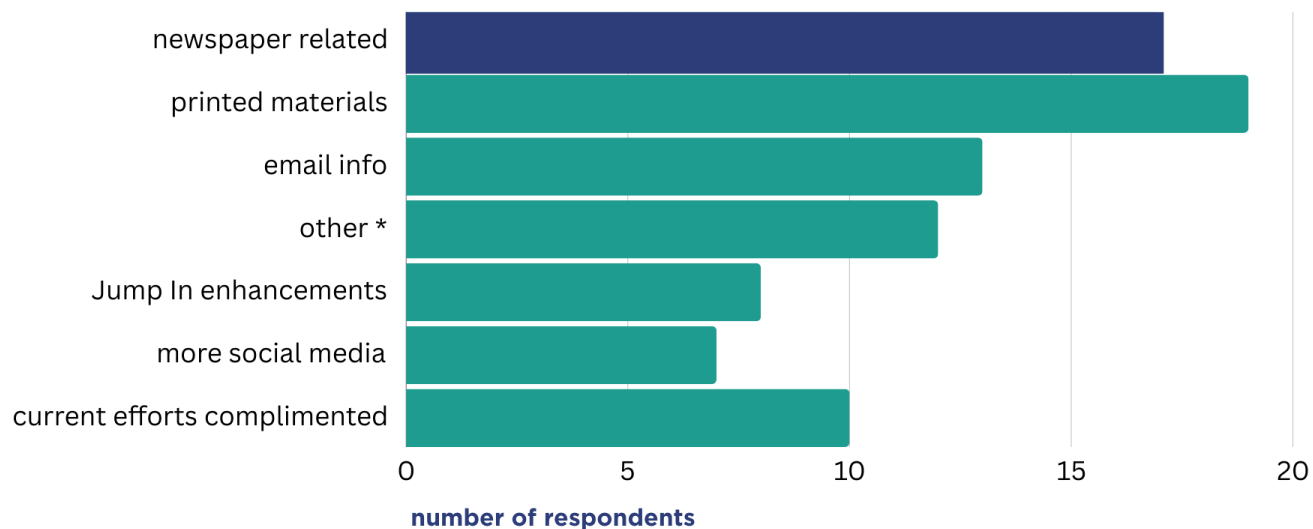
Where do you get most of your information about the municipality? (top 3)



Overall, how satisfied are you with Kawartha Lakes' efforts to communicate municipal information?



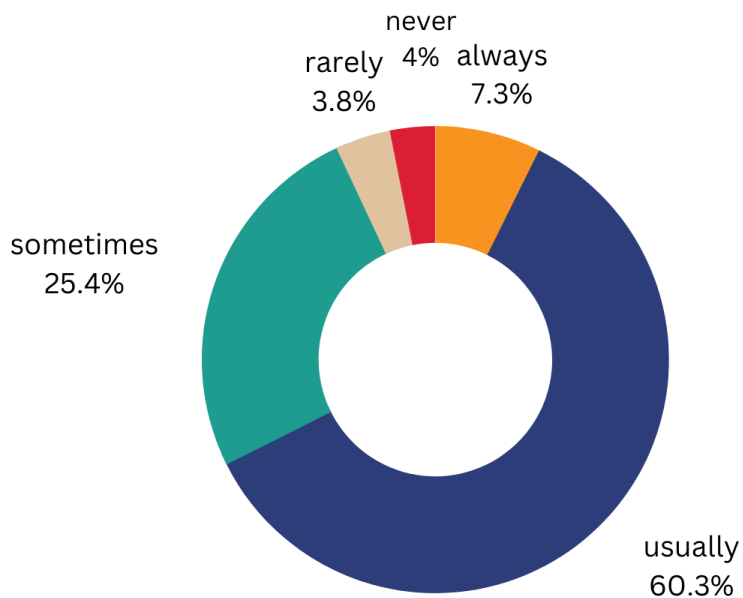
What could the municipality do better in its efforts to communicate and share information with you?



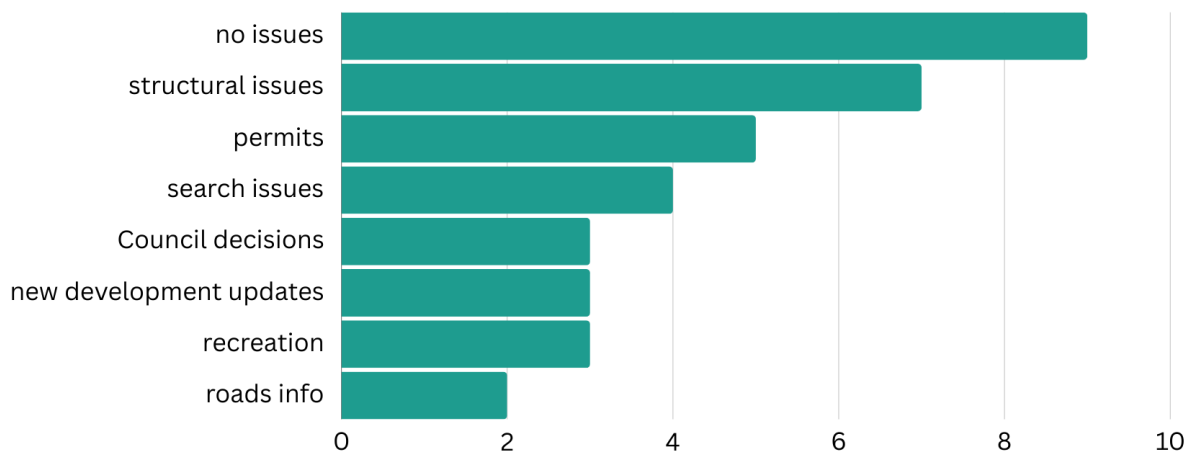
*Other - Respondents offered suggestions to improve communications:

- Expand the Did You Know campaign
- Town halls or other information meetings
- Text message campaigns
- Maps with information on future growth
- Phone blast/messaging
- Seasonal info for seasonal residents
- Radio announcements
- Municipal app or website that allows personalization
- Keep it simple, no jargon

Can you typically find what you're looking for on the website?



Is there something you can't find/would like to see added to the website?



Focus Groups

We held focus groups in Lindsay and Fenelon Falls to allow for small group discussions in greater depth on the topics covered in our surveys and polls.

Focus Group Feedback: Seniors community

- “Following up on requests is extremely important as people want to know they have been heard, even if nothing can be done
- Be proactive and not reactive - keep people informed on topics that affect them no matter what and ensure they get a chance to have their say before finalized
- Keep website simple so you can find what you need quickly
- Need a way to reach people who don’t have email, cell phones, but want to be kept aware of things – mail is a good option
- Information should be brief as seniors just want the highlights of changes that affect them
- Did You Know campaign was good, keep it going, ask people who gave feedback to opt-in to more
- Newspapers or radio are the best ways to reach seniors”



Seniors Focus Group, Fenelon Falls

Focus Group Feedback: Business community

- “Telephone customer service is excellent, make it easier to find the right staff contact online
- Interest in more fillable forms on the website
- Chambers of Commerce willing to host Member Town Halls to update our members on current issues
- Would like a monthly Did You Know topic
- Providing more lead time before major service changes (e.g. moving Service Centre) would be preferable”

Where we're going

Vision

Together, we tell the stories that create understanding and dialogue.

Mission

Empower community members to access municipal information they can trust. Provide opportunities for two-way communications that lead to greater trust and understanding.



Maryboro Lodge conversation

Values

We adopt the values of the corporation, as noted in the Kawartha Lakes Strategic Plan:

Respect

Accountability

Teamwork

Guiding Principles

Audience-focused

- Listen to understand
- Equity, inclusion and accessibility are at the forefront of our work
- Generate authentic content that resonates and is easily shared
- Plain language, clear and direct



Outcome-oriented

- Communicate with purpose
- Data and measurement driven



One-team approach

- Work with our internal partners to deliver a unified message
- One voice that genuinely speaks for staff, Council and partners



Goals

1. Create authentic connections

Our communications will strive to create authentic connections with our community as it enters a rapid stage of growth. To do this, we will deepen partnerships: with **media partners**, **internal partners** across departments and **community partners**. Together, we tell the stories that create understanding and dialogue.



Actions

- Craft 'stories' that resonate with the community. Stories include easy to share content, images/videos, links to more information, posted in multiple locations.
- Develop Kawartha Lakes Ambassadors to authentically tell our stories. These will be staff and community members.
- Explore partnerships with groups and associations who can expand the reach of our stories.
- Build more reach and engagement across a broader audience on social media, as recommended in the Social Media Audit, 2023. Build stronger connections with the under 45-year-old audience.
- Grow the engagement community on Jump In, Kawartha Lakes as measured through members and engagement rate.
- Close the loop by asking the community about their level of satisfaction with communications and engagement.

2. Deliver inclusive and convenient communications

We use a mix of traditional media (TV, radio, billboards, print) and digital platforms (social media, websites) to share information widely. This approach helps us reach people of different ages, backgrounds, abilities and access to technology. Our goal is to make sure everyone can access municipal information.



Actions

- Redevelop websites to leverage the latest technology, enabling more digital services, customer convenience and accessibility.
- Increase printed newsletter schedule from two to four times a year. These seasonal newsletters will be delivered to mailboxes and will be made available for pick up at retail and municipal locations across the community. Content will be helpful information of broad public interest, and involve community partners/ambassadors.
- Leverage municipal hubs (service centres/libraries) to share public notices.
- Build in content and formats that meet the needs of seniors.
- Explore opportunities with community and traditional broadcast (radio and television).
- Test new tools to better serve our audiences (mobile apps, podcasts, use of AI, translation and more).

3. Build processes and standards that add value

The CAM Division guides a group of staff across departments that have communication skills and duties specific to their service delivery. This structure was created to allow CAM to focus on the strategic aspects of brand management and the creative aspects of message development. As demands increase, it's becoming more important to clearly define roles and processes among these staff resources to enhance coordination and effectiveness.

Actions

- Further develop the Communications Toolkit for corporate-wide internal understanding of how to work together and drive desired outcomes.
- Continue to provide training and support to staff in order to produce accessible and engaging communications on all of our platforms.
- Support a municipal-wide signage strategy.
- Create a branded corporate apparel program and corporate promotional item program.
- Develop quarterly Insight Reports using data to understand reach, engagement and media exposure to measure effectiveness across all campaigns.
- Deliver an Annual Communications Report to Council.
- Support message sharing by Council as one of our best connections to the community.



4. Elevate engagement

By setting out a clear set of guidelines and practices for public engagement, Kawartha Lakes will enhance transparency, build trust and encourage active participation among community members. People will know their voices have been heard, and will trust the engagement process. Building on past successes, we will elevate and enhance engagement.

Actions

- Develop a Kawartha Lakes Engagement Framework.
- Champion a corporate commitment to resources and training across the organization.

5. Cultivate brand identity and voice

Inclusive communications have a welcoming, relaxed tone. This will make accessing services easy for current residents and newcomers.

Actions

- Develop style guidelines for the welcoming and conversational 'voice' of Kawartha Lakes.
- Publish a Brand Management Directive to consolidate standards and the process for updating previous branding.
- Align with Customer Service division for consistent messaging and tone across channels and early identification of issues.



Lindsay Milk Run registration

- Rollout the Days of Significance Management Directive to invite public involvement in the municipality's equity, diversity and inclusion calendar.
- Shape the evolving Tourism branding and marketing efforts to align with the Kawartha Lakes brand.

Timeline

Year	Goal	Actions	Budget / Resource Implications
2024 to 2027	Create authentic connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craft 'stories' that resonate with the community. Stories include easy to share content, images/videos, links to more information, posted in multiple locations. • Develop Kawartha Lakes Ambassadors in the community and staff members to authentically tell our stories. • Explore partnerships with groups and associations who can expand the reach of our stories. • Build more reach and engagement across a broader audience on social media, as recommended in Social Media Audit, 2023. Build stronger connections with the under 45-year-old audience. • Grow the engagement community on Jump In, Kawartha Lakes as measured through members, engagements and page views. 	
	Deliver inclusive and convenient communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redevelop websites to leverage the latest technology, enabling more digital services, customer convenience and accessibility. Tendering in 2024, special project early start 2025, go-live June 2025. Estimated \$500,000. • Increase printed newsletter schedule from two to four times a year. • Leverage municipal hubs to share public notices. • Test new tools to better serve our audiences (mobile apps, use of AI, translation and more). 	2025 budget request

Year	Goal	Actions	Budget / Resource Implications
	Build processes and standards that add value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further develop the Communications Toolkit for corporate-wide internal understanding of how to work together and drive desired outcomes. Support message sharing by Council as one of our best connections to the community. 	
	Cultivate brand identity and voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop style guidelines for the welcoming and conversational 'voice' of Kawartha Lakes. Ensure this is used for new websites. Align with Customer Service division for consistent messaging and tone across channels and early identification of issues. Rollout the Days of Significance Management Directive to invite public involvement in the municipality's equity, diversity and inclusion calendar. Shape the evolving Tourism branding and marketing efforts to align with the Kawartha Lakes brand. 	
2025 to 2027	Create authentic connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore partnerships with groups and associations who can help share stories and help two-way communication. Close the loop by asking the community about their level of satisfaction with communications and engagement. 	
	Deliver inclusive and convenient communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build in content and formats that meet the needs of seniors. Explore opportunities with community and traditional broadcast (radio, television, podcast, etc.). Potential new staff resource, journalism internship or contract work to support new initiatives. 	2025 budget request
	Build processes and standards that add value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support a municipal-wide signage strategy. Create a branded corporate apparel program and corporate promotional item program. 	

Year	Goal	Actions	Budget / Resource Implications
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop quarterly Insight Reports using data to understand reach, engagement and media exposure to measure effectiveness across all campaigns. Deliver an Annual Communications Report to Council. 	
	Elevate Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a Kawartha Lakes Engagement Framework. Champion a corporate commitment to resources and training across the organization. Engagement staffing, training across departments and Council. 	2026 budget request
	Cultivate brand identity and voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish a Brand Management Directive to consolidate standards and the process for updating previous branding. 	

Final thoughts

This document is a collaborative effort from many people and organizations across Kawartha Lakes. While led by the Corporation and funded by Council, the success of this Strategy depends on engaged citizens. As we collaborate, our expanding community will become increasingly informed and involved, playing a pivotal role in shaping the future of Kawartha Lakes.

Acknowledgements

Many people provided input and experience throughout the development of this plan.

We would like to thank the following for their time and insights:

- Residents of Kawartha Lakes
- Fenelon Falls senior citizens
- Bobcaygeon and Area Chamber of Commerce
- Coboconk and Norland Area Chamber of Commerce
- Fenelon Falls and District Chamber of Commerce
- Lindsay and District Chamber of Commerce
- Lindsay Downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA)

We appreciate the input of staff, Council members and members of the media – your contributions allowed us to gain diverse perspectives on what meets your needs and expectations.

Thank you to Redbrick Communications for allowing us to gather impartial feedback and frank recommendations from an industry leader in municipal communications.