

Communications Service Enhancement

Description:

A 2012 Communications Audit identified a need for four major plans: community engagement, communications, internal communications, and crisis communications. The recommended internal communications plan and communications strategy are now complete. However, a lack of staff resources and funding for consultants are assessed as factors in the remaining gap.

Based on recent motions around engagement levels it is proposed that additional staff positions are needed to provide the increased public participation opportunities that may be directed - an engagement specialist and an additional communications coordinator.

Recognizing that this is significant growth in the department (currently 4 staff), it is suggested that an engagement specialist be hired in 2025, and the communications coordinator would be a 2026 budget request.

Financial Cost of Enhancement:

The annual cost for the Engagement Specialist position is estimated to be \$106,797.

Measurement of Service Level Increase:

These new positions will allow the division to better support each division in the City and improve overall City communications internally and externally. Investing in communications is crucial for fostering stronger relationships between the city government and its residents. As our city grows, so do the diverse needs and concerns of our community. These positions will serve as dedicated liaisons tapping into ideas and feedback from our community and ensuring that all voices are heard and considered in decision-making processes while creating a sense of ownership among residents.

The Community Engagement Specialist will proactively involve citizens in policy discussions, project developments, and city planning, leading to more informed, transparent, and inclusive governance. This role is key to enhancing public trust, increasing civic participation, and reducing the potential for misunderstandings or conflicts. By actively engaging with residents, we can better identify and address issues before they escalate, ultimately saving the city time and resources.

The City of Prince George often engages citizens in the decision-making process less than cities of similar and smaller sizes. Best practices in local government indicate a city the size of Prince George should be engaging the public on approximately 30-40 issues or projects per year. That engagement can be a simple survey or a neighborhood meeting, or a large town hall style event. At present our community engagement has been approximately 3-6 projects per year. Some of these engagement projects are managed by contractors as divisions include engagement as part of the RFP for their projects.

As comparators, Kamloops (pop: 97,000) has 4 full-time engagement staff in addition to their communications team of 6. The City of North Vancouver (pop: 58,000) also has 4 full-time engagement staff in addition to 4 communications staff.