
HALDIMAND COUNTY

Report CEC-05-2024 Website Redesign Project Update and Governance Strategy



For Consideration by Council in Committee on October 8, 2024

OBJECTIVE:

To provide an update on the website redesign project, and seek approval on proposed governance that will guide the management of County websites according to best practices and in line with established corporate standards and provincial requirements, and to obtain approval for staffing resources within the Customer Experience & Communications Division.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report CEC-05-2024 Website Redesign Project Update and Governance Strategy be received;
2. AND THAT Policy 2002-04 Corporate Web Presence be rescinded;
3. AND THAT the draft Web Governance Policy, as attached to this report, be approved;
4. AND THAT the Information Technology Governance Steering Committee be provided delegated authority to approve the Haldimand County Web Governance Guide as updates are required;
5. AND THAT a new staffing initiative in the amount of \$134,700 be approved and included in the 2025 Tax-Supported Operating Budget to fund the additional FTE staffing requirement within the Customer Experience and Communications division to support communications activities including management and oversight of the website;
6. AND THAT capital purchases in the amount of \$5,000 related to new technology for the above FTE staffing initiative be approved;
7. AND THAT a staffing initiative in the amount of \$22,590 be approved and included in the 2025 Tax-Supported Operating Budget to fund the additional 0.31 FTE staffing requirement to change the Accessibility Coordinator to a permanent full-time position to provide additional organizational support to maintain an accessible website.

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Approved: Cathy Case, Chief Administrative Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Haldimand County Council identified corporate communication and the associated redevelopment of the County website as a key priority within the 2022-2026 Council term with the aim to provide an easier-to-navigate format with transparency and accessibility for residents and businesses. In 2023, staff initiated a project to rebuild and re-design the corporate website using third-party software, as well as develop a long-term website governance policy to enable sustainability of the new website. New

websites for Tourism Haldimand and the Haldimand County Public Library were also developed as part of the project.

The project is nearing completion. In order to effectively launch and maintain the website going forward, staff are presenting draft Website Governance Policy (Attachment 1), and the Website Governance Guide (Attachment 2) for adoption. In addition, staff are seeking an additional 1.31 FTE in dedicated communications and accessibility staff in order to effectively carry-out the ongoing responsibilities of the website as a key, corporate communication tool.

BACKGROUND:

In February 2023, Council approved Capital Project 123004: “Website Redesign and Hosted Web-Provided Services” which aimed to rebuild the corporate website ensuring web guidelines including accessibility requirements are met and communication and functionality for customers was improved.

This project was initiated in response to Council’s identification of customer service and communication as a term of Council priority. Later, an order of non-compliance from the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility was issued to Haldimand due to the County website not meeting legislated WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) sets out a process for developing and enforcing accessibility standards. The Act mandates that as of January 1, 2021, all organizations’ websites must conform to World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA (except for live captions and pre-recorded audio descriptions). The web content guidelines define how to make content more accessible to people living with a disability. By initiating the capital project, the Ministry granted the County a legislative requirement compliance extension deadline of December 2024.

In addition to accessibility requirements, the rebuild of the corporate website was identified as a key priority in the Corporate Customer Service Strategy for 2023-2026, as a core communication tool to encourage easy, accessible and transparent services.

In order to complete the project, a temporary full-time Communications Project Manager was hired to oversee the selection of a new third party provider, the website rebuild, developing website governance guidelines, drafting web content, and collaborating with different divisions to ensure the corporate goals were achieved. Additionally, the part-time Accessibility Coordinator’s position was temporarily increased from part-time to full-time to ensure the compliance of accessibility legislation specifically ensuring all web content meets legislated WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards, as set out by the AODA.

The project formally launched in February 2023, with anticipated completion within two years.

ANALYSIS:

The new corporate website, as well as individual microsites for Tourism and the Haldimand County Public Library, are nearing completion with the “go live” launch anticipated in November, 2024. The entire website has been “designed for use”, which means: each page considers the anticipated audience; integrations with third party vendors (such as eCommerce and Council Documents) have an approach that puts the customer needs first; and, using standardized writing style and processes provide an easy to follow, consistent product. All pages are mobile friendly, attractive and AODA compliant.

As a core communication tool, the new website aims to provide a positive customer experience through easier navigation, functional search options, and clear, accurate, accessible and up-to-date content. Once launched, staff are confident the goals of the project will have been met including being on time and within budget.

As with all websites, the bulk of the work involved to create, revise or maintain it is not something evident by looking at the site alone and is primarily behind the scenes involving web content management, governance processes, etc. It is imperative to recognize that the corporate website will always be a changing/evolving communications tool and will require constant updates ensuring it is always improving and maintained to continue to provide the intended result of a positive user experience. The volume of time and content necessary to meet community expectations is significant. To ensure the County is better positioned to maintain compliance with corporate communication goals and legislated AODA standards, staff are requesting Council approval to establish modern website governance tools, as well as increasing dedicated staff levels.

1. Web Governance Policy / Web Governance Guide

The Web Governance Policy (Attachment 1) outlines the County's commitments to ongoing web standards, defines staff roles and responsibilities and provides direction on external links, information collection, online payments, and terms of use. This policy will replace the current outdated Corporate Web Presence Policy (2002-04) containing references to the previous website and processes that are no longer relevant to the new website.

In addition, staff have prepared a Web Governance Guide as a complement to the Web Governance Policy (Attachment 2). The Guide provides detailed principles and procedures to ensure the County meets web standard commitments including establishing guiding principles, oversight and content strategy, approval procedures, and maintenance plans such as training and audits. To ensure the Web Governance Guide remains relevant and effective, staff recommend that the Information Technology Governance Steering Committee be provided delegated authority to approve updates to the guide as required.

2. Ongoing Staffing Requirements

As established by the Web Governance Guide, all web content changes for the corporate website, as well as the two microsites, will require review and approval by the Customer Experience & Communications (CEC) division. This division will also be responsible for several duties including adding, revising, and removing content, as well as the overall management including content approvals for all corporate websites ensuring adherence to established web standards. To continue maintaining a compliant and effective website, it is critical that the Customer Experience & Communications Division be staffed appropriately.

Communications Advisor

As noted, a temporary full-time Communications Project Manager was recruited to manage the website redesign project. This position will end early 2025. Under the permanent complement, the County does not have a dedicated staff member who's focus is solely on corporate communications activities. Communications activities are currently undertaken by CEC staff in addition to their regular job duties with limited capacity to take on the new web duties outlined above. Ensuring appropriate staffing levels with the relevant expertise will be crucial in establishing the long-term viability of the website as an effective and compliant communication tool.

By comparison, Staff have researched communication team staffing levels in nearby municipalities such as Brant County, Norfolk County, Welland and Woodstock. Each of these municipalities employ between two to four FTE positions dedicated solely to communications activities.

To address the current gap, and ensure the commitments of the web governance guide can be met, Staff are recommending adding a permanent full-time Communications Advisor to the County staff complement. In addition to the primary website responsibilities, the position will also assist with corporate communications.

Accessibility Coordinator

Noting that accessibility concerns were a main driver of the website redesign project, the hours for the permanent part-time Accessibility Coordinator were increased by eleven hours per week, from twenty-four hours to thirty-five hours for the duration of the project to assist with ensuring all web content meets legislated WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards set out by the AODA.

Going forward, it is important that AODA regulatory compliance is maintained. Staff assigned to review and approve content must have education and expertise in corporate communications and detailed knowledge of WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards to ensure the website continues to serve as an effective communication tool and trusted source of truth that is accessible to all Haldimand residents.

To support ongoing corporate standardization, the Accessibility Coordinator has developed a corporate accessibility training program to provide support to staff in creating and editing accessible documents for sharing with the public. While this will help streamline activities, additional hours are required for the Accessibility Coordinator to provide ongoing support to all staff to ensure all documentation remains accessible if and when it is shared to the website or other channels. As AODA legislation changes, there is a requirement to dedicate additional staff time to interpret the changes and ensure Haldimand County continues to remain compliant to standards set out in AODA legislation, not only for the website, but for all areas of accessibility within the County.

For the reasons outlined, it is recommended that the Accessibility Coordinator position be permanently changed from part-time to full-time; a total increase of 0.31 FTE or five hundred seventy-two (572) hours per year.

Corporate Administrative and Technical Support

In addition to dedicated communications staff, it is recognized that maintaining the new website will be a corporate team effort. The Website Governance Guide (Attachment 2) introduces new roles such as accessibility ambassadors, content editors and the web team. In most cases these duties align with existing staff regular roles and responsibilities and in all cases can be absorbed within current staffing level capacity. Should there be a greater need for administrative or technical support going forward, staff would report back to Council.

FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

Using standard budgeting assumptions, the request to include a permanent full-time Communications Advisor will require annual operational budgeting of approximately \$134,700.00 within the 2025 Tax-Supported Operating Budget. As a new position, this role is subject to a job evaluation process and this estimate could increase/decrease as a result. An additional \$22,590 must also be budgeted annually commencing in 2025 to change the permanent part-time Accessibility Coordinator position to permanent full-time, increasing the position by 0.31 FTE or 11 hours per week. If approved, the resulting increase of \$157,290 will appear in the 2025 Tax Supported Operating Budget as a Council approved initiative and will have an impact on the 2025 tax levy.

In addition, a new permanent full-time communications position will require an additional \$5,000 budget for the one-time purchase of a new computer and a mobile phone. The resulting amendment to the 2025 Tax-Supported Capital Budget will be included with the new staffing initiative as part of the Operating Budget deliberations, and will be funded from Capital Replacement Reserve - Information Technology.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:

By providing an AODA-compliant website, the County is allowing municipal information to be accessible to all members of the public including those living with a disability.

Additionally, the website will be easier to navigate and search, creating a more positive customer experience for all users at all levels.

REPORT IMPACTS:

Agreement: No

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: Yes

Policy: Yes

REFERENCES:

1. [Policy 2002-04 Corporate Web Presence Policy](#)

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Website Governance Policy
2. Website Governance Guide