



Staff Report for Budget Committee of the Whole Meeting

Date of Meeting: February 7, 2024

Report Number: SRCFS.23.010

Department: Corporate and Financial Services

Division: Strategic Communications

Subject: **SRCFS.23.010 –Reinstatement of Community Bulletin Board in the Liberal Newspaper**

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to respond to Council's November 23, 2022 direction to report back on the reinstatement of a community bulletin page in the Liberal newspaper as well as outline the City's current approach to advertising City initiatives.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That staff report SRCFS.23.010 regarding reinstatement of community Bulletin Board in the Liberal Newspaper, be received for information;
- b) That Council provide direction based on the options presented in staff report SRCFS.23.010.

Contact Person:

Libbi Hood, Acting Manager, Strategic Communications

Report Approval:

Submitted by: Sherry Adams, Commissioner of Corporate and Financial Services

Approved by: Darlene Joslin, City Manager

All reports are electronically reviewed and/or approved by the Division Director, Treasurer (as required), City Solicitor (as required), Commissioner, and City Manager. Details of the reports approval are attached.

Background:

For many years up to April 2020, Richmond Hill purchased one or more pages of advertising in the Liberal newspaper to run a weekly Bulletin Board providing the public with City information. The Richmond Hill Liberal is a Metroland newspaper and provides general circulation to Richmond Hill residents, though not every household. The Bulletin

Page 2

Board was a combination of full-colour print advertisements, black and white public notices and a listing of upcoming meetings.

In April 2020, Richmond Hill discontinued the Bulletin Board page(s) in the Liberal following a decision by Council. The costs of payment to the Liberal was removed from the City's budget.

Despite this change, the City continues to purchase print advertising with the Richmond Hill Liberal (Metroland) on an ad hoc basis to support City initiatives. In 2022, the City ran 57 ads with Metroland: 38 print and 19 online digital display. The total cost for all 57 ads was \$25,000, which was almost half of the total spent on advertising in 2022.

Richmond Hill is currently one of several York Region municipalities that do not have a weekly community page in the local paper. Vaughan and Stouffville do not have a Bulletin Board page, and Markham is changing from a weekly to a monthly page in February 2023.

The City's current, results-oriented approach to advertising and promotion

In the last few years, Richmond Hill has built a results-oriented and robust approach to advertising which includes a mixture of

- digital/online advertising,
- paid social media,
- 'Out of Home' advertising such as mini billboards and bus ads,
- radio ads, and
- print advertising.

Digital advertising is the most measurable type of advertising. We measure impressions (the number of times an ad is seen), potential reach and click-through-rate. We consistently achieve click-through-rates on digital advertising that are twice the industry standard.

Digital advertising allows us to target our desired audiences. Based on campaign goals, digital advertising can also be geo-targeted specifically to Richmond Hill residents (our ads only appear to people who are in Richmond Hill) or target new audiences beyond our borders reaching the broader GTHA. We have diversified our advertising portfolio and reached new audiences by advertising in exciting new places such as BlogTO, Narcity, Spotify and Bell Media sites like CP24 and CTV News, while continuing to target Richmond Hill residents specifically.

In 2022, the City piloted ads on the Weather Network app. These ads were geo-targeted to Richmond Hill residents and visitors and triggered to run when 5cm of snow

Page 3

or more was in the forecast. Anyone using the app in Richmond Hill during that time would be served an ad that reminded them not to park on the road.

In 2023, the City is piloting a monthly digital ad spend with Mackenzie Health on multiple digital display screens in the Richmond Hill hospital.

Digital advertising also allows us to place multilingual ads, targeted through web browser settings to Richmond Hill residents who read those languages.

Paid social media on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn are also targeted and measurable.

Out of Home advertisements are seen while "on the go" helping to diversify our approach and build brand awareness and brand engagement.

Radio ads give us a wide potential reach while also providing multilingual options.

Print advertising is much more difficult to measure than digital advertising. We predominantly measure scans of the QR code that we include on some print ads. Readership and return on investment (ROI) is difficult to quantify in print publications.

2022 advertising spend and breakdown

The annual print cost to reinstate a weekly, one-page Bulletin Board (\$92,716) is significantly higher than the Strategic Communications' entire advertising spend in 2022 (\$58,736).

- Total spend was \$58,736
 - 134 English ads
 - 19 Multilingual ads
- Breakdown by type of ad:
 - 22% online/digital display ads
 - 28% print ads
 - 1% radio ads
 - 8% signage
 - 41% social media ads/boosted posts
- Total potential reach was 1+ Million

Budget for advertising is held in each department and used on a per-project basis. The City takes advantage of promotional rates when possible to save money. For example, from October to December 2022 we purchased 17 print ads from the Liberal to promote a variety of initiatives for a total cost of \$4,500. This represents a savings of \$14,000 off the regular advertising rate, which is close to 75%.

Multilingual outreach

Page 4

As shown above, the City placed 19 multilingual ads in 2022 (print, digital and radio) compared to 134 English ads – approximately 12% of our advertising. We continue to work on expanding our multilingual offerings within available budgets. Please see Appendix A to Staff Report SRCFS.21.060 for more information.

Advertising is just one piece of the City's communication strategy.

We use a multi-channel approach to diversify our communications so we reach the most people with the highest impact.

In addition to paid advertising, Richmond Hill's communications strategy includes (but is not limited to) the City website, media products such as news releases and public service announcements, social media channels, monthly e-newsletter, bi-annual citywide mailout print newsletter and the annual Waste Management Calendar.

In 2022 we drove over 1.3 million users to the corporate website – a 50.5% increase in users compared to same time period in pre-pandemic 2019 – and garnered more than 9 million pageviews.

Our social media channels continue to grow. We increased our followers by 4,100 across all corporate channels in 2022.

The monthly corporate e-newsletter has grown to over 1,150 subscribers since its launch in October 2020 and we continue to promote it to increase that number.

The bi-annual print newsletter is delivered to all households in Richmond Hill – more than 68,000 households. Following delivery of the spring/summer print newsletter, survey results showed 92% of respondents found the information useful, 90% felt it kept them informed of City services and initiatives, and 96% would read a future issue. The print newsletter costs less than \$0.35 per household.

The Liberal is currently delivered to approximately 42,000 households. Metroland advised there are no plans in the foreseeable future to increase distribution to reach more/all Richmond Hill households.

The annual Waste Management Calendar is delivered to more than 56,000 households and includes important information about the City's waste management programs, environmental initiatives, as well as community information.

Finally, the City uses news releases and public service announcements to share our message. Thanks to our significant increase in media relations efforts and content creation (176% increase in news releases and public service announcements in 2022 compared to 2019, the last non-pandemic year), the City has at least one if not more articles in most weekly print versions of the Liberal, as well as online, keeping Richmond Hill's profile in the news and raising awareness of services, initiatives and Council decisions.

Page 5

The vast majority of paid and organic promotion drives traffic to our website, the key source of information for City initiatives. In 2022 we drove close to 1 million users to the corporate website – a 45% increase compared to same time period in pre-pandemic 2019 – and garnered more than 7 million page views (as of September 30).

Research into residents' preferred communication methods

The City's research tells us how people like to hear from us. We use that information to tailor our communication mix to the preferences of residents, including the addition of the e-newsletter, mailout newsletter and increased online digital advertising.

Our research shows that our audiences including older adults are becoming less reliant on traditional print advertising to be informed about City services and initiatives.

In the City's Age-Friendly Community survey in 2021, which had almost 800 participants, results show:

- "email/e-newsletters" were the top choice for receiving information from the City
- "newsletters/notices mailed to my home" was second choice
- respondents aged 75+ ranked "newspaper articles" 3rd and the website 4th
- respondents aged 75+ ranked "newspaper advertisements" 7th of 9 options

Richmond Hill's 2019 Community Survey showed only 16% of respondents said newspapers were their preferred method of communication from the City.

A 2020 Environics Research Program Report for Richmond Hill specifically showed that residents have a favourable opinion regarding direct mail (54%) which matches other findings, as referenced above. This led Strategic Communications to create the mailout newsletter which has since received positive reviews from readers, as previously mentioned.

In addition, research shows close to half of newspaper readers are consuming their content online. The Environics report showed 42% of Richmond Hill respondents had used the internet in the past week to access a news site.

This research indicates that the City should continue with print advertising as part of our marketing mix, but increased spending on print is not necessary to reach our audiences.

Reinstating the Community Bulletin Board

If Council chooses to reinstate the community Bulletin Board page, it should be reimaged from the previous version. It will require new branding in line with current citywide communications and should be a full-colour advertisement to promote City initiatives, services, programs and events and include a notice of upcoming meetings.

Page 6

However, statutory Public Notices should no longer be included in a community page except when legislatively required. The current process to communicate Public Notices meets or exceeds the relevant legislative requirements for each type of notice. For example, statutory notices under the Planning Act are communicated through a sign at the site, a mailout to local addresses and a post to the public notice section of RichmondHill.ca/News.

There are several options to consider to reinstate the bulletin board, with different sizes and frequencies of publication:

Page 7

Options	Print Cost	Labour Cost*	Total Cost
<p>Option 1 Reinstate weekly, full page, full colour Bulletin Board</p>	<p>Print cost is \$1,783 per page with a 52-week commitment = \$92,716</p>	<p>10 hours graphic design x 52 weeks = \$29,604 5 hours editing and coordination of content x 52 weeks = \$20,579 OR Convert part-time graphic designer role to full-time (addition of 11 hours/week) = \$27,756</p>	<p>\$142,899 OR \$141,051 with PT Graphic Design role conversion to FT</p>
<p>Option 2 Reinstate weekly, half page, full colour Bulletin Board</p>	<p>\$1,070 per week with a 52-week commitment = \$55,640</p>	<p>6 hours graphic design x 52 weeks = \$17,762 4 hours editing and coordination of content x 52 weeks = \$16,463</p>	<p>\$89,865</p>
<p>Option 3 Reinstate bi-weekly, half page Bulletin Board</p>	<p>\$1,294 per insertion x 26 weeks = \$33,644</p>	<p>6 hours graphic design x 26 weeks = \$8,881 4 hours editing and coordination of content x 26 weeks = \$8,232</p>	<p>\$50,757</p>
<p>Option 4 Do not reinstate Bulletin Board at this time</p>	<p>No committed costs. Continue to place Liberal print and digital advertising as needed (e.g. purchased \$25,000 in Liberal/Metroland advertising in 2022).</p>	<p>No additional labour costs.</p>	<p>\$0 additional budget impact</p>

Page 8

*Labour costs are estimated based on previous full-page bulletin board ads created by Strategic Communications (April 2020). The hours are not currently available as Strategic Communications staff are at capacity. Absorbing this work into the current staff complement means taking resources from other projects or outsourcing this or other work. Graphic design hours can be added by converting Strategic Communications' Part-time graphic design role to a full-time position.

The annual cost to convert the part-time graphic designer (24 hours/week) to a full-time position (35 hours/week) including benefits is \$27,756.

Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:

Reinstating the use of a community Bulletin Board page in the Liberal has budget and resource implications.

Staff hours are required for coordination, editing and graphic design. Without extra resources, Strategic Communications will need to redirect communication support from other projects in order to free-up the hours needed to create the Bulletin Board page(s).

Climate Change Considerations:

Print advertising is potentially negative for the environment as the process to make paper is resource-heavy and hard on the environment. However, the City already uses print advertising so reinstating the Bulletin Board likely has no additional climate impact.

Conclusion:

The City's current approach to paid advertising is predominantly a mixture of print and online digital advertising, mini billboards and radio. We consider our audience with each initiative and measure our results to ensure we are continuing to make the most of the available budget for each project.

Research demonstrates that our audience prefers to receive information from the City by email and mail – so Strategic Communications implemented a monthly e-newsletter and a bi-annual mailout print newsletter to more effectively reach our audience of Richmond Hill residents. We also know that our audience is online, including reading news online, but that some of our audience continues to prefer print. This is why our communication strategy includes print and online advertising.

The print cost to reinstate a weekly one-page Bulletin Board is \$92,716, which is significantly higher than Strategic Communications' entire advertising spend of \$58,736 in 2022.

Additional staff resources to reinstate the Bulletin Board range from \$17,113 to \$50,183, depending on the size and frequency of the advertisement. These resources could be added in the form of casual wages to the Strategic Communications budget or PT to FT

Page 9

conversion for the additional graphic design work plus casual wages for the additional coordination/editing work.

Attachments:

The following attached documents may include scanned images of appendixes, maps and photographs. All attachments have been reviewed and made accessible. If you require an alternative format please call the contact person listed in this document.

- Appendix A - Staff Report SRCFS.21.060 Report Back on Advertising in Ethnic Media

Page 10

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRCFS.23.010 - Reinstating the Bulletin Board in the Liberal newspaper.docx
Attachments:	- Appendix A - SRCFS.21.060 – Report Back on Advertising in Ethnic Media.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Jan 31, 2023

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Libbi Hood - Jan 30, 2023 - 4:28 PM

Gigi Li - Jan 30, 2023 - 6:23 PM

Sherry Adams - Jan 30, 2023 - 7:31 PM

Task assigned to Darlene Joslin was completed by delegate Kelvin Kwan

Kelvin Kwan on behalf of Darlene Joslin - Jan 31, 2023 - 10:00 AM