![Richmond Hill logo - Incorporated 1873]

Staff Report for Committee of the Whole Meeting

Date of Meeting: April 16, 2025
Report Number: SRCFS.25.022

Department: Corporate and Financial Services
Division: Strategic Communications

Subject: SRCFS.25.022 City of Richmond Hill Corporate Use of X (formerly Twitter)

Purpose:

This staff report examines the proposal to suspend Richmond Hill's X (formerly Twitter) social media accounts and provides an analysis of alternative platforms, data and user engagement on X and an overview of actions taken by other municipalities.

Recommendation(s):

a) That staff report SRCFS.25.022 be received;

b) That Council provide direction on the use of the City's corporate X account.

Contact Person(s):

- Candice Debi, Director of Communications, ext. 2418
- Sherry Adams, Commissioner of Corporate and Financial Services, ext 2521

Report Approval:

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.

Key Messages:

- The City of Richmond Hill has 6 active X accounts totaling 24,173 followers.
- Three other social media platforms have been considered as alternatives to X. Each present their own unique strengthens and limitations.
- Some municipalities across Canada have suspended their X accounts, while others continue to have active accounts on the platform.

Background:

Richmond Hill currently shares information to residents through social media using four main corporate accounts including: LinkedIn, X, Facebook and Instagram. The City has 6 active X accounts totaling 24,173 followers.

The social media strategy designed by Communications Services uses each platform strategically, based on the algorithms of the individual platform, to ensure the City reaches the largest audience possible. X is currently the only platform that is used by the City which allows text-based communications to be posted multiple times per day without negatively impacting follower reach.

Discussion:

All of Richmond Hill's social media platforms as they currently stand, perform exceptionally well relative to the City's population size. Among GTA municipalities, The City ranks #2 for follower growth and engagement metrics on X and Instagram, and #3 on LinkedIn. In addition, the City ranks #1 for Facebook engagement rate.

Richmond Hill's Current X Accounts

Account	Established	Followers
Corporate account (@myrichmondhill)	2010	13,473
Richmond Hill Fire & Emergency Services	2012	4,993
Economic Development	2011	2,120
Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts	2009	1,998
Richmond Hill Small Business Enterprise Centre	2011	1,208
Greening the Hill	2013	381

The City of Richmond Hill's engagement metrics consistently align with industry benchmarks:

- Corporate account engagement rate: 2.7% in 2024 (industry standard: 1% to 3.5%)
- Current 6-month engagement rate: 2.10%
- Follower change (past 6 months): -52 followers

X offers immediate, subscription-free access to its posts, with no login/account required. It has also been noted that the City typically gains additional followers on X during emergencies. For example, during the extreme snow experienced in February 2025, the @myrichmondhill account gained 18 new followers.

Security & Privacy

The City of Richmond Hill has a staff [Social Media Policy](#) which explains what staff can and can't post on official accounts. This helps protect sensitive information and keeps our online communication professional and secure.

X, like other social media platforms uses personal information from users in a variety of ways, including:

1. Data collection: information is collected on user data including usage patterns, device information and content engagement metrics.
2. Targeted advertising: personal data may be used for ad targeting
3. Third-party data sharing: data may be shared with partners, and advertisers.
4. Retention policies: user data could be stored for extended periods with limited transparency about duration.
5. Platform-wide security incidents: security incidents may occur which affect access to user data.

In addition, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada has initiated an investigation into X. The investigation, as required by the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA), will examine whether X is meeting its obligations under the Act and will focus on the platform's compliance with federal privacy law with respect to its collection, use, and disclosure of Canadians' personal information to train artificial intelligence models.

Municipal Comparison:

Some municipalities across Canada have suspended their X accounts, while others continue to have active accounts on the platform. The below chart provides an analysis of some municipalities in Ontario.

Page 4

Municipal Comparison of X Accounts

Account	Follower Count	X Status	Alternative Platforms
Whitby	16.4k	Suspended	Not replacing – Maintaining: LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram
Cambridge	21.4k	Transitioning	Moving to BlueSky (623 followers)
Waterloo	60.1K	Considering suspension	Under review
Ottawa	262.5k	Active (Council decision made not to suspend X)	Multiple platforms
Markham	21.5k	Active	Multiple platforms
Vaughan	20.5k	Active	Multiple platforms
Newmarket	16.9k	Active	Multiple platforms
Aurora	11.4k	Active	Multiple platforms
York Region	29.4k	Active	Multiple platforms

Alternative Platforms:

Communications Services reviewed a number of alternative social media platforms, the following three platforms were considered as an alternative to X:

Alternative Platforms to X

Platform	Strengths	Limitations	Accessibility	Optimal Posting Frequency
Threads	Meta integration, growing user base, similar format to X	Requires Instagram account, limited analytics	Moderate	1-3
BlueSky	Decentralized approach, growing quickly, similar interface to X	Invitation system limits growth, smaller user base, developing features (i.e. there is no encrypted direct messaging)	Limited	2-5
TikTok	Rapidly growing platform, strong youth engagement	Limited emergency communication capability, video focused content format	Moderate	1-4

Compared to other platforms like X or Instagram, Bluesky gives users more control and visibility into how their data is used. However, while its design principles are privacy-friendly, it doesn't yet have all the privacy features of more established platforms (e.g. end-to-end encrypted direct messaging). In addition, Communications Services is unable to find any social media management platform tools that are able to integrate with BlueSky, which makes measuring the performance of this platform a challenge.

Threads leverages Meta's infrastructure and Instagram's existing network and has features like advanced messaging and greater ability to suggest relevant posts. However, Threads is a login-based platform that only allows access to messaging if an individual has a Threads account.

TikTok uses video content to provide information and is not typically used for text-based information. Maintaining a TikTok account necessitates a specialized and dedicated resource to sustain the production volume required for effective engagement. In addition, the City's Information Technology department has restricted access to the TikTok platform on all corporate mobile devices due to identified security considerations.

Transition & Engagement Strategy

It is also important to note that there are a number of considerations. The Communications Services Division would have to develop a comprehensive content strategy, create targeted communication assets across multiple channels, carefully manage cross-platform content migration, and proactively address potential challenges such as follower resistance and platform-specific access requirements.

Given the limitations and strengths of the alternative social media platforms, should a decision be made to suspend all X accounts, Threads would be the most strategic alternative for the City of Richmond Hill.

To effectively mitigate the risks of transitioning to a new platform and allow the City to leverage a new channel, the below is a proposed engagement plan:

Transition Plan

Timing	Activity
Phase 1: Preparation	•Announce the City's intent to suspend all X accounts and transition to Threads. •
Phase 2: Soft Launch	•Create transition announcement assets •Begin simultaneous posting
Phase 3: Active Migration	•Gradually shift content emphasis to new social media platform
Phase 4: X Phaseout	•Minimize X activity •Formally archive X account

Given this assessment, of alternative platforms, there are three options for Council to consider, they include the following:

Option A

Maintain status quo. Communications Services will continue to monitor the City's corporate X account for decline in engagement and proceed with Option B or C if there is a significant decline in engagement or based on the results of the Privacy Commissioner of Canda's investigation.

Should Council wish to maintain the status quo, the following should be adopted:

a) That staff report SRCFS.25.022 be received for information.

Option B

Ease the City away from support of X. Continue to use the platform, including for emergency related communications but cease all paid advertising. The City would continue to maintain its Corporate and Fire Department X accounts and over the course of the next quarter explore consolidating the other departmental X accounts (SBEC, Economic Development, Greening the Hill and Theatre) into existing divisional platforms that can support their specific content types such as LinkedIn and Instagram.

Should Council wish to proceed with Option B, the following should be adopted:

a) That staff report SRCFS.25.022 be received for information.

b) That staff be directed to proceed with Option B as generally described in SRCFS.25.022.

Option C

Announce the City's intent to suspend all X accounts and transition to Threads. Enact a transition strategy, understanding the potential negative impact on the current audience reach as staff efforts will be focused on growing the channel versus leveraging it as an effective communications platform.

Should Council wish to proceed with Option C, the following should be adopted:

a) That staff report SRCFS.25.022 be received for information.

b) That staff be directed to proceed with Option C as generally described in SRCFS.25.022.

Financial Implications:

Options A and B and C have no immediate financial implications.

Relationship to Strategic Plan 2024-2027:

The decisions regarding Richmond Hill's social media accounts related to two Strategic Plan Pillars:

1. Pillar 3: Strengthening our Foundations, Priority 1: Make decisions that are evidence based and data driven to enable the City's long term financial sustainability, as well as social, environmental and economic sustainability.

2. Pillar 2: Focusing on People, Priority 1. Engage the community, stakeholders and City staff to support informed participation and to ensure that all voices can contribute toward effective decision-making.

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRCFS.25.022 City of Richmond Hill Corporate Use of X.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Apr 8, 2025

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

Candice Debi - Apr 7, 2025 - 5:11 PM

Sherry Adams - Apr 8, 2025 - 8:02 AM

Darlene Joslin - Apr 8, 2025 - 12:33 PM