



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF VERNON REPORT TO COUNCIL

SUBMITTED BY: Christy Poirier, Manager,
Communications and Grants

COUNCIL MEETING: REG COW I/C
COUNCIL MEETING DATE: August 15, 2022
REPORT DATE: August 4, 2022
FILE: 1470-09

SUBJECT: ACTIVE LIVING CENTRE REFERENDUM STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

PURPOSE:

To provide Council with information on a strategic communications plan for the Active Living Centre Referendum.

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council receives the report dated August 4, 2022, titled "Active Living Centre Referendum Strategic Communications Plan," respectfully submitted by the Manager, Communications and Grants;

AND FURTHER, that Council endorse the Active Living Centre Referendum Strategic Communications Plan, as presented.

ALTERNATIVES & IMPLICATIONS:

1. THAT Council direct Administration to amend the Active Living Centre Referendum Strategic Communications Plan as follows *(to be cited by Council)*.

ANALYSIS:

A. Committee Recommendations:

N/A

B. Rationale:

1. At its April 11, 2022 Regular Meeting, Council directed Administration to move forward with a City of Vernon referendum, in conjunction with the 2022 Local Government Election, for the Active Living Centre with the City of Vernon as owner, operator and manager of the facility. Subsequently, at its May 30, 2022 Regular Meeting, Council passed a resolution to approve the following question for electors to consider during the 2022 General Local Elections:

"Are you in favour of "Active Living Centre Loan Authorization Bylaw 5908" which would authorize the Corporation of the City of Vernon to borrow up to \$121 million dollars, with interest, over a period not exceeding 30 years in order to finance the construction of an Active Living Centre to be located at 3501 43rd Avenue?"

As part of the referendum process, Administration has committed to delivering a comprehensive information campaign to help eligible voters become aware of the project, its details, financial implications for Vernon taxpayers, and how eligible voters can participate in the referendum process.

2. As an organization, the City's overarching communication goal is: to establish the City of Vernon as a proactive, effective and efficient organization that uses open, two-way communication to build trust-based relationships and purposefully engage internal and external stakeholders. This will increase awareness and understanding of City services and initiatives while building organizational stability, community confidence, and public participation.
3. Following the principles of the above communication goal, the *Active Living Centre Referendum Strategic Communications Plan* ("the plan") has been developed to share accurate, fact-based information about the Active Living Centre project and the corresponding referendum, using open, two-way communication and approaches to purposefully and meaningfully engage citizens.
4. The communication goal of the plan is: to increase public awareness and understanding of the proposed Active Living Centre project and the referendum question that will be presented to Vernon electors during the 2022 General Local Election. Specifically, the City is seeking to inform Vernon electors of:
 - what would be included in the multi-purpose recreation facility
 - cost information, borrowing terms, and impact for Vernon taxpayers
 - site information and how the facility would fit within the Kin Race Track Athletic Park
 - how the facility could be used by many different types of users
 - reasons for recommendation (based on the 2018 Greater Vernon Recreation Master Plan, Active Living Centre Feasibility Study, and 2022 Recreation Centre Asset Management Report)
 - project information (e.g., timeline for construction, etc.)

Additionally, the City is seeking to have an effect on the action of Vernon electors, to become informed about the proposed Active Living Centre project with accurate, fact-based, and up-to-date information, and to vote in the referendum.

5. All communications about the project and referendum will follow guidelines from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and will utilize engagement best practices from the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2). The City of Vernon is committed to ensuring key principles of transparency and the stewardship of public trust are upheld. Throughout the duration of the information campaign, relevant questions and concerns of the community will be addressed. Information that is shared will be accurate, fact-based, and truthful, to allow the public to make an informed decision.
6. The plan includes four communication phases:
 - Phase 1 – Planning and consultation (May 2020 - July 2022)
 - Phase 2 – Sharing information with the public (August 2022 to the referendum date)
 - Phase 3 – Getting out the vote (September 2022 to the referendum date)
 - Phase 4 – Continuing the conversation (post referendum)
7. The plan follows the RACE model, which is a best practice in communication planning. The RACE acronym represents steps in the process related to **Research, Analysis, Communication, and Evaluation**.
8. In Phase 1, research, analysis, and communication development took place. This phase included the analysis of input from members of the public, stakeholders, and elected officials during the development of the *2018 Greater Vernon Recreation Master Plan* and the *Active Living Centre Feasibility Study*. It also included analysis of conversations Recreation Services staff have had with community members about the proposed Active Living Centre project, to help determine the most frequently asked questions.
9. The plan follows the City of Vernon's usual *integrated communication approach*, using a healthy mix of contemporary and traditional marketing and public relations techniques in order to reach a diverse

audience that is already inundated with constant messaging, advertisements, and information from other sources. This mix includes the use of:

- Interpersonal communication (public information booths, pop-ups, market booths, service club and business organization presentations, local events, staff information sessions);
- News media;
- Owned media (websites, social media platforms);
- Paid advertising (radio broadcast, print, electronic/outdoor signage, digital); and
- Organizational communication (Council reports/memorandums, *2018 Greater Vernon Recreation Master Plan*, *Active Living Centre Feasibility Study*, rack card, community posters, Recreation Service's *Active Living Guide*, information stands).

10. In Phase 2, information will be shared directly and indirectly with the public through various communication channels on an ongoing basis, and relevant questions raised by the public will be answered. In Phase 3, referendum details will be shared, including voting locations and dates. The second part of Phase 3 will be evaluation – where the community is empowered to make the final decision. Evaluation will include the level of public participation throughout the information campaign and voting process, as well as other insights and measures such as website statistics, budget summary, and an internal debriefing of lessons learned.
11. Phase 4 is dependent on the outcome of the referendum. If electors vote in favour of borrowing up to \$121 million to construct the Active Living Centre, Phase 4 would include ongoing community conversations on topics such as facility design. Phase 4 will not occur if the referendum does not pass.

Messaging

12. Regular and open conversations and information sharing is critical to ensuring a fair and balanced referendum and that the public has a reasonable opportunity to indicate its views on the matter. It is imperative that key messages are accurate, fact-based, truthful, and easy to understand. The City will provide multiple methods and opportunities for the public to easily access information about the proposed Active Living Centre project, the referendum process, and facts that will empower them to make an informed decision at the polls.

Spokesperson considerations

13. Key spokespeople have been identified from City staff to provide fact-based information about the project and the referendum process, on behalf of the City of Vernon.

Financial messaging considerations

14. City staff have been researching and anticipating questions about funding sources, borrowing timelines, project costs, property tax implications, and debt servicing. To help Vernon electors become aware of and understand the funding strategy for the proposed Active Living Centre, particular attention will be given to sharing financial information in clear, easy to understand language and formats, multiple times and on multiple communication channels.

Key information: Impact for the Vernon taxpayer

If electors vote in favour of the referendum question:

- The City of Vernon will have up to five years to begin borrowing funds for construction of the Active Living Centre facility.
- The City is not required to borrow all of the funds at one time. Borrowing can take place as required during construction of the facility.

- The funding strategy, which was approved by Council at its June 9, 2022 Special Meeting, includes four consecutive years of property tax increases for the purpose of repaying the debt to construct the facility.
- The first property tax increase related to the Active Living Centre project is expected to take place in 2024, with the following schedule:
 - 2024: 3.5% for debt repayment
 - 2025: 3.5% for debt repayment
 - 2026: 3.5% for debt repayment + 0.4% for facility operating costs*
 - 2027: 3.0% for debt repayment + 0.9% for facility operating costs

**If built, the Active Living Centre is expected to open in 2026, thus requiring additional funds for operating costs.*

- No more property tax increases are expected after 2027 for the purpose of repaying the debt to construct the facility.
- To reduce the amount the City would have to borrow for the project, and to reduce the impact for Vernon taxpayers, the City is also actively pursuing major grant funding for the planning, design, and construction of the facility.

Legislative messaging considerations

15. The strategic communications plan ensures the key principles of transparency and the stewardship of public trust are upheld. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs oversees the legislative requirements and information sharing during referendums and gives permission to cities to advertise and communicate information about the matter proposed in referendums in any manner they see fit, including advertising, writing articles, and sending notices to the community. The City's role is to provide accurate, fact-based, truthful, and balanced information about the initiative so eligible electors can make an informed decision about how they will vote.

Implementation plan

16. The strategic communications plan includes four phases:

Phase 1 - Planning and consultation (May 2020 - July 2022)

- Consult with public, stakeholders, and elected officials
- Consult with senior management team and Recreation Services staff
- Collect questions and answers for project-related information and financial information
- Plan presentation and community information booth opportunities (provide opportunity for organizations to request presentations)
- Initiate graphic design and CGI conceptual drawing design
- Develop a suite of communication tools such as: a list of frequently asked questions; webpage; presentation slide deck; pop-up booth materials; print and digital advertising materials; media releases; rack card; and information stands
- Research pricing and finalize planning for other communication tools and begin writing, designing, and producing the tools (print, web, social)
- Launch and regularly update information webpage

Phase 2 – Sharing information with the public (August 2022 to the referendum date)

- Continue producing communication tools (print, web, social)
- Participate in community events and business-related meetings where possible, such as:
 - Vernon Farmers' Market
 - 2900 Plaza Downtown Sounds
 - Polson Artisan Night Market

- BC Culture Days
- Vernon Fall Home Show
- Vernon Vipers hockey games
- Silver Star Rotary Club meeting
- Kalamalka Rotary Club meeting
- Host open house/information sessions at various locations throughout the community, such as:
 - Vernon City Hall
 - Kal Tire Place
 - Vernon Recreation Centre
 - School District No 22 facilities
 - Okanagan College
 - Schubert Centre
 - Village Green Shopping Centre
- Distribute weekly media releases to share detailed project information and background
- Provide information and updates to local and regional media, answering media questions as they arise, offering a guided media tour of the Vernon Aquatic Centre, and responding to requests for interviews
- Place free-standing information stands (kiosks) in key locations throughout the community to share answers to frequently asked questions and offer a link to more information on the established project webpage
- Update the project webpage as new information becomes available

Phase 3 – Getting out the vote (September 2022 to the referendum date)

- Inform the general public on voting opportunities and encourage the electorate to vote, using a variety of tools that include, but are not limited to:
 - Media relations
 - Advertising
 - Webpage
 - Other City-owned communication channels
- Evaluate the results (referendum results, website statistics, social media statistics, feedback)

Phase 4 – Continuing the conversation

- This phase is to be determined, depending on the result of the referendum.

Tools to be used for implementation in various stages:

- Media relations
 - Launch referendum information campaign
 - Provide details about www.engagevernon.ca/activelivingcentre information page and City website assent voting information page
 - Announce details of upcoming community outreach opportunities (open houses and community event booths)
 - Weekly media releases to share detailed project information and background
 - Media interviews, as requested
 - Guided media tour of Vernon Aquatic Centre
 - Announce voting opportunities (dates, times, locations, eligibility to vote)
- Owned media and City assets
 - Webpages on City owned websites: www.engagevernon.ca/activelivingcentre and www.vernon.ca/activelivingcentre
 - Social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn)
 - Weekly DID YOU KNOW posts on social media accounts, as well as links to all media releases

- Free-standing information stands (kiosks)
- Signage and banners
- Intranet
- Paid advertising
 - Newspaper
 - Radio
 - Digital
 - Bus benches
- Print materials
 - Rack card
 - Poster board CGI conceptual drawings
 - QR code cards to www.engagevernon.ca/activelivingcentre
 - Posters
- Open houses and information booths at community events
- Presentation materials

C. Attachments:

N/A

D. Council's Strategic Plan 2019 – 2022 Goals/Action Items:

The 2022 Active Living Centre Referendum Strategic Communications Plan involves the following goals/action items in Council's Strategic Plan 2019 – 2022:

- Develop a new multi-purpose Recreation Centre
- Develop a comprehensive plan for the Kin Race Track lands: explore a recreation and/or aquatic centre and consider additional uses such as housing and commercial
- Commence construction of priority recreation facilities at Kin Park
- Enhance transparency of decision making, including the use of new or expanded tools and on-line platforms
- Investigate new approaches to engage citizens (e.g. on-line platforms)
- Investigate opportunities to enhance the transparency of decision making
- Increased public participation in decision making

E. Relevant Policy/Bylaws/Resolutions:

1. At its Regular Meeting of May 25, 2020 Council passed the following resolution:

“THAT Council supports in principle the Administration recommendation to proceed with steps required to conduct a referendum, at the earliest possible date, in order to borrow up to \$90M for the design, development and construction of the Full Build Out of the proposed Active Living Centre as per the Internal Memorandum titled Active Living Centre Feasibility Study - Final Report and the accompanying presentation, dated May 15, 2020 respectfully submitted by the Director, Recreation Services;

AND FURTHER, that Council direct Administration to present the What We Heard Report containing the results of the controlled direct mail statistically valid survey and Active Living Centre Feasibility Study - Final Report to our Community Partners, the District of Coldstream and Electoral Areas B & C;

AND FURTHER, that Council request the Mayor write a letter to our Community Partners the District of Coldstream and Electoral Areas B & C informing them of the City of Vernon's support in principle to proceed with steps to conduct a referendum at the earliest possible date in order to borrow up to \$90M for the design, development and construction of the Full Build Out of the proposed Active Living Centre and that the City respectfully requests that they give consideration to support proceeding to referendum.”

2. At its Special Meeting of June 19, 2020 Council passed the following resolution:

“THAT Council directs Administration to complete the planning process for the multi-purpose Active Living Centre, as a City of Vernon facility at this time, drawing funding from City of Vernon sources in order to prepare for a potential referendum in September 2021.”

3. At its Regular Meeting of August 17, 2020 Council passed the following resolution:

“THAT Council, receive the memorandum titled Active Living Centre - Planning Update dated August 7, 2020 from the Director, Recreation Services for information;

AND FURTHER, that Council approve spending up to \$55,000 for design and geotechnical work funded by the City of Vernon Prior Year Unexpended Uncommitted Balance reserve;

AND FURTHER, that Council Direct Administration to identify a City of Vernon source of funds for up to \$145,000 in the 2021 budget to conduct an assent voting and communication campaign as described in the memorandum titled Active Living Centre – Planning Update dated August 7, 2020 from the Director, Recreation Services.

4. At its Regular Meeting of June 14, 2021 Council passed the following resolution:

“THAT Council ratifies and confirms the following resolution adopted at the June 14, 2021, Committee of the Whole meeting of Council:

THAT Council receive the memorandum titled “Active Living Centre - Planning Update” dated June 4, 2021, respectfully submitted by the Director, Recreation Services;

AND FURTHER, that Council rescind the following resolution from their meeting held June 19, 2020;

“Council directs Administration to complete the planning process for the multi-purpose Active Living Centre, as a City of Vernon facility at this time, drawing funding from City of Vernon sources in order to prepare for a potential referendum in September 2021.”

AND FURTHER, that Council directs Administration to continue the planning process for the multi-purpose Active Living Centre, as a City of Vernon facility at this time, continuing to draw funding as required from City of Vernon sources in order to prepare for a potential communication campaign and assent voting in conjunction with the municipal election on October 15, 2022;

AND FURTHER, that Council, through the Mayor, request that our Community Partners, the District of Coldstream and Electoral Areas B & C reconsider their involvement in the proposed Active Living Centre project.”

5. At its Regular Meeting of April 11, 2022 Council passed the following resolution:

“THAT Council direct Administration to move forward with a City of Vernon referendum, in conjunction with the 2022 Local Government Election, for the Active Living Centre with the City of Vernon as owner, operator and manager of the facility.”

6. At its Regular Meeting of May 30, 2022 Council passed the following resolution:

“THAT, Council receive for information the memorandum titled “Active Living Centre, Loan Authorization Approval, Elector Assent and Assent Question” dated May 18, 2022 and respectfully submitted by the Manager, Legislative Services;

AND FURTHER, that Council approve the following question to be put to the electors for their consideration during the 2022 General Local Elections:

“Are you in favour of “Active Living Centre Loan Authorization Bylaw 5908” which would authorize the Corporation of the City of Vernon to borrow up to \$121 million dollars, with interest, over a period not exceeding 30 years in order to finance the construction of an Active Living Centre to be located at 3501 43rd Avenue?””

7. At its Special Meeting of June 9, 2022 Council passed the following resolution:

“THAT Council receive the memorandum titled “Active Living Centre Borrowing Strategy”, dated June 7, 2022 and respectfully submitted by the Director, Financial Services;

AND FURTHER, that Council direct Administration, upon electoral assent, to authorize the expenditure for the Active Living Centre project, at a cost of up to \$121,000,000, in the 2023 five-year financial plan;

AND FURTHER, that Council direct Administration, upon electoral assent, to include the expenditure to pay the debt servicing costs for the Active Living Centre in the 2024 and future annual budgets by including a 3.5% increase in taxation each year until the full amount of annual debt servicing costs are funded by taxation;

AND FURTHER, that Council direct Administration, upon electoral assent, to create a Loan from Reserves account to internally borrow sufficient funds to pay annual debt servicing costs, in excess of a 3.5% taxation increase, from 2023 through 2027, with full repayment of the Loan from Reserves by year end 2027.”

BUDGET/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

At its March 14, 2022 Regular Meeting, Council approved a budget of up to \$60,000 for the Active Living Centre Assent Vote and a public information campaign. This is a reduced amount from the original \$145,000 that was approved by Council on August 17, 2020, because the Assent Vote will now take place during the 2022 Local General Election.

Various City departments have been engaged in the process of developing the strategic communications plan and the information that will be shared with the community. This includes the Communications Department, Recreation Services Division, Financial Services Division, and Administration. During the implementation phase of the public information campaign, the Communications Department and Recreation Services Division will provide staff time to distribute information, answer community questions, and attend various community-based events, meetings, and open houses. The approved budget will be used for production, advertising and implementation costs of communication tools.

Prepared by:

Approved for submission to Council:

X 
Christy Poirier
Manager, Communications and Grants


Will Pearce, CAO

Date: 09. AUGUST. 2022

X 
Signer 2
Division Director
*Brett Bandy
for Kevin Poole*

REVIEWED WITH

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Bylaw Compliance | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Works/Airport | <input type="checkbox"/> Long Range Planning & Sustainability |
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