



Corporate Communications Strategy

**The Railway City:
*On Track Together***

2025 - 2029



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Land Acknowledgement



We acknowledge that the land on which we meet is the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinabek, Attiwonderonk (Neutral) and Mississauga peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

We also recognize that this land is now home to the Munsee-Delaware Nation, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation and Oneida Nation of the Thames.

This land was settled through Treaty 2, the McKee Purchase Treaty of 1790, and we, as beneficiaries of the treaty recognize our collective responsibilities to the land and water.

Message from the Mayor



As Mayor of the City of St. Thomas, I am proud to present our 2025–2029 Corporate Communications Strategy - an essential step in strengthening how we connect with our residents, partners, and stakeholders.

St. Thomas is a city built on progress and collaboration. As we continue to grow and take on new challenges, it is more important than ever that we communicate clearly, consistently, and inclusively. This strategy sets out a vision for how we share information, listen to feedback, and tell the stories that define who we are as a community.

This is more than a plan - it's a commitment. A commitment to transparency, to innovation in how we engage, and to making sure every voice has the chance to be heard. Through this strategy, we aim to build public trust and ensure that our residents stay informed and involved.

Thank you to everyone who contributed their insights and feedback to help shape this direction. With the continued dedication of Council, staff, and our entire community, I'm confident we will continue building a brighter future together - stronger and more connected than ever.

A handwritten signature of Joe Preston in blue ink, written in a cursive style.

Joe Preston
Mayor, City of St. Thomas

Introduction

The City of St. Thomas is growing, and as it continues to grow, it is essential to establish effective communication channels to keep the public informed, support civic engagement, and promote local initiatives. While functional, current communication practices require a more structured and strategic approach.

The **2025-2029 Corporate Communications Strategy** lays the foundation for community engagement over the next four years. This plan aims to enhance transparency, foster community engagement, and effectively promote municipal services and initiatives, thereby improving the overall relationship between the City of St. Thomas and its residents and stakeholders.

The City of St. Thomas formed a Communications Working Group composed of individuals from various departments across the organization, all of whom have experience handling communications in some capacity. Their backgrounds provided a range of unique perspectives and insights on the subject. To help shape the strategy and ensure the corporation communicates as effectively as possible, the group conducted a public survey to gather feedback from residents. The survey was available online, with physical copies distributed at various locations and events throughout the city.

A separate online survey was shared amongst City employees, the Leadership Team, and

council members to inform how this strategy will enhance internal communication efforts. Per the strategy, several communication opportunities and initiatives have been spotlighted:

- Create a new municipal website with improved navigation and user experience.
- Launch seasonal print and digital newsletters to keep residents and stakeholders informed.
- Implement an online engagement tool to allow public input and feedback on City-led projects and initiatives.
- Strengthen the City's social media presence to highlight projects, community achievements, and updates on key initiatives.
- Improve internal communications to keep staff connected and informed.

This strategy supports the City's vision of building a brighter future through trust, accountability, and consistent collaboration, and allows the City the ability to be effective, responsive, and agile in its communications and storytelling.

Alignment with the Strategic Plan

The need for increased and strengthened communication practices has been recognized in the **2024-2027 Strategic Plan, Brighter Future**, as it pertains to Strategic Pillar #2 - “Prepared and Resilient City,” and further, Priority #1 - “Effective Governance.” Per the plan, the City will prioritize increased communication from council and staff, and provide more engagement and feedback opportunities for St. Thomas residents and communities. Other such objectives include:

- Ensuring accountability and transparency in government decision-making for the effective and efficient functioning of the City.
- Establishing, tracking, and reporting measurable performance indicators and results, using data to inform decision-making and improvement.
- Improving voter engagement and resident participation in the City’s governance structures.
- Fostering transparent, accessible, and responsible two-way communication, information sharing, and performance reporting with the public.
- Encouraging and actively engaging citizens in dialogue and decision-making forums.



Strategy Development Process

Phase One: Preparation and Analysis (July - August 2024)

- Established Communications Working Group
- Conducted a SWOT analysis of current communications structures and processes

Phase Two: Engagement and Feedback (August - October 2024)

- Gathered community feedback through virtual and in-person surveys (422 responses)
- Collected internal staff, leadership, and council feedback through virtual surveys (133 responses)

Phase Three: Strategy Development (November 2024 - January 2025)

- Developed draft *City of St. Thomas Corporate Communications Strategy* based on SWOT analysis and survey feedback

Phase Four: Review and Approval (February - April 2025)

- Presented draft strategy to Leadership Team and council for feedback
- Finalized and presented the *City of St. Thomas Corporate Communications Strategy* for council endorsement

Phase Five: Implementation (Spring 2025)

- Roll out and implement strategy goals and initiatives

Targeted Audiences

Who does the City of St. Thomas need to communicate with?

To achieve the goals outlined in this strategy, the following target audiences were identified for the City of St. Thomas's communications.

RESIDENTS

Residents are the core of the community and the primary audience for city communications. Keeping residents informed fosters transparency, builds trust, and encourages engagement in civic life and local decision-making.

BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The business community includes existing entrepreneurs, storefront owners, and service providers who contribute to the city's economic vitality. Effective communication with this group supports economic development and helps address the needs and concerns of those operating within the local market.

PROSPECTIVE INVESTORS AND BUSINESS OPERATORS

This audience consists of individuals and organizations considering St. Thomas a location for future investment or business activity. Targeted communications help position the city as a desirable and strategic area to grow, expand or launch new ventures.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Community partners include nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders who collaborate with the city to deliver services and programs. Clear and consistent communication ensures alignment of goals and enhances the effectiveness of joint initiatives.

VISITORS AND TOURISTS

Visitors and tourists contribute to the local economy and help shape the city's reputation beyond city limits. Communicating with them helps promote local attractions, events, and cultural experiences that highlight the city's identity and hospitality.

ELECTED OFFICIALS, COMMITTEE MEMBERS, AND VOLUNTEERS

This group plays a critical role in governance, policy-making, and civic engagement. Including them in communication efforts ensures alignment, accountability, and recognition of their contributions to municipal operations and community well-being.

CITY STAFF

City staff are responsible for implementing policies, delivering services, and maintaining daily operations. Internal communication supports efficiency, fosters a strong organizational culture, and ensures staff are informed, supported, and aligned with strategic goals.

Communication Objectives

Why does the City of St. Thomas need a communications strategy?

The goal of the City of St. Thomas Corporate Communications Strategy is to build a stronger relationship between the municipality and its residents through clear communication, inclusive outreach, and meaningful collaboration.

Objectives:



Enhance Transparency and Build Public Trust Through Accountability



Foster Two-Way Engagement and Effectively Promote Municipal Services



Ensure Consistent and Inclusive Communication Across all Channels

Swot Analysis

As part of developing the communications strategy, the Working Group assessed the current state of the corporation's communication efforts through a SWOT analysis to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats from internal and external perspectives. This analysis was further informed by valuable insights gathered from the internal and external communications surveys, allowing the group to incorporate diverse perspectives into the strategic planning.

STRENGTHS	ACTION ITEMS
Council meetings are well-advertised	• Increase visibility • Promote highlights • Spotlight critical decisions • Share highlights with staff • Explore alternative streaming options
Positive reception to external Mayor's Update show	• Launch a City-specific series hosted by the Mayor and featuring staff and council members to keep residents updated on City services, projects and initiatives • This show will be distinct from the Mayor's external web show in length, distribution format, and central focus
Some existing email alerts	• Launch email sign-up campaign • Increase awareness • Ensure the new website has automated email alert capabilities

Swot Analysis

WEAKNESSES	ACTION ITEMS
Outdated City website	• Initiate website overhaul
Limited internal communications	• Overhaul of the Intranet program • Send council highlights to staff • Launch bi-annual internal Town Halls • Explore leveraging new tools and technologies
Limited community engagement	• Explore opportunities for a third-party engagement platform and provide proposals to council for approval • Launch annual public survey to measure satisfaction • Monitor social media and traditional media • Increase the presence of City representatives at events
Inconsistent branding and messaging	• Create social media graphic templates • Update and enhance existing Graphics Guidelines into a Brand Guide • Work with Human Resources to incorporate branding and communications framework into onboarding documents for new employees • Ensure all staff are adhering to the City email signature guidelines

Swot Analysis

WEAKNESSES	ACTION ITEMS
Limited communications resources	• Dedicate strategic financial resources in future annual budgets
Limited youth engagement	• Utilize a variety of social channels to reach younger audiences, and tailor content utilizing the Platform Focused Approach document • Explore alternative options to engage with youth
OPPORTUNITIES	ACTION ITEMS
Increase community engagement	• Launch seasonal print and digital newsletters • Explore launching a third-party engagement platform • Develop City app • Develop a “Year in Review” publication as an annual roundup of City services, projects, and community impact
Enhance the City’s social media presence	• Develop a diverse content schedule and implement the Platform-Focused Approach for content posting • Engage audiences on social platforms the City does not actively employ • Offer more communication opportunities/support across the corporation • Develop an events calendar

Swot Analysis

WEAKNESSES	ACTION ITEMS
Limited communications resources	Dedicate strategic financial resources in future annual budgets
Limited youth engagement	- Utilize a variety of social channels to reach younger audiences, and tailor content utilizing the Platform Focused Approach document - Explore alternative options to engage with youth

OPPORTUNITIES	ACTION ITEMS
Increase community engagement	- Launch seasonal print and digital newsletters - Explore launching a third-party engagement platform - Develop City app - Develop a “Year in Review” publication

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Swot Analysis

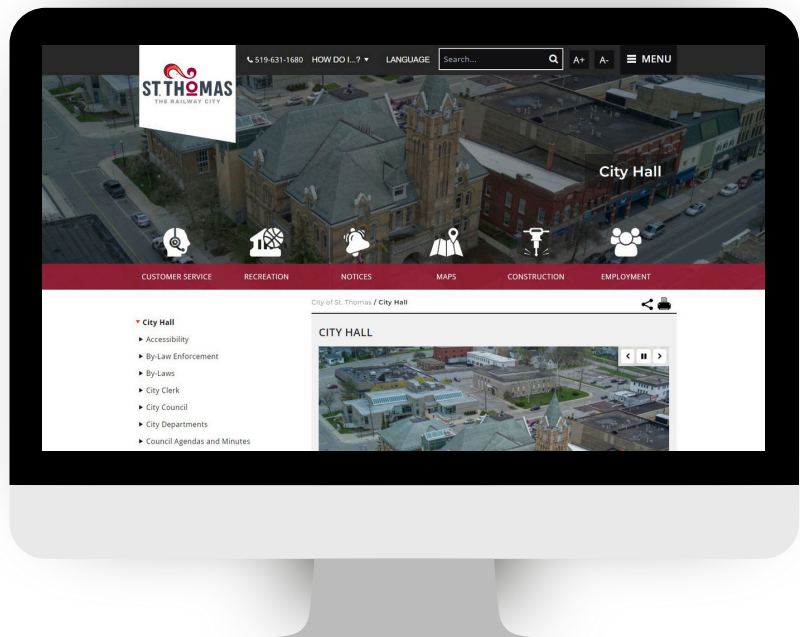
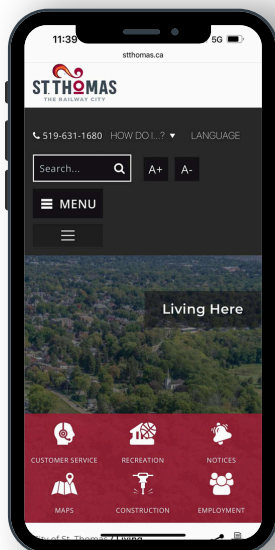
THREATS	ACTION ITEMS
Potential for engagement fatigue on social media	• Develop a consistent posting schedule that also ensures variety in content and format
Limited staff resources and budget to implement big changes	• Reallocate existing resources where possible • Develop a year-over-year plan to establish a communications team within the corporation • Annually update/revise the communications strategy to ensure resources are in place
Lack of buy-in from existing staff	• Maintain an open line of communication to be proactive and mitigate any concerns. • Ensure department heads are championing communication efforts and initiatives. • Ensure staff are aware of and utilizing the Communications Request Form.

Communications Toolkit

The City employs a variety of communication tools and platforms intended to reach residents and stakeholders in a timely and effective manner. These methods are subject to change and are under constant review to ensure they remain functional and valuable to the diverse needs of our population.

The list of tools currently being employed includes:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| ✓ Hand delivered notices | ✓ Public information Centres and Public Meetings |
| ✓ Press Releases | ✓ Tax Bill Notices |
| ✓ TV Screens | ✓ Email Alerts |
| ✓ City Website | ✓ Local Print and Digital Media |
| ✓ Social Media | ✓ Council Meetings |
| ✓ Surveys and Polls | ✓ Printed Materials/Flyers |



Communication Toolkit - Opportunities

Email/Print Newsletters

The City intends to implement seasonal print and digital newsletters to keep residents and stakeholders apprised of City-led projects, initiatives, and other relevant information. This communication method is supported by The City of St. Thomas Corporate Communications Strategy: Survey for Residents and Public Stakeholders, which found nearly 51% of respondents would like to engage with the City through email newsletters with interactive polls.

An email address campaign will be launched to develop a distribution database with print copies to be made available at select locations throughout the city for those who prefer not to engage digitally.

Public Engagement Tool/Platform

An interactive online forum, separate from the municipal website, will allow the public to learn about what's happening in their community, contribute their ideas and feedback, and connect directly with staff regarding projects, services, and initiatives. Developing this platform will encourage community engagement and meaningful two-way dialogue in a transparent, responsive, and inclusive setting that allows all citizens to feel heard and understood

City Website Overhaul

A significant number of survey respondents noted that the current municipal website is dated and requires a comprehensive overhaul to improve navigation and overall user experience. Further, the public communications survey results showed that 44% of respondents engage with the City's website most frequently, indicating this is a primary method of communication and information sharing.

It would benefit the City's communications efforts to allocate resources toward developing an updated and more efficient website focused on clarity of content, ease of navigation, and a clean, visually stimulating design that is mobile-friendly and AODA compliant.

Branding and Visual Identity

The City will strengthen its visual identity by implementing an email signature policy to standardize font, branding and message formatting across the corporation. Additionally, a designated brand guide will be developed and included in onboarding materials and training procedures to ensure consistency in visual identity across all communications.

Communication Toolkit Opportunities

Resourcing - Communications and Public Relations Coordinator

Reporting to the City Manager, the Communications and Public Relations Coordinator is responsible for leading the City’s communication efforts, supporting department-specific communication activities, and ensuring smooth and effective communication between the municipality and its residents.

The Communications Coordinator’s day-to-day activities include:

- | | |
|---|---|
|  Strategic Communication |  Advertising and Promotional Material |
|  Social Media Monitoring and Management |  Committee Involvement |
|  Website Management |  Improve Internal Communications |
|  Community Engagement |  Crisis Communications |
|  Media Relations | |

As outlined in the City Communications Procedures, requests by staff for communication material (including website, Intranet, social media, news releases, and publicly distributed print material) will be provided to the Communications Coordinator via an official request form. While all relevant information will be provided by the requester, the coordinator will make any necessary revisions and will retain creative control of the final content.

This role, along with the new processes, will ensure a departmental centralized approach for all corporate communications.

Communications Objectives - Timeline

*subject to change based on evolving needs and resources

2025 - Year One

- Develop and implement social media guidelines
 - Launch internal and external seasonal newsletters
 - Initiate RFP process for website overhaul
 - Hire a Communications and Public Relations Coordinator to plan and implement internal and external communications efforts
 - Launch a public engagement platform
 - Develop annual “Year in Review” publication
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2026 - Year Two

- Launch monthly City-specific series that includes the Mayor
 - Finalize and launch a new City website
 - Develop a communications orientation package for staff and council
 - Launch internal communications platform
 - Create a dedicated budget line for communications resources
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2027 - Year Three

- Conduct resident and employee satisfaction surveys (to become annualized)
 - Explore opportunities for a city-wide mobile app
 - Establish youth engagement opportunities (i.e. school visits)
-

2028 - Year Four

- Hire additional Communications Team support

Measuring Success

To ensure the success of the Corporate Communications Strategy objectives, the City will implement a structured approach focused on strategic planning and consistent evaluation of such metrics as:

OBJECTIVE	METRICS
Enhance Transparency and Build Public Trust Through Accountability	• Social media insights and benchmarking (including audience demographics, impressions, and engagement) • Website analytics • Number of email subscriptions • Third-party engagement platform reports (including visitor statistics, traffic, and participation summaries) • Survey/poll participation rate (including annual communications satisfaction survey) • Customer Service Inquiries
Foster Two-Way Engagement and Effectively Promote Municipal Services	
Ensure Consistent and Inclusive Communication Across all Channels	



Cross-Departmental Collaboration

The City intends to implement the Corporate Communications Strategy's core objectives in a cross-departmental and collaborative effort through the following actions:

TIMING	ACTION
Daily, Weekly, or Bi-Weekly	• Monitor local media outlets to highlight potential issues and coverage of City happenings to be communicated to the Leadership Team and members of council • Monitor social media accounts for resident inquiries/feedback • Monitor external community partners and stakeholder groups for potential collaborative/shared content • Meet with the City Manager to provide updates on the effectiveness of communication tools and strategic planning, adjust where necessary
Monthly	• Communicate with the Leadership Team to spotlight upcoming events/news/projects to ensure efficient and timely communication with the public • Proactively engage with other City departments to identify and highlight their initiatives, achievements, and stories, ensuring they are effectively shared with the public.
Quarterly	• Review metrics against quarterly benchmarks • Provide recaps of high-level news and updates through seasonal newsletters (print and digital) • Meet with Customer Service representatives to spotlight frequent public inquiries and draft future communications accordingly

Cross-Departmental Collaboration

TIMING	ACTION
Annually	• Annual meetings with the Leadership Team to gauge the effectiveness of the communications strategy and highlight gaps/issues. • Review the use of online engagement tools • Annual communications satisfaction survey (internal and external) • Annual “Year in Review” publication with contributions from the Leadership Team for their specific areas/departments • Annual communications insight report to the council • Review Corporate Communications Strategy



Tactics & Deliverables

This section outlines specific tactics that will be used to enhance the City's communications efforts, as well as the estimated cost associated with the tactic and its anticipated initiation date:

ACTION	COST	DATE INITIATED
Develop and implement social media guideline	\$0	2025
Launch seasonal print newsletters	\$1,000/season	2025
Launch seasonal digital newsletters (includes paid online boosting)	Approximately \$30/edition	2025
Hire Communications and Public Relations Coordinator	Included in the 2025 Operating Budget	2025
Launch a public engagement platform	Approximately \$20,000 annually	2025
Develop "Year in Review" digital publication	\$0	2025
Launch new Mayor's web show	\$0	2026
Launch new municipal website	Dedicated funds in budget	2026
Develop communications orientation package	\$0	2026

Tactics & Deliverables

ACTION	COST	DATE INITIATED
Launch internal communications platform	TBD	2026
Establish youth engagement opportunities	\$0	2026
Conduct resident and employee satisfaction surveys	\$0 (built into new website/engagement platform)	2026
Explore opportunities for City-wide app	TBD	2027
Hire additional communications support	TBD	2027
Purchase digital sign for City Hall exterior	TBD	2027

Accessibility Commitment

The City of St. Thomas is committed to implementing, maintaining, and enhancing the accessibility of its communication and engagement deliverables for all residents. The City also aims to ensure that all individuals have access to programs and services in a way that respects the dignity and independence of all persons.

As part of this commitment, the City's communications strategy incorporates accessibility principles to ensure information is delivered clearly, inclusively, and in formats that meet the diverse needs of the community.

The City supports the goals of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and has established policies in place governing how the organization achieves or will achieve accessibility through meeting its requirements referred to in the Integrated Standards Regulation.

Connections to Other Corporate Policies and Processes

- City of St. Thomas Communications Procedures
 - i. Communications Request Form
- City of St. Thomas Platform Focused Approach
- City of St. Thomas Email Signature Policy



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City of St. Thomas



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