

Report

Date	April 6, 2020	File:
To	Council	
From	Megan Jordan, Manager, Communications & Public Engagement	Endorsed:
Subject	Proposed Amendments to the New RCMP Detachment AAP Communications Plan due to the COVID-19 Pandemic	

Purpose

To seek approval from Council on the proposed revisions to the Communication Plan (the “Plan”) for the new RCMP Detachment and to authorize staff to move forward with the Alternative Approval Process (AAP) amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background

On July 17, 2019, Council directed staff to proceed with the AAP and the Plan as presented to them, to inform the public of the need for the new detachment, implications, cost, and how electors can submit response forms in opposition to the proposed initiative.

An overview of the AAP was prepared and was to be presented to Council at the March 18, 2020 Committee of the Whole meeting; however, due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, that meeting was cancelled. The March 18, 2020 report from the Manager of Legislative Services has been appended to this report as a reference for Council on how an AAP works and the timelines anticipated prior to the pandemic.

Discussion

To enable staff to move forward with the project this year, staff are proposing to remove one of the elements the Plan previously approved by Council. At this time, it is no longer feasible to carry out a media/resident tour of the existing RCMP detachment due to physical distancing orders put in place by the Provincial Health Officer. By shifting our emphasis more toward digital communication the public can still be provided with the necessary information to proceed with the AAP safely.

The Plan still includes updates to the website to provide key information (just the facts without highlighting any particular point of view) to the public; the creation of a short animated video; news releases; radio interviews; social media posts and advertisements; newspaper advertisements; and a pamphlet that will be mailed out to all property owners and residents which includes an elector response form. Please see the **Revised RCMP AAP Communication Plan** attached to this report for more information on how staff propose to move this Project forward.

Options

1. Authorize the proposed change to the Plan and direct staff to proceed with the AAP at this time.
2. Defer consideration of the revised Plan and moving forward with the AAP until Council has reconsidered the 90-day pause on engagement.

Implications

Demographic – At this time, Canada Post is still offering Neighbourhood Mail; however, this could change. If Neighbourhood Mail is no longer available, going completely digital may reduce reach within the community, as not all residents are on social media. While the main demographic on Facebook is 18-65, there are many seniors not on this social platform. We will need to consider alternate ways to get this information to them in a paper format.

Social – At this time, as a result of COVID-19, most members of the public are focused on the health and safety of their family, friends, and loved ones. Residents may not participate to the fullest extent possible if the AAP moves forward at this time.

Time - Failing to move forward at this time will delay the Project until next year.

Communication – With the removal of the media tour, alternatives like OpEds (i.e. opposite of editorial page) from key spokespeople with photos attached are recommended to provide visuals for the public. It should be noted that the Cowichan Valley Citizen has scaled back physical distribution of the paper to once per week instead of twice per week. As a result, not all OpEds may be picked up in the printed newspaper, but more than likely would be in the digital version (again possibly missing some of the intended audience who only reads print editions). Increased radio interviews with key spokespeople are also recommended in lieu of a media tour; these can be arranged at no cost with key spokespeople.

Recommendation

That Council approve the revised Communication Plan for the new North Cowichan/Duncan RCMP detachment and, notwithstanding the 90-day postponement of all public engagement made by Council on March 18, 2020, that staff be directed to proceed with the alternative approval process at this time.

Attachments:

- Revised RCMP AAP Communication Plan (DRAFT April 2020)
- 2020-03-18 RCMP Facility Loan Authorization Bylaw Elector Approval Process Report