

Town of Whitby

Staff Report

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Report Title: Revised Public Notice Policy

Report to: Committee of the Whole

Date of meeting: March 4, 2024

Report Number: CLK 03-24

Department(s) Responsible:

Office of the Town Clerk

Submitted by:

Christopher Harris, Town Clerk

**Acknowledged by M. Gaskell,
Chief Administrative Officer**

For additional information, contact:

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1. Recommendation:

That Council approve the revised Public Notice Policy appended to Report CLK 03-24 as Attachment 1.

2. Highlights:

- This report introduces a revised Public Notice Policy for Council review and approval.
- The Town's current Public Notice Policy, approved in 2016, references certain notices being provided through a newspaper with general circulation in the municipality.
- "Whitby This Week", the Town's community newspaper with general circulation throughout the municipality discontinued printed editions of their newspaper in September 2023. As such, updates to the Public Notice Policy are required.
- Staff recommend that notices previously provided via community newspaper be provided through the Town's website, under the "Latest News" section.

- The Public Notice Policy outlines minimum statutory requirements for notice publication. Efforts to inform members of the public about topics of broader community interest will continue to see Staff leverage additional engagement platforms including Connect Whitby, digital and social media, community and facility signage, public information meetings, etc.

3. Background:

Section 270(1) of the Municipal Act requires municipalities to adopt and maintain a policy outlining the circumstances in which the municipality will provide notice to the public, and the form, manner, and times such notice shall be given.

Council adopted the current Public Notice Policy in 2016. The current policy contains references to certain notices being provided through a newspaper with general circulation in the Town.

In September 2023, Metroland Media Group, the owner of Whitby This Week discontinued printed editions of their paper and moved to digital publication only. In addition to Whitby This Week, numerous other community newspapers in Ontario were moved from printed to digital publication only. Many municipalities in Ontario, including those in Durham Region, are now revising their respective public notice policies.

Due to the discontinuation of printed editions of Whitby This Week, the revised Public Notice Policy appended to this report has been modified to allow for notices previously provided via newspaper to be posted on the Town's website, on the homepage, under the "Latest News" section.

Through the development process for the revised Public Notice Policy, Staff undertook a review of the Municipal Act and made additional updates to the policy, as appropriate.

4. Discussion:

Whitby This Week was a beneficial resource to the Town for the purpose of providing notice as it was circulated to most homes and businesses in the municipality. The evolving media landscape resulted in Metroland Media Group changing their business model to move away from printed editions of most of their community newspapers.

The effectiveness of providing notice via newspaper is difficult to evaluate. To receive notice regarding a matter, a member of the public would need to be a regular reader of the newspaper, navigate to the public notice in the paper, and decide to read the notice to understand its content.

As an alternative to newspaper publication, Staff recommend leveraging the website's "Latest News" section for posting of notices. Notices published on this section of the website appear on the homepage. The benefit to this approach is that the website homepage is highly visible to residents generally interested in the Town and its activities, and the website allows members of the public to subscribe

to receive email notification when a notice is published, allowing for a more tailored experience.

Some municipalities have decided to provide certain notices through circulation in larger, Toronto-based newspapers. This approach may not be particularly effective as these newspapers are subscription based and the number of Whitby residents subscribing to the newspapers is unknown. Also, it may not be intuitive for a reader to expect a Whitby notice in a Toronto-based newspaper. Finally, the cost associated with publication in one or more Toronto-based newspapers would be prohibitive.

5. Financial Considerations:

The cost of including a notice in Whitby This Week was approximately \$1,400 in 2023. 8 statutory notices were published in Whitby This Week in 2022 and 4 in 2023. Annual cost savings of moving from the defunct printed newspaper to fully digital publication via the Town's website will be removed from the annual budget or used to offset other forms of notices when deemed necessary, such as temporary or mobile signs and direct mail.

6. Communication and Public Engagement:

Staff recommend that the Public Notice Policy be revised to change the requirement for notices circulated in a community newspaper of general circulation to posting on the Town's website under the "Latest News" section. As noted in Section 4 of this report, notices published on this section of the website appear on the homepage and have the added benefit of allowing members of the public to subscribe to receive email notification when a notice is published.

7. Input from Departments/Sources:

The revised Public Notice Policy has been reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team and the Communications and Creative Services division.

8. Strategic Priorities:

Developing a revised Public Notice Policy in response to the changing media landscape is consistent with Strategic Pillar 4 - Whitby's Government, Accountable & Responsible in the Community Strategic Plan.

9. Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Revised Public Notice Policy