



MUNICIPALITY of WEST GREY

2020 ACTION PLAN

As adopted by Council
March 2016

COMMUNITY VISION

**We strive to be a safe, unique and welcoming community,
at the heart of the Saugeen Rivers, providing opportunities
for all.**

CORPORATE MISSION

**We serve a vibrant, caring community, nestled in nature,
and are dedicated to enhancing the quality of life and
providing services in a sustainable and professional manner.**

INTRODUCTION

With input from residents and businesses, the Municipality of West Grey has prepared this Action Plan to identify specific, realistic and meaningful initiatives for this term of Council and beyond. The Action Plan reflects the priorities of the public. It will provide direction to Council and staff, and it encourages community organizations and other governments to help us.

There is never enough time or money - particularly in small municipalities - to do everything that we would all like. Nonetheless, by identifying and tackling the most important priorities, the Municipality can make a difference. This Action Plan represents a balance between what we, and the West Grey community, would hope to see done, and what we expect to be able to achieve.

In 2006, and again in 2011, the West Grey Council adopted strategic plans. They set out the vision that Council wished for the West Grey community, the mission it saw for its government, and the values that it would use to steer the West Grey "ship of state". Those values are in an appendix to this Action Plan.

This Action Plan takes the next step. First, it deals with West Grey's circumstances four or five years later. Second, it is based on a substantial program of community consultation, which included over 20 meetings with community organizations and representatives of businesses and agencies in our community - over 200 people in all. Also, a 30-question survey was mailed to 734 households chosen at random throughout West Grey. 172 households responded, giving us a very good statistical picture of what West Grey residents think about the 30 questions. Details about this community consultation are on the West Grey website.

Finally, this Action Plan goes beyond the previous strategic plan by asking not just what goals the Municipality would like to pursue on behalf of our community, but also what Council believes it can get done over the next four years. It sets priorities.

The Action Plan is always a work in progress. Emergencies or new opportunities may cause the Municipality to re-evaluate what needs to

get done and how much can get done. These Action Plan priorities will be reflected in each annual Municipal budget, where we will decide how much of which ones we can bite off each year.

Still, as Yogi Berra said, "If you don't know where you are going, you might wind up somewhere else". This Action Plan tells you - and reminds us - where we are going.

SUMMARY

During the fall of 2015, Council of the Municipality of West Grey met several times to hammer out an Action Plan that would serve the Municipality of West Grey until 2020. Council had the invaluable benefit of an enormous amount of thoughtful input from the public and businesses of West Grey, as well as the assistance of our senior staff.

During this process, Council challenged itself collectively to forge not just general goals but specific actions that would effectively pursue those goals. Council also challenged itself to enunciate its priorities. While West Grey's needs are large, its resources are limited. Everything can't be done, certainly not by 2020. So, Council debated what actions would be most important, most effective and most feasible by 2020.

Out of those discussions, this Action Plan determines three broad goals for attention in the 2015-2020 periods:

- 1. The long-term financial sustainability of the Municipality**
- 2. The development of the West Grey economy**
- 3. Providing information and communicating with the public**

In the Action Plan, a series of strategies have been chosen and are listed below. In turn, under each such strategy, Council has distilled a number of specific actions to be undertaken over the next four years. Those specific actions - contained on pages 5-18 of this document - are the meat of the Municipality's 2020 commitment.

GOAL A -

WE WILL ENSURE THE FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF THE MUNICIPALITY

STRATEGY A.1 Partnerships

We will continue to investigate the potential for partnerships, including with the County, our neighbouring municipalities, and/or the private sector, in order to maximize the efficiency and quality of all our services.

STRATEGY A.2 New Sources of Revenue

We will find new sources of municipal revenue.

STRATEGY A.3 Asset Management Planning

We will prepare long-term plans for the repair/replacement of municipal capital assets, and update those plans on a regular basis.

STRATEGY A.4 Comprehensive Service Reviews

We will initiate a program of comprehensively reviewing our services and their associated municipal facilities.

GOAL B -

WE WILL ACTIVELY PURSUE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN WEST GREY

STRATEGY B.1 High-speed Internet

We will encourage the acceleration of the development of a fibre optic cable network throughout West Grey.

STRATEGY B.2 Employment Opportunities

Through the actions listed in this Plan, we will support the retention and expansion of employment opportunities in West Grey.

STRATEGY B.3 Urban Cores

We will encourage the revitalization of West Grey's urban cores.

STRATEGY B.4 Tourism

We will encourage tourist attractions and events that support local business.

STRATEGY B.5 Population Growth

We will endeavour to take steps to attract new citizens to West Grey as a community of choice.

GOAL C -

WE WILL ENHANCE OUR EFFORTS TO INFORM AND COMMUNICATE

STRATEGY C.1 Municipal Communication

We will promote and review our efforts to provide information and communicate with our citizens and businesses on municipal matters.

STRATEGY C.2 Community Activities

We will support enhanced efforts to provide information to residents and visitors about community events, activities, organizations and facilities.

ACTION PLAN 2020 -

GOAL A - FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

WE WILL ENSURE THE FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF THE MUNICIPALITY

Background

Municipalities in Ontario must rely primarily on the property tax to provide the services and the infrastructure that their communities want provided. Property taxes are not only very visible but also very challenging for homeowners with modest or fixed incomes and for struggling businesses. Current West Grey property tax rates are not high by comparison with nearby municipalities, but neither are they the lowest. See Table A below. To put the discussion into context, a 1% increase in West Grey's property tax revenue would equal about \$85,000.

Table A 2015 property tax rates (excluding education portion)				
	Lower Tier	County	Total Municipal	On \$200,000 assessment
West Grey	0.00643	0.00364	1.007 %	\$ 2,014
Chatsworth	0.00585	0.00364	0.949 %	\$ 1,898
Grey Highlands	0.00488	0.00364	0.851 %	\$ 1,703
Southgate	0.00676	0.00364	1.040 %	\$ 2,080
Brockton	0.00756	0.00379	1.135 %	\$ 2,270
Minto	0.00553	0.00649	1.202 %	\$ 2,404
North Perth	0.00708	0.00300	1.008 %	\$ 2,016
South Bruce	0.00717	0.00379	1.096 %	\$ 2,192
Wellington North	0.00529	0.00649	1.178 %	\$ 2,356

On the other side of the coin, West Grey is like many rural municipalities with a large inventory of services and infrastructure. The Municipality owns approximately 100 bridges and box culverts, some of which carry low volumes of traffic. It owns and maintains 523 kilometres of hard-topped roads and a further 472 kilometres of gravel roads. It has 12 community halls of varying sizes, some of which are lightly used. It owns fire halls, libraries, a police station, and landfill sites.

All of the roads require - or will require - re-surfacing or re-gravelling, drainage improvements, lighting, and sign repairs, in addition to their routine patrol,

maintenance and snow ploughing. All of the bridges now require or will require replacement, reinforcement, or repair, in addition to routine inspection and maintenance. A sense of West Grey's infrastructure needs and the resulting costs, JUST for roads and bridges, can be seen in Table B below. Indeed, closing several bridges for safety reasons is now imminent.

Table B				Cost to rehabilitate all to "good" rating
West Grey ROADS and BRIDGES	2013 Condition Rating			
	Good	Fair	Poor	
Gravel Roads		417 kms	55 kms	NA
Surface Treated Roads		67 kms	323 kms	\$118 million
Paved Roads	5 kms	98 kms	30 kms	
Bridges	29	29	5	\$6 million
Culverts	33	45	9	
Source: West Grey Asset Management Plan 2014, Infrastructure Solutions Inc.				
Note: The Asset Management Plan did not include Gravel roads in the rehabilitation cost estimate, because it assumed regular re-gravelling, grading, and ditching on an on-going basis				
Note: The Asset Management Plan based its bridges/culverts rehabilitation estimates on the 2012 bridge inspection report recommendations				

While many of the Municipality's buildings are relatively new, others are not, and at some point all of them will require significant repairs or upgrades such as accessibility, roofs, furnaces, and/or plumbing, in addition to routine heating, lighting, cleaning, water testing, access ploughing, etc. Given that West Grey's population has grown slowly and is getting older on average, and given that expectations are rising - whether it be for banquet facilities, libraries, or the police station - costs are increasing while the use of municipal facilities is not. The same is true for our landfills, where we face heavy costs for closing and environmental safeguards.

In times past, senior levels of government, particularly the Province, provided significant subsidy for municipal operations. This is no longer the case. Indeed, West Grey is bracing for a \$900,000 permanent cut in its annual operating grant from the Province, to be phased in over the 2015-2017 period. While the Province has uploaded the cost of some Grey County services, and

approximately \$250,000 in permanent "tax room" has been transferred to West Grey from the County, a net loss is still expected.

For the capital cost of our roads, bridges, water and sewer systems, and community facilities, the picture may be somewhat brighter. Both federal and provincial levels of government have announced plans to increase funding for municipal infrastructure projects. We remember, however, that funding applications to senior levels for legitimate West Grey projects have been turned down in the recent past. Furthermore, even if senior level funding were forthcoming, the Municipality will still have to contribute a portion of the costs and the costs are huge.

During the 2015-2020 periods, we intend to pursue the following strategies to keep West Grey on a long-term sustainable financial footing.

STRATEGY A.1 Partnerships

We will continue to investigate the potential for partnerships, including with the County, our neighbouring municipalities and/or the private sector, in order to maximize the efficiency and quality of all our services.

2015-2020 Action Priorities

Action A.1.1 We will expand on our recent partnership with neighbouring municipalities in a joint Chief Building Official/building department, including the establishment of a joint property standards enforcement program.

Action A.1.2 As we progressively review each of our municipal services, we will include an investigation of potential partnerships in those service reviews.

Action A.1.3 We will communicate our 2020 Action Plan to our neighbouring municipalities, and invite them to identify potential opportunities to partner with West Grey.

STRATEGY A.2 New Sources of Revenue

We will find new sources of municipal revenue.

2015-2020 Action Priorities

Action A.2.1 We will develop a policy on offering the naming rights on municipal facilities and equipment, in return for financial contributions.

- Policies in effect in other municipalities can be adapted for use in West Grey.

Action A.2.2 We will investigate obtaining permanent liquor licenses for our larger municipal banquet halls.

Successful examples in effect in other municipalities could be adapted to West Grey. The investigation will require:

- Substantial consultation with community organizations with regard to fund-raising events and revenue sharing,
- Identifying the suitability of, and any changes needed to, West Grey facilities and procedures,
- Estimating the increase in banquet hall usage and other expected benefits.

Action A.2.3 We will actively lobby senior governments for infrastructure project funding.

- West Grey will be prepared to invest substantial time and potentially some funds - both individually and in conjunction with the County and AMO - to ensure that provincial and federal infrastructure project funding recognizes the urgent needs in municipalities such as ours and that West Grey receives its fair and timely share.

Action A.2.4 As we progressively review each of our municipal services, we will include in each of those service reviews an investigation of potential private investment in municipal services or infrastructure.

Action A.2.5 We will develop a policy on possible sale of gravel from municipal pits.

Action A.2.6 We will continue to lobby for changes to the Aggregate Resources Act to increase the tonnage levy paid to municipalities by aggregate producers.

Action A.2.7 We will identify and offer for sale municipally-owned properties which are surplus to any present or predictable municipal purpose.

Action A.2.8 We will investigate the potential to generate revenue from solar panels at municipally-owned sites.

The investigation would identify:

- Whether Ontario Power Generation will pay a Feed-In Tariff for the potential electricity generated,
- Suitable sites in terms of solar exposure, community impact, site preparation,
- Potential investment interest on the part of suppliers, contractors, lessees.

STRATEGY A.3 Asset Management Planning

We will prepare long-term plans for the repair/replacement of municipal capital assets, and update those plans on a regular basis.

2015-2020 Action Priorities

Action A.3.1 We will identify the Municipality's potential to use its long-term borrowing capacity to catch up on its infrastructure repair/replacement needs.

- West Grey has virtually no outstanding tax-funded long-term debt, but it does have a backlog of infrastructure repair/replacement needs.
- Many of these projects, such as bridge work, once completed, will remain serviceable for more than 20 years, during which time the borrowing for the project would be paid off.
- Factors such as this, as well as the current low borrowing rates and the potential for senior government funding assistance, will be considered.

- By the same token, our desire not to leave an unsustainable debt load to the next generation indicates that any long-term borrowing must be rational and restrained.

Action A.3.2 We will investigate the use of lower-cost bridge specifications, where appropriate.

- If and where lower-cost specifications can be used, and the resulting projected capital cost savings, is information to be incorporated into a long-term bridge repair/replacement plan.
- Developing such specifications will require engineering safety approval based on the projected frequency and weight of vehicular use.

Action A.3.3 We will prepare a long-term bridge repair and replacement plan.

- When the two actions outlined above have been completed, we will prepare a 20-year plan to project which bridges will be dealt with, in what order of priority, at what projected cost, and with what funding.
- The plan will be reviewed, and when appropriate revised, based on new information arising from the biennial bridge inspections and from public input.

Action A.3.4 We will continue to develop a comprehensive long-term asset management plan covering all of West Grey's capital assets.

- West Grey currently has a long-term capital asset repair/replacement plan lacking information on municipal facilities and vehicles, lacking a funding plan, and without decisions yet being made on realistic service levels and funding mechanisms.
- When the three actions outlined above have been completed, a comprehensive 20-year plan will incorporate information about all municipal capital assets and choices about levels of service and sustainable funding.
- This Plan would be regularly updated as new information becomes available through experience, inspection, and service reviews.

STRATEGY A.4 Comprehensive Service Reviews

We will initiate a program of comprehensively reviewing our services and their associated municipal facilities.

2015-2020 Action Priorities

Action A.4.1 We will undertake a review of West Grey's waste management services and service levels, including our landfill sites and waste depots.

- Waste management - including collection, disposal, recycling and reuse - is a service which touches residents directly and implements the desire of West Grey residents to be good stewards of our environment.
- It is also a service with significant Provincial mandates and regulations, substantial operating costs, as well as heavy financial and potentially environmental liabilities pertaining to both operating and closed landfills.
- By obtaining both external expertise and public input, we intend to make sure that this service is being delivered efficiently and effectively and planned for prudently.

Action A.4.2 In collaboration with the Library Board, we will undertake a review of West Grey library service, including a long-term plan for library service delivery methods.

- West Grey's Library operations are governed by the Library Board, while the Municipality owns and maintains the library facilities. In its strategic planning, the Board is already taking stock of library usage, factors which will affect future library service, and future directions for library services.
- At the same time, the Municipality faces facility issues related to accessibility and building adequacy, particularly in Durham and Elmwood.
- By obtaining both external expertise and public input, we intend to ensure that this service is being delivered efficiently and effectively, and planned for prudently.

Action A.4.3 In collaboration with the Police Services Board, we will undertake a review of police service delivery and the adequacy of police facilities in West Grey.

- West Grey's police service is governed by the Police Services Board and Chief, within an environment of Provincial law and regulation. In addition to operating funding, the Municipality provides police facilities.
- The current police station no longer meets all provincial guidelines.
- The Municipality will review police facility requirements, examine its options, and resolve this issue in an efficient and effective manner.

Action A.4.4 We will undertake a review of West Grey's administration and finance operations.

ACTION PLAN 2020 -

GOAL B - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

WE WILL ACTIVELY PURSUE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN WEST GREY

Background

West Grey's economy has a strong history in fields such as agriculture and food products, forestry and wood products, furniture, auto parts and general manufacturing, retail services, trades, health and public services. Yet in recent years, like most rural municipalities, West Grey has lost jobs, the closing of the InterForest plant being the most dramatic but not the only example. Table C demonstrates this loss of jobs in the 2001-2011 period, and projects that the loss would not be recovered by 2031.

TABLE C - Employment in West Grey						
West Grey JOBS	2001	2011	2001-2011 %	2016 projected	2001-2016 %	2031 projected
Jobs within West Grey	3790	3150	-17%	3300	-13%	3340
# WG residents with jobs	4,465	4600	+3%			
# WG residents commuting		3530	77% of WG workforce commutes out			
Jobs in WG filled by outside residents		2050	In-commuters fill 66% of jobs in WG			
Source: County of Grey Growth Management study 2014 update						
Comments - regional job market; slow projected recovery from 2001-2011 loss of jobs in WG						

Table C shows another important fact about the West Grey economy. More West Grey residents have jobs than there are jobs in West Grey. 77 % of the 2011 workforce residing in West Grey held jobs outside West Grey, often in nearby municipalities such as Hanover, Mount Forest, or Markdale but in some cases as far away as Alliston, Orangeville, or Owen Sound. Conversely, of the jobs which existed in West Grey, 66% were held by people who lived elsewhere. The fact is that we are in a regional job market.

Our population has grown very slowly in recent decades and this slow growth is expected to persist. At the same time, on average our population is older than the Provincial average. Our households have ever-fewer children; this fact in

turn jeopardizes the utilization of our schools and sports facilities, as well as local retail business. Table D illustrates the situation.

TABLE D - West Grey Population						
West Grey Population	2001	2011	2001-2011 %	2016 projected	2001-2016 %	2031 projected
Population	12,200	12,580	3%	12,620	3.5%	13,510
Households	4,520	4,880	8%	5,090	12.6%	5,530
Note: # Households excludes seasonal/vacation hhlds (an additional 580 in 2011)						
Source: County of Grey Growth Management study 2014 update						
Comment: 1. average # people/hhld is shrinking as children leave home and # retiree hhlds increases						
2. slow population growth experienced and projected						

Several factors militate against the growth of the number of jobs in West Grey. Our distance from major population centres, major industries, and major highways is one. The lack of high-speed broadband internet service throughout West Grey is another. Other factors include a lack of trades training and apprenticeship opportunities and big-box retail in adjacent municipalities.

At the same time, other factors offer hope for the future. Businesses are being attracted to our boundaries with neighbouring towns; jobs are available in agriculture; there is renewed energy among our business organizations; retirees from southern cities are being attracted to our natural environment and village lifestyle; many residents continue to live here when they find jobs elsewhere; arts and craft producers are springing up; property is relatively inexpensive; hospital services are available.

Clearly, the Municipality has no direct control over the attraction of businesses and the creation of jobs in West Grey. In some ways, too, a job in a neighbouring town is as beneficial to residents as a job within West Grey. Nonetheless, the public clearly indicated that the Municipality should take action in this area. In our random-sample public survey, for instance, pursuing fibre optic cable/high speed internet service was considered the most important action we could take, while providing incentives for commercial and industrial development was one of the areas where the public feels we have made least progress.

During the 2015-2020 period, we intend to pursue the following strategies to facilitate the expansion of the West Grey economy.

STRATEGY B.1 High-Speed Internet

We will encourage the acceleration of the development of a fibre-optic cable network throughout West Grey.

2015-2020 Action Priorities

Action B.1.1 We will actively advocate for senior government funding and rapid implementation of the SWIFT program.

- The SWIFT program (Southwest Ontario Internet Fibre Technology) is a \$300 million initiative on the part of Counties in southwestern Ontario and several private sector partners to develop a trunk network of fibre optic cable.
- Grey County has budgeted \$1.1 million for its share, about \$100,000 of which will come from West Grey taxpayers. The program relies on substantial federal and provincial funding assistance.
- The Counties have applied for this funding and, although the signs look positive, have not yet had a firm commitment.
- Without this funding, the rural nature of southwestern Ontario does not present a sufficient return on investment for private sector internet companies.
- Fibre optic cable is fundamental to the future success of the West Grey economy.
- West Grey will continue to support Grey County's participation in this initiative, and when the program is being implemented, West Grey will make every effort to facilitate installation on municipal rights of way.

Action B.1.2 At the appropriate time, we are prepared to investigate the business case for the Municipality to install local fibre cable networks on a cost-recovery basis.

- The SWIFT program will not deliver cable to every rural road and urban street; local networks will remain to be completed. So, in addition to its participation in the SWIFT program, Grey County has also set aside \$1 million to support local networks within the County

(of which approximately \$100,000 comes from West Grey taxpayers).

- While the cost to install cable on all roads and streets is much more than that, the County hopes that this contribution to the capital cost of local networks will "tip the scales" by providing a sufficient return on investment for private sector internet companies to pay the remaining costs.
- The timing and viability of local networks depend on the SWIFT program build-out. It is unlikely that local internet networks would be feasible without further federal and provincial funding assistance, as well as private initiative.
- However, at the appropriate time, if necessary, West Grey must be prepared to investigate the business case for possible direct municipal involvement in local fibre network installation.

A local-networks feasibility study would:

- Identify potential private partners
- Seek federal and provincial funding assistance
- Determine the cost-recovery mechanisms and payback period if West Grey were to install the cable
- Identify the technical and regulatory requirements and the construction cost.

STRATEGY B.2 Employment Opportunities

Through the actions listed in this Plan, we will support the retention and expansion of employment opportunities in West Grey.

2015-2020 Action Priorities

Action B.2.1 We will assist in the attraction of satellite trades training and apprenticeship programs to West Grey.

- Not only has the loss of local industries and the aging of the workforce decreased the local supply of skilled trades people, but more and more skills training is required for jobs in all sectors, including agriculture.

- We will make the necessary contacts and lobby for community college apprenticeship courses in West Grey, and we are prepared to offer resources and other supports for college courses to operate here.
- We anticipate numerous allies and partners in this campaign, including Georgian College, the Saugeen Economic Development Corporation, private sector, and our neighbouring municipalities.

Action B.2.2 We will investigate the creation of a new municipal position to help us promote business and investment in West Grey, maintain liaison with local business and business organizations, and facilitate economic development.

- Before creating this position, we will take care to define clear terms of reference and criteria for evaluating success.
- We will also examine opportunities to contract with a third party and/or work with neighbouring municipalities.

Action B.2.3 We will encourage the development and promotion of municipal industrial areas.

- In the absence of private industrial property development, the Municipality is prepared to identify suitable industrial land locations, particularly among properties the municipality may already own, to zone and service them for industrial uses, and to promote these industrial areas in addition to any available privately-owned industrial areas.
- Neighbouring municipalities may be willing partners in this initiative. West Grey already owns an industrially zoned property in Neustadt.

Action B.2.4 Working with the County and its GIS system, we will create a searchable database of properties in West Grey zoned for commercial and/or industrial use.

STRATEGY B.3 Urban Cores

We will encourage the revitalization of West Grey's urban cores.

2015-2020 Action priorities

Action B.3.1 We will enforce property standards.

- While recognizing that municipal jurisdiction over the appearance of private properties is limited, we also recognize that unsightly and ill-kept properties discourage the efforts of other owners and businesses to rejuvenate the urban centres.
- To support local business organizations, we will initiate property standards enforcement proceedings and the legal/prosecution costs such enforcement entails.

Action B.3.2 We will continue to beautify the public realm in West Grey's urban cores.

- As we continue to improve the appearance of municipal buildings, sidewalks, lights, signs, and street furniture, we will also consult with businesses and volunteer organizations about appropriate roles and mutual support.

Action B.3.3 We will increase the loans and grants available from the Municipality for the improvement of the facades of privately-owned buildings in the urban cores.

- For many years, West Grey has had a program of loans up to \$500 toward the total cost of downtown owners improving the appearance of the fronts of their buildings.
- About \$2000 remains in that fund. However, few businesses seem to be aware of the program, and the amount of the loans - or the mix between loans and grants - is now less than some other municipalities offer to their downtown building owners.
- We will look at programs in other municipalities and update West Grey's façade improvement program.

Action B.3.4 We will review the restrictions in our bylaws concerning business use of public sidewalks in our urban cores.

STRATEGY B.4 Tourism

We will encourage tourist attractions and events that support local business.

2015-2020 Action Priorities

Action B.4.1 We will entertain support for the development of a tourist-oriented festival or market.

- The Municipality will consider partnering, following a complete evaluation of each proposal by businesses, business organizations, and other community organizations that take the lead to develop a major festival or market which would attract more tourists and more tourist spending.
- We would work with such groups to prepare a clear plan and business case for the successful development of such a festival or market.

Action B.4.2 We will endeavor to enhance the mapping and signage for hiking, biking and riding trails in West Grey.

STRATEGY B.5 Population Growth

We will endeavour to take steps to attract new citizens to West Grey as a community of choice.

2015-2020 Action Priorities

Action B.5.1 We will encourage Grey County to continue to support critical amenities in West Grey, including the hospital, Rockwood Terrace, and affordable housing, among others.

Action B.5.2 We will promote and conserve our natural attractions and proximity to nature in order to attract retirees and young families considering West Grey

Action B.5.3 We will encourage activities and amenities that appeal to young families and to retirees considering West Grey.

ACTION PLAN 2020 -

GOAL C - COMMUNICATION

WE WILL ENHANCE OUR EFFORTS TO INFORM AND COMMUNICATE

Background

Our consultations with the public indicated the importance which community organizations place on communication with the Municipality. In some cases, in the absence of accurate information from the Municipality, inaccuracy and misunderstanding seeped in to fill the vacuum. The random sample survey asked about enhancing channels of communication in order to improve communication with the public. While the respondents on average did not consider this the most important action the Municipality should take, there was a significant discrepancy between the importance people attach to this action, and their satisfaction with what we are doing now. We can improve.

West Grey already makes significant efforts to communicate. The website (www.westgrey.com) contains a wealth of information and frequent public notices. Our Council meetings are broadcast. Notices appear regularly in the municipal page of the West Grey Progress and semi-annually a lengthier newsletter appears there. Our most significant studies - including this Action Plan - entail considerable public involvement.

Our consultations also made it clear that our community is looking for more information-sharing, not just about municipal issues, but also about what is going on in the community. Some community organizations that have been the sparkplugs of community events and community identity for many years express their urgent need for new members to join and participate. The Municipality and other organizations have made efforts to spread the word about the wealth of events, organizations and facilities in West Grey. But, here too, there is more to be done.

Accordingly, during the 2015-2020 period, we will pursue the following strategies.

STRATEGY C.1 Municipal Communication

We will promote and review our efforts to provide information and communicate with our citizens and businesses on municipal matters.

2015-2020 Action Priorities

Action C.1.1 We will keep the West Grey website updated and enhanced with municipal content.

Action C.1.2 We will produce the municipal newsletter on a quarterly basis, and distribute it via the website, in the West Grey Progress, and with our regular municipal mailings. Copies of the municipal newsletter will be made available at the municipal office, municipal libraries, and municipal arenas.

Action C.1.3 We will host, at least annually, a breakfast meeting for discussion with representatives of West Grey stakeholder organizations, to be held at a different location for each event.

Action C.1.4 We will initiate an electronic process whereby the public could lodge complaints or service requests with the Municipality electronically. The Municipality will inform individuals of the complaint process via the municipal newsletter.

STRATEGY C.2 Community Activities

We will support enhanced efforts to provide information to residents and visitors about community events, activities, organizations and facilities.

2015-2020 Action Priorities

Action C.2.1 We will work with community organizations to host a "volunteer fair" to showcase West Grey's community organizations and activities, and recruit volunteers.

Action C.2.2 We will investigate creating a new responsibility charged with communicating and promoting community events, organizations, facilities and opportunities.

- The person with this responsibility would work integrally with business and community organizations in order to develop protocols for routinely assembling accurate and timely information and for distributing it effectively.
- Clear terms of reference and criteria for evaluating success would be defined before the investment is made.
- Opportunities will be investigated for partnerships or contracts with the County or neighbouring municipalities, business, media, or other parties.
- An aspect of the responsibilities, as outlined above, would be to push out information about the community via social media and to manage subsequent social media interaction.

APPENDIX A

THE VALUES OF THE WEST GREY COMMUNITY INCLUDE:

- Community Engagement
- Infrastructure Enhancement
- Responsible Economic Growth
- Environmental Stewardship
- Quality Service Delivery

THE VALUES OF THE MUNICIPAL CORPORATION OF WEST GREY INCLUDE:

- Honesty
- Integrity
- Compassion
- Progressiveness
- Inclusiveness