

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

One of Council's six new strategic priorities is communications and public engagement. I have said all along that local governments need to be more accountable and transparent. We need to connect in meaningful ways with the citizens we serve, and we need the citizens to know that we value their input.

Some of the ways we would like to enhance our communications and your engagement include:

- using technology to deliver more timely information
- video streaming/archiving council meetings
- hosting regular Town Hall meetings
- engaging the community in Town strategies
- identifying opportunities for more public involvement in our decisions (participatory decision-making)
- carrying out a comprehensive review of our commission and committee structure

We are already delivering on many of these actions. At our February 15 meeting, Council approved a staff recommendation for a system to record, stream and archive all public Council meetings. The new system will be installed soon. If you can't get to a Council meeting, you will be able to watch it at your convenience through the Town's website. I hope you had a chance to fill out the citizen survey for our new Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plan. If you didn't get to take part in the survey, there will be more opportunities to engage in that process. This is the kind of approach we will take with other Town plans and initiatives, including the Waterfront Plan and our commission/committee system. Stay tuned to our various communications vehicles for information on these and other initiatives.

Speaking of communications vehicles – we are also greatly enhancing ways we reach out to citizens. Last summer, we launched the Town's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/LadysmithBC) and we are now on Twitter too (www.twitter.com/TownOfLadysmith -- @TownOfLadysmith). We will continue to send out our Ladysmith Links newsletter with utility bills and the tax notices, and would love to hear from you if you have requests for information or news you would like us to share. Did you also know that we have a Town of Ladysmith e-mail distribution list? This is how we provide updates on Council meetings and other events and important information. If you'd like to be on that list, send an e-mail to info@ladysmith.ca. It's that simple. Our website is a wealth of information, and again, if you go to www.ladysmith.ca and can't find what you are looking for, let us know and we would be pleased to find the information and update the website if possible.

With our budget deliberations, we have scheduled meetings at different times and days to give as many people as possible an opportunity to attend the meetings, ask questions and have their say.

We take our desire for transparency and accountability seriously; I speak for both Council and staff when I say we are open to suggestions from our citizens, and always happy to answer questions. The more questions and suggestions we get, the more engaged we all are in our future.

The best way to make sure people are informed and engaged is to offer sincere meaningful two-way communications. And this is where you, the citizens of Ladysmith, are also accountable. If you want to know more about something that we are doing, ask someone who knows or who can find the answer. That could be me, or another member of council, or one of our professional staff. You're unlikely to find the correct information by asking a general question on Facebook or other social media outlets. Worse yet, you may get a variety of opinions without the facts and perspective required to form your own opinion. We can't expect staff and members of Council to monitor every Facebook page out there. We can, however, provide specific and detailed answers if you put your questions directly to the Town. You can do this through our Town of Ladysmith or my Aaron Stone – Working Together Facebook page, call City Hall, or send an e-mail to myself, another councillor or Town staff. We are making efforts to find ways to communicate and engage with you. I sincerely hope that you want to be part of these positive changes, will engage yourself, make an effort to seek out the information you need, and be constructive in your input.

It takes all of us **working together** to build our future.

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