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Town of Aurora
Information Report
No. CA024-003

Subject: Aurora Town Square 2023 Communications and Marketing Summary

Prepared by: Carley Smith, Manager, Communications

Department: Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

Date: February 20, 2024

In accordance with the Procedure By-law, any Member of Council may request that this Information Report be placed on an upcoming General Committee or Council meeting agenda for discussion.

Executive Summary

As Aurora Town Square nears the end of construction and approaches its opening year in 2024, marketing and communications efforts, rooted in The Square's Business Plan, made significant progress throughout 2023. The goals were to generate excitement about opportunities at The Square for residents, community members and local businesses while building a lasting foundation for successful programs, events and experiences.

- Monthly 'Behind the Scenes' newsletter and social media channels were used to build a dedicated following.
- Media, advertising and website development continued in order to build awareness of Aurora Town Square's brand.
- Staff continued to generate excitement and build relationships with the community at events, through hard hat tours and neighbour visits and with Aurora Town Square's partners.

Background

Staff have been working consistently throughout the duration of Aurora Town Square's construction to generate awareness and build excitement leading up to its opening.

Analysis

Monthly 'Behind the Scenes' newsletter and dedicated social media channels were used to build a dedicated following.

The 'Behind the Scenes' monthly newsletter launched in March 2023, and has amassed an audience of 1,200 subscribers. The newsletter is exceeding performance expectations with high open and click through rates.

In April, 2023 Aurora Town Square's Facebook, Instagram and X channels were launched and the year ended with nearly 2,000 followers across all channels. The 2023 social media strategy aimed to build and sustain awareness and excitement about The Square, converting audiences into long-term supporters and laying the foundation for years to come.

Content on these channels focused on construction progress, the vision for The Square, community engagement events and partner highlights. The Communications team created four timelapse videos and construction videos as well as a trailer available to the public on the Town of Aurora's YouTube channel resulting in 3,100 views. Two of these videos had the highest number of views on the Town's channel in 2023.

Media, advertising and website development continued in order to build awareness of Aurora Town Square's brand.

Leveraging local and potentially national media for earned media coverage will become a priority as we near grand opening in 2024. In 2023, the Communications team responded to four media inquiries that resulted in local stories about The Square. Additionally, three news releases were distributed, resulting in at least five local stories.

The Aurora Town Square microsite will launch six months prior to grand opening in 2024. In the meantime, staff utilized the Engage Aurora page posting 21 updates with a total of 5,500 page visits.

Digital and print advertising was used to build newsletter and social media following as well as drive traffic to the website.

Staff continued to generate excitement and build relationships with the community at events, through hard hat tours and neighbour visits and with Aurora Town Square's partners.

Robust community engagement efforts play a vital role in driving awareness, building excitement and ensuring success upon opening. In 2023, staff attended 27 community engagement events to promote Aurora Town Square and provided over 50 hard hat tours to donors, community members, business owners, Town staff and more.

In 2023, members from each of The Square's partner organizations – Aurora Public Library, Aurora Cultural Centre and Aurora Museum & Archives started meeting quarterly and participated in their first joint community engagement event at the Aurora GO Station.

Throughout 2023, staff connected with Aurora Town Square's neighbouring homes and businesses through construction notices, email updates, regular home visits and check-ins to demonstrate our commitment to open communication and reducing inconveniences throughout the construction project.

Advisory Committee Review

None.

Legal Considerations

Not applicable.

Financial Implications

Aurora Town Square's marketing and communication expenses are included as part of the Town's approved operating budget.

Communications Considerations

Marketing and communications efforts will continue with activities that demonstrate Aurora Town Square's long-term value for arts and cultural experiences as well as community connection in Aurora. And in 2024, strategies will shift to inform the public about its own special events, rental opportunities and various initiatives of our cultural partners.

Climate Change Considerations

The information provided in this report does not impact greenhouse gas emissions or impact climate change adaptation.

Link to Strategic Plan

Supporting an exceptional quality of life for all in its accomplishment in satisfying requirements in the following key objectives within these goal statements:

- Invest in sustainable infrastructure
- Celebrating and promoting our culture
- Encourage an active and healthy lifestyle
- Strengthening the fabric of our community

Enabling a diverse, creative, and resilient economy in its accomplishment in satisfying requirements in the following key objectives within these goal statements:

- Promoting economic opportunities that facilitate the growth of Aurora as a desirable place to do business

Alternative(s) to the Recommendation

None.

Conclusions

Staff have been working consistently throughout the duration of Aurora Town Square's construction to generate awareness and build excitement leading up to The Square's opening. Effective communications and marketing during the construction of a new building, especially one with a community focus like Aurora Town Square, are essential for creating awareness, building support, and establishing a positive reputation before the facility even opens its doors.

Attachments

Attachment 1 - 2023 Aurora Town Square – Year in Review

Previous Reports

None.

Pre-submission Review

Agenda Management Team review on February 1, 2024

Approvals

Approved by Robin McDougall, Director, Community Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer



2023

YEAR IN REVIEW

As Aurora Town Square nears the end of construction and approaches its opening year in 2024, marketing and communications efforts – that are rooted in The Square’s Business Plan – made significant progress throughout 2023. The goals were to generate excitement about opportunities at The Square for residents, community members, and local businesses, while building a lasting foundation for successful programs, events, and experiences.

‘Behind the Scenes’ Newsletter

In the first quarter of 2023, the Communications team focused on building a dedicated following for the ‘Behind the Scenes’ monthly newsletter. In March, the first edition was distributed and has landed in inboxes the first Tuesday of each month ever since. In the lead up to grand opening, the newsletter highlights construction progress, the vision for The Square, upcoming community events where readers can learn more, relevant news and programs, along with a recurring section to highlight our partners’ current news, events, and initiatives.

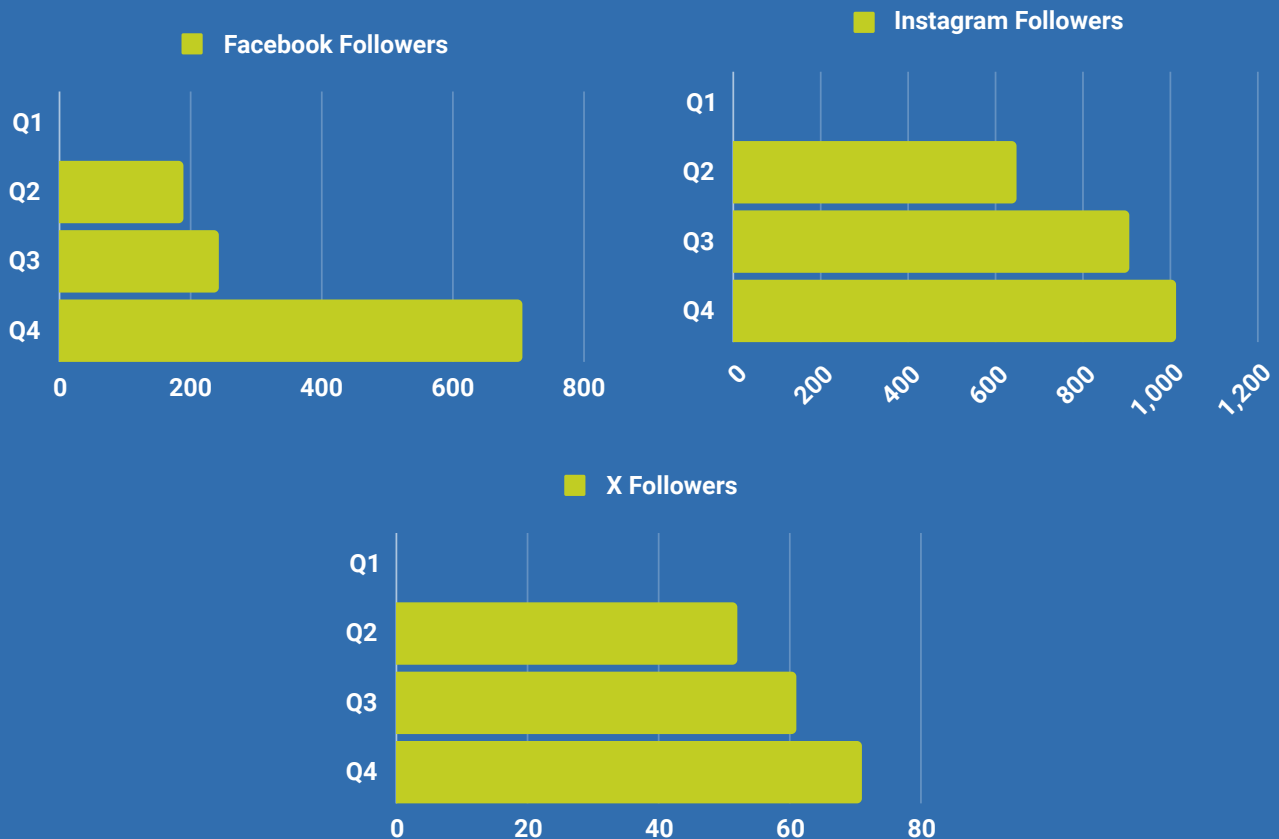
From March to December 2023, the ‘Behind the Scenes’ Open Rate averaged at **78 per cent**. According to industry standards, this is **42 percent higher** than the average open rate, which was **36 per cent** in 2023. Additionally, the click rate averaged at **13 per cent**, while the industry average was **1.4 per cent**.

Newsletter Audience Growth by Number of Subscribers



Social Media

The 2023 Social Media Strategy aimed to build and sustain awareness and excitement about Town Square in Aurora, as well as beyond our municipal boundaries, converting audiences into long-term supporters and laying the foundation for years to come. In April 2023, Town Square's Facebook, Instagram, and X channels were launched. With changing algorithms and saturated platforms, starting brand-new social media channels in 2023 inevitably posed challenges. The Communications team will continue to build on this following throughout 2024 and create cutting-edge content that engages our growing audience.



Earned Media

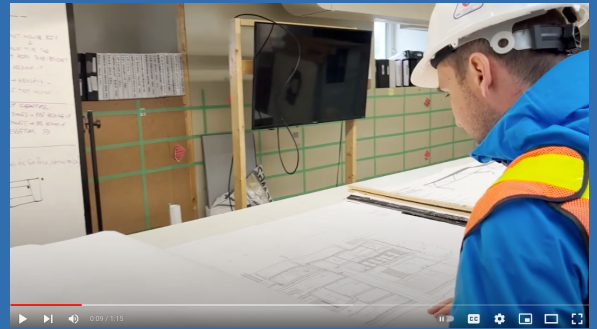
Leveraging local and potentially national media for earned media coverage will become a priority as we near grand opening in 2024. In 2023, the Communications team responded to 4 media inquiries that resulted in local stories about Town Square. Additionally, we distributed 3 releases, resulting in at least 5 local stories.



Video Content

In 2023, the Communications team created 4 timelapse videos, available to the public on the Town of Aurora's YouTube channel, resulting in 1.7K views. Additionally, we created 2 construction videos with representatives from Chandos Construction and RAW Design, along with a trailer that premiered at Movies in the Park, resulting in 1.4K views.

Notably, the trailer 'Aurora Town Square - Coming Soon' and 'Aurora Town Square Fall 2022 - Winter 2023 Timelapse' had the highest number of views on the Town's channel in 2023.



Engage Aurora and Town Square's Microsite

The Aurora Town Square microsite will launch in late spring or early summer 2024. In the meantime, the Communications team continues to utilize the Engage Aurora page to connect with the online community. Although we experienced little two-way engagement, we distributed 21 posts throughout the year, and had a total of 5.5K total visits to the Aurora Town Square page.

Advertising

To build our newsletter and social media following and support on-going engagement, we promoted The Square in at least 12 print ads and 5 digital ads through various sources, including: Neighbour Media, the Auroran, Metroland, the Town's Recreation Program Guides, Explore Aurora, and more.



Community Engagement

Robust community engagement efforts play a vital role in driving awareness, building excitement, and ensuring long-term sustainability. By consistently attending Town-led and Town-supported community events, we establish deeper connections with residents and members of the broader community, ultimately fostering excitement, transparency, and on-going credible communication.

In 2023, the Communications and Cultural Services teams attended 27 community engagement events to promote Aurora Town Square.



Hard Hat Tours

Hard hat tours provide Town staff, prospective renters or partners, and members of the community with a look at progress as the new indoor and outdoor space nears completion. During these tours, we enjoy sharing the vision for Town Square and answering questions. Often, individuals or groups on the tour also look at how they may use the space in the future.

In 2023, we hosted over 50 hard hat tours!

Our Partners

Town Square's marketing and communications efforts foster collaboration that enhances the collective capacity and supports the success of each partner — Aurora Public Library, Aurora Cultural Centre, and Aurora Museum & Archives — in meeting their objectives. Marketing and communications activities align partner goals, target audiences, and key messaging, to enhance community recognition, awareness, and value proposition.

In 2023, members from each partnering communications team started meeting quarterly, and we had our first joint community engagement event at the Aurora GO Station.



Our Neighbours

Throughout 2023, we connected with Aurora Town Square's neighbours through construction notices, email updates, regular home visits, and check-ins to demonstrate our commitment to open communication and reducing inconveniences throughout the construction process.



Downtown Aurora

In 2023, members from the Communications and Cultural Services teams met with downtown business owners to support the Town's downtown revitalization efforts and encourage cross-promotion and future collaboration as opportunities arise.

