

STAFF REPORT



TO: Committee of the Whole of Council

FROM: George Vadeboncoeur, CAO

SUBJECT: Proposed Public Consultation for the Review of Wasaga Distribution Inc.

DATE: November 1, 2016

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Committee of the Whole of Council recommends approval of the public consultation process regarding potential options for the future of Wasaga Distribution Inc. outlined in this report.

BACKGROUND

At the October 25, 2016 Council meeting, Wasaga Distribution Inc. (WDI), with the assistance of Mr. Mark Rodger with Borden Ladner Gervais LLP, made a presentation to Wasaga Beach Town Council regarding potential options for the future of WDI. The presentation was received by Council with direction provided to the CAO to develop a public consultation process that will ensure the public have an opportunity to comment on the proposed options, and make their views known to Council.

DISCUSSION

Following Council's direction, and to ensure a thorough public consultation process, the CAO is proposing the following components form the public consultation process:

1. development of a dedicated webpage on the Town's website that will include all information pertaining to potential future options for WDI; (frequently asked questions, any presentations that may be provided, background information, general information regarding hydro distribution, Town issued media releases etc.);
2. hosting a Public Information meeting at the Wasaga Beach RecPlex for the purpose of providing information regarding potential options for WDI to residents and business owners. The meeting will provide an opportunity for the public to express their views through an open microphone forum with a question and answer period prior to the meeting concluding. Rogers television has offered to film and broadcast the meeting. Council members to be in attendance to listen to comments;
3. ensure all methods of expressing comments regarding the potential options for the future of WDI are advertised using every media outlet available in Wasaga Beach including: the Town page in the Wasaga Sun, the Town's corporate social media platforms (Twitter and Facebook), a comprehensive radio campaign on 97.7 the Beach, Beach Booster Radio/Beach Booster publication, digital information boards at the Wasaga Stars Arena and RecPlex and as noted above, the Town website;
4. develop a list of frequently asked questions; make the list available at the Public Information meeting, on the Town's website and social media platforms;
5. undertake a public opinion survey made available on-line (Town's website and corporate social media platforms) and at all Town facilities; and

6. create an established e-mail address to allow residents and business owners to send e-mail comments to the Town, as well as direction on how to send comments through written correspondence.

It has been mentioned that in addition to the recommended public engagement components above, Council may wish to consider undertaking a referendum. The estimated cost of holding a referendum is approximately \$95,000.00, which is based on the 2014 Municipal Election costs using the same method, staffing and electronic voting equipment. Taking into consider the vast percentage of individuals who utilize social media and the Town's intention to ensure all information pertaining to potential options for the future of Wasaga Distribution Inc. be clearly communicated, including the development of a public opinion survey, staff are of the view that the residents and business owners of Wasaga Beach will be provided with every possible opportunity to express their comments without the need to undertake a referendum.

CONCLUSION

Staff fully appreciate and respect the importance of ensuring members of the Wasaga Beach public have an opportunity to express their comments regarding the future of Wasaga Distribution Inc. It is equally important that the public have all the facts about the current operation of Wasaga Distribution Inc. and its contribution to the Town and the pros and cons of the three options for the future of the utility. The public consultation process will ensure that these goals are met using clear and concise communication methods. The process outlined is very similar to that used to gauge public opinion on the opportunity to pursue a gaming facility in the municipality.

Respectfully Submitted,

George Vadeboncoeur
Chief Administrative Officer