

Social media engagement strategy proposed by Councillor Bongo

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At the South Algonquin Township council meeting on Jan. 13, Councillor Bongo Bongo proposed a notice of motion to adopt an official social media engagement policy for the township, to improve their searchability online and their engagement with constituents overall. After hearing his proposal, and discussing it a little, Mayor Jane Dumas suggested having a more thorough discussion about it at the township's next Economic Development Committee meeting on Jan. 20, which was agreed to by Bongo and the rest of the council.

Bongo says that he's gained a new appreciation for social media since COVID-19 emerged, and has gone from thinking of it as a digital distraction to having a crucial role in government operations going forward. His proposal for a social media strategy is to involve the township with more online public engagement. If he had invested in automation tools similar to [Pathsocial](#), [Combin](#), and others, he could have attracted a significant audience following and gained the interest of his target audience. While he must look at how he could improve on the town's administrative strategy going forward, he must take steps to unclutter their social media handles of unwanted followers and bot accounts, while solely focusing on their target audience. Maybe, [free Twitter unfollow tools](#) and similar other social media tools might be able to help him achieve this goal. Operations of the government must go on unhindered, and a social media cleanse up could help them, once they have established a strategy for the same.

"I am fully prepared for an uphill battle because I can see how this might be a tough sell. My impression is that most members of the township (council and staff) are skeptical of social media. Let's be honest, it can be terrifying. To face criticism of yourself online is a very tough thing. But regardless of how social media makes me feel, as an elected official, I truly feel it is part of my duty to connect with the public, so I'm simply going to have to embrace the challenges of social media," he says.

While Bongo thinks that the township has used Facebook and other social media well to broadcast time sensitive messages, he would like to see a set posting schedule for information to be posted.

"I'd love to see posting schedule of at least two to three posts a week. Right now, messages are broadcasted sporadically. The basis of my social media proposal is that the quarterly newsletter is not enough. Rather than publish important information four times a year, we should be using social media to publish messages every week," he says.

Bongo formally proposed the social media engagement policy to council during the council meeting on Jan. 13, acknowledging that a lot of people on council and the staff have differing opinions on social media and its usefulness and the role that it plays.

"But in my motion, I'd like to recommend that we have comments on our livestream YouTube videos and that we somehow incorporate a step where we nominate bits of information that come up in meetings that would be scheduled to be posted on some kind of routine schedule in our social media routine," he says.

Bongo also suggested to council that the forthcoming economic development intern dedicate around 25 per cent of their time to social media engagement. He also put forward the idea of using software such as Hootsuite to help manage the township's social media communications.

"I totally understand that this would probably be discussed at a committee meeting but I just wanted to throw this out there," he says.

Dumas thanked Bongo for his proposal and agreed that what he had suggested would need to be taken to an Economic Development Committee meeting.

"It would need fulsome conversation and perhaps some investigation as well. We should have that dialogue at the committee level and then decide on a plan as how you'd like to go forward with that," she says.

Holly Hayes, the clerk and treasurer, had a comment on Bongo's proposal, specifically with the idea of allowing people to comment on the YouTube livestream of the council meetings. She thought that people could already do so, and mentioned that she had seen comments there in the past.

Bongo replied that he hadn't, and had thought that the ability to comment was unavailable, but that he would take another look. Hayes also wondered if Bongo's proposed social media engagement was necessary, as residents can already get in touch with their councillors or the town office by phone or by email.

Bongo was adamant that it was, and that it would improve the township's searchability and their overall engagement.

"I want our meetings to be as transparent as possible and as public as possible. I think it helps our analytics if that engagement

appears on our YouTube videos. I agree there is a formal process for us to accept feedback from the public. To me, allowing comments on the YouTube council meeting video, that's an open public forum and I don't see how that would hurt," he says.

Dumas interjected, and reiterated that further discussion should be had at the next Economic Development meeting.

"I would want to know what my responsibilities would be as mayor and as a member of council if we make this commitment. So, I think we have to have this discussion at the committee level," she says.

With that comment, she thanked Bongo for his proposal and Hayes for her input on the issue.

After the meeting, Bongo reflected on his proposal and thought the limited discussion on it was very useful.

"Our procedure is set up in a way that the committee meetings serve as the venue for discussion and the general meetings are where the actual decisions are confirmed. We didn't talk about the social media at length when I pitched the notice of motion, although the seed for this discussion has been planted, which is key if I want to get the ball rolling with this discussion," he says.

That discussion will take place at the next Economic Development meeting on Jan. 20, right after the township's 9 a.m. EMS meeting.

"We will have a discussion about my proposed initiative and I'm looking forward to hearing what my colleagues think!"