



AMHERST TOWN COUNCIL

RFD#

Date:

TO: Mayor Kogon and Members of Council

SUBMITTED BY: Kim Jones, Director of Communications and Information Technology

DATE: March 27, 2023

SUBJECT: *Customer Notification System Software*

ORIGIN: 2023/24 Operating Budget

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY: MGA 65A (1) Subject to subsections (2) to (4), the municipality may only spend money for municipal purposes if (a) the expenditure is included in the municipality's operating budget or capital budget or is otherwise authorized by the municipality;

RECOMMENDATION: The Council approve the inclusion of a Customer Notification System Software in the 2023/24 Operating budget in the amount to \$20,000.

BACKGROUND: Staff have been exploring ways to improve our communications with citizens. Currently several municipalities such as Truro/Colchester County and Yarmouth use this type of technology.

DISCUSSION: Public notification systems are traditionally used at the community or municipality level to send one-way messages to inform large groups of people of a specific message.

Public notification systems allow residents to receive important public safety messages in the event of large-scale emergencies such as floods, severe weather, or significant power outages. Notifications can be delivered to home phones, mobile phones, text and email. Notifications can also be used to advise citizens of upcoming meetings, street work/detours, festival and events etc.

This is typically subscriber based, as in the citizen must sign up for the program. As well, most programs allow the user to customize what types of notifications they wish to receive and how they wish to receive them. For example, email, text, or land line.

During our review of public notification systems, we found that a majority of the current systems on the market have the ability to set predetermined messages and the ability to send out information simultaneously on multiple platforms (Text, Email, Call, Facebook, Twitter, etc...). In addition, they have the ability to generate reports showing the analytics around the delivery of the information; and provide the members of the public with the ability to opt in and out of the notification system when required. In addition, some platforms provide the ability to map out an





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area within the Town of Amherst, in which the notification would only be delivered to individuals within that area.

Policy development will be paramount in defining when and how to use a public notification system; especially how the deployment of information vs. operational objectives (Time) will be achieved to meet operational requirements. It should also be noted that, if a system of this type is over used improperly, it will provide an atmosphere where the public may see them as nuisance messages and either ignore the notifications or unsubscribe their contact information from the public notification system.

An effective, ongoing communication strategy will be required to maintain public confidence in the system and to promote an increase in self registration of citizens on the system. Also, preparing for the potential negative interactions with the public by various communication means is a possibility; therefore, a proactive and positive communication plan should be developed and adjusted to meet current trends.

It is recommended that the Town of Amherst proceed with implementing a notification system as tool to support our public communications strategy. This recommendation takes into account that a public notification system is only one piece of the public notification puzzle; and further believes that all current social media platforms would still be required to be used to provide information to the public. Also, it is recommended that if the Town of Amherst decides to proceed with procuring a service, that the procurement for a system is focused around a one (1) year service agreement or a five (5) year service agreement.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS: Depending on the system chosen and its capabilities the cost could be up to \$20,000.

SOCIAL JUSTICE IMPLICATIONS: There are none

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS: There are no environmental implications.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: There was no community engagement

ALTERNATIVES:

- Do not add a public notification system at this time.

ATTACHMENTS:

Report prepared by:

Report and Financial approved by:

