

For Information Only

Leisure Guide Survey

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Committee

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Recommendation

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Background

This report was prepared by Corporate Communications in consultation with Leisure Services. As part of a service review and an effort to look at how the Leisure Guide is received by citizens, Corporate Communications and Leisure Services have conducted a review of the Guide, including its content, its delivery, its production, and possible changes to reflect trends in community guides.

The City's Leisure Guide

The City of Greater Sudbury issues the Leisure Guide twice annually: once in the spring/summer and once in the fall/winter. Guides are delivered to every household and apartment complex in the community in March and again in August. The Guides are delivered inside the Northern Life and Le Voyageur newspapers. Copies are also made available online on the City's website, and through Citizen Service Centres.

The Leisure Guide by the numbers:

- 69,000 English copies delivered into households
- 7,000 French copies delivered into households
- 5,000 copies (English and French combined) for distribution to 13 Citizen Service Centres and to Leisure Services
- Annual budget of approximately \$62,000 for the printing and distribution of the Guide

Signed By

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- Each issue of the Guide requires the equivalent of approximately 1.5 to 2 months of full-time work from start to finish (from compilation of information through to design, translation, production and distribution)

- From November 3rd, 2012 to November 3rd, 2013, there were 15,389 page views to the Leisure Guide page on the www.greatersudbury.ca website, by 12,897 unique visitors. This represents an average of 42 page views per day. Traffic is fairly even throughout the year, with slightly more visits during the summer than the winter.

The Leisure Guide is designed to be an information tool for residents as well as a resource for schools, families, and citizens alike. It is also one of several community contact and event listings, although this is not its primary purpose and maintaining accuracy of that information poses a significant challenge. It should also be noted that the Leisure Guide is not currently intended as a marketing tool, although numerous marketing initiatives are undertaken separately to promote municipal recreation programs.

Each issue of the Leisure Guide provides space for paid advertising. Ads are purchased by community organizations, both for-profit and non-profit. A preferential rate is applied to non-profit groups. Rates are set through the user fee by-law and are updated annually. Groups contact the City throughout the year to be added to the list of advertising contacts; as well, the City proactively contacts organizations who may potentially be interested in purchasing advertising space in the Guide. Ad sales currently generate approximately \$11,500 per year, which is used to offset production and distribution costs for the Guide.

It is noted that many organizations are reducing their reliance on print advertising, and investing instead in non-traditional media for their marketing needs. Although it is possible that the City could include more advertising in the Leisure Guide, trends indicate that it would not be easy to fill that space. As well, it would result in an increased page count, and therefore higher production costs.

There will be a continued effort to develop creative solutions to attempt to increase revenue generation through Leisure Guide advertising. There is an opportunity to modify advertising in the Guide by creating a consistent layout for ads (a horizontal banner on the bottom of pages) in the Guide, in a semi- "sponsor this page" initiative, thereby increasing available space for advertising.

Council has previously inquired as to the feasibility of converting the Leisure Guide into a monthly publication sent to every household and containing all City-related information. Staff are still investigating this, taking into consideration a number of factors, including:

- Staff time required to compile, coordinate, write and/or edit information on a monthly basis;
- Costs associated with production and distribution of information on a monthly basis;
- Possible partnership with a third party to print and deliver information; - Significant costs associated with translation of a monthly publication, which may not be handled through a third party;
- Need to comply with legislation and by-laws related to the provision of public notice (e.g., Planning Act regulates how far in advance certain types of meetings must be advertised and accepted advertising venues).

Staff will continue to work collaboratively to determine the feasibility of this path.

Citizen Survey

Corporate Communications and Leisure Services conducted a citizen survey over the summer of 2013 to ask residents about their thoughts on the Leisure Guide. Specifically, a number of questions were asked

about:

- Satisfaction level with the current content of the Guide
- Retention rate of the Guide (whether residents keep a hard copy of the Guide in their home)
- Reading preference for the Guide (online or hard copy)
- Recall of advertisements in the Guide - Use or potential use of online registration services for recreation programs
- Comments on possible changes to be made to the Guide (open ended)

The survey was placed in the Leisure Guide itself, delivered to every household in August 2013. It was also made available on the City's website, and promoted by a news release as well as social media.

Ninety-two (92) residents responded to the survey: 82 people responded in English, and 9 in French. This is a low response rate, and lower than other surveys the City has conducted with the same promotion and distribution methodologies.

The small number of respondents does not provide a statistically significant representation of Greater Sudbury citizens. However, in 2012 Corporate Communications commissioned a resident survey on the topic of communications from the City. This telephone survey was conducted through a research company specializing in opinion polls, and the results were statistically significant. Staff have therefore looked at the Leisure Guide survey and the communications survey concurrently to identify trends and draw possible conclusions.

The 92 residents represented in a balanced way the demographics of the Greater Sudbury community. The results were split between male and female, younger and more senior residents, and there was an equal split between households with children and households with no children.

- The Leisure Guide is one of the City's most visible products, as it is delivered to every household. The 2012 communications survey indicated that the majority of residents prefer to receive their communications directly to their households.
- The Leisure Guide has a high recall rate (75% of respondents to the communications survey remembered receiving the Guide to their household, and rated it at 7.8 out of 10 in terms of usefulness).
- Citizens are interested in the information provided by the Leisure Guide. In the 2012 communications survey, residents said they wanted to know about leisure programs (18%), taxes, water and roads, transit and garbage, in order of priority.

Current & Future Marketing Initiatives for Leisure Services

A comprehensive communication strategy exists for the marketing of leisure and recreation services, and new initiatives are incorporated regularly based on feedback and corporate and Council priorities. For example, over winter 2013-2014, a new marketing initiative is being launched to actively promote the City's three ski hills and a new flex pass. As well, a communication strategy around the City's arenas and community halls is currently in development. All leisure-related communications work to support Council's strategic priority of creating a healthy community and focusing on opportunities to improve our City.

Going Forward

The Leisure Guide in its current format is working to meet the needs of Greater Sudbury residents. Adding to the scope of the Leisure Guide would decrease its effectiveness, and have a significant impact on production costs, as well as time, in preparing the Guide. However, more can be done to use the Guide more creatively to promote the City's recreation programs. Going forward, the City will undertake a number of changes to the Leisure Guide to address feedback received and implement best practices in terms of community guides.

1. Provide an email sign-up form for residents to register to receive an electronic version of the Guide as it becomes available.
2. Work with partners to develop a consistent advertising template to possibly increase ad space and therefore revenue generation. The proposed layout is a horizontal banner to be placed on the bottom of pages of the Guide. This consistent approach to advertising would have the additional benefit of providing a more consistent and aesthetically pleasing layout. This will be explored for the fall/winter 2014-2015 issue of the Guide.
3. Continue to maintain the community contacts and events on the City's website, where the information can be more easily updated to ensure accuracy, and remove those two sections from the hard copy. A number of comments have been received over the past years relating specifically to the accuracy of information in the contacts and events listing. The rapidly changing nature of that information means that it is very difficult to maintain accuracy over the Leisure Guide's six-month shelf life. Using an online format, changes can be made immediately, providing more timely and accurate information to the public. A note will also be included to ensure that those who wish to receive a printed version of this list can do so.
4. Work in a stronger marketing angle to better promote municipal leisure services and City initiatives. With a healthy community focus at all times, each issue of the Guide would speak to a specific theme, such as affordable access to recreation. This will allow the City to more strategically position its work in the area of recreation.
5. Leisure Services will continue to work towards an upgrade of the Class system, which is used for online registration. Additional functionalities within the Class system, allowing for greater flexibility and a more comprehensive user experience, are expected to be rolled into future years' operating budgets.
6. Staff will work with Supplies & Services to further explore the possibility of a third party taking on the development, translation, production, and distribution of a City guide.

Conclusion

The Guide is a comprehensive information tool for schools, families and residents across the city. Over two surveys, residents have expressed overall satisfaction with the City's Leisure Guide. Although some may wish to see a different format or different content, the Guide serves a specific and necessary purpose for Greater Sudbury residents. Adding content would dilute that purpose and render information more difficult to find in the Guide.