PROPOSED TEMPLATE FOR COUNCIL CONSIDERATION

Proposed Council Motion

Prepared by Valley Journalism Project ·
https://valleyjournalismproject.ca/council-motion

This is a proposed template for municipal councils to consider and adapt. Municipal staff should confirm the wording against applicable contracts, procurement rules, and public notice requirements.

Discontinuing Discretionary Municipal Advertising

WHEREAS Council is responsible for ensuring that municipal advertising expenditures serve a clear public purpose and represent responsible use of taxpayer funds;

AND WHEREAS public confidence in municipal government and independent journalism depends on avoiding both improper influence and the reasonable appearance of improper influence;

AND WHEREAS municipal advertising creates a financial relationship between the municipality and publications reporting on its decisions, elected officials, and administration;

AND WHEREAS the Quebec Superior Court found David Leonardo and his company liable for defamation arising from articles published in the St-Lambert Journal, and documented repeated failures to meet journalistic standards;

AND WHEREAS the publisher’s documented history in Quebec, together with concerns raised about journalistic standards in his Ontario publications, creates a reasonable concern about the appearance of municipal advertising revenue influencing coverage;

AND WHEREAS Council wishes to avoid that appearance by directing discretionary advertising expenditures to other suitable communication channels;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council directs staff to:

1. Immediately cease purchasing or authorizing new discretionary advertising in the Smiths Falls Record Journal, Perth Courier Journal, and Carleton Place Journal, including their print editions, websites, supplements, and associated advertising products, whether purchased directly or through an intermediary;
2. Make no new discretionary advertising commitments or renewals involving these publications, and discontinue existing arrangements at the earliest date permitted by their contractual terms;

3 For the purposes of this resolution, treat every paid placement in the named publications as discretionary except a notice that cannot reasonably be delivered through another legally compliant method or qualifying publication. Discretionary advertising includes promotional advertisements, sponsorships, paid municipal information pages, greetings, and optional additions to required notices;

4 Use other legally permitted methods for required notices wherever available. Where newspaper publication is required, use another qualifying publication wherever practicable. Any unavoidable placement in one of the three named publications shall contain only the content and space reasonably necessary to meet the applicable requirement;

5 Publish a record of any continued advertising expenditure in these publications, identifying the publication, date, purpose, cost, and specific legal requirement or existing contractual obligation supporting the expenditure;

6 Maintain accessible municipal communications through other suitable channels, including options for residents who do not use the internet; and

7 Report to Council within 60 days on implementation, any outstanding contractual commitments, and any amendments needed to municipal advertising, procurement, or public notice policies.

AND THAT this direction apply to all municipal departments and advertising purchased on the municipality’s behalf.