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Wendy (Guest)

Welcome to Big G in conversation, the podcast from Inside Guelph City Hall. Hi, I'm Wendy King and on today's show, we're talking with staff from the strategic communications and community engagement departments to discuss one city 1 voice shared purpose, the city's five year plan for enhancing communications and engaging with its employees and the community. We'll learn about two important disciplines of communications and engagement and how it helps the city share information.

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Wendy (Guest)

And Foster community participation all to improve public services, breakdown barriers and shape Guelph future. Let's start the conversation.

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Wendy (Guest)

Joining me today is Laura Mousseau, manager of Strategic Communications and Glen Lombard, manager of community engagement Welcome.

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Glen Lombard

Hi there.

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Laura Mousseau

Hi, nice to be here.

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Wendy (Guest)

So we're talking today about one city, 1 voice shared purpose. Can you just kind of give me an overall view of of what that's all about with that theme is all about?

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Glen Lombard

Yeah, absolutely. I can start. You know that we we get lots of questions about the name and and sometimes people wonder, well, what does it mean and and actually don't don't we want many different voices and. And the truth is yes, we absolutely want many voices speaking so that we can make city services better. In fact, that's sort of critical to the way we think about delivering stronger public service. It's key that we're listening to different voices and creating conditions for even more public participation. The title really.

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Glen Lombard

Is is reflective of it's sort of crafted from the perspective of the city and and what the public can expect from us. So by one city we mean that we are one organization working together to deliver excellent public service to the Community. We're not our teams, our divisions or departments that might be how we organize the work, but it's not the experience that we want people in the Community to feel and and

when we say 1 voice, it's sort of an extension of that. Again, we're many voices in the organization sharing our insights expertise.

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Wendy (Guest)

So.

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Glen Lombard

Experiences and so on. And when we deliver services or provide customer service as employees, we need to be able to provide the same excellent service no matter what department we work in, so that our Community can expect the same service no matter who they talk to. So that's a little bit more about the sort of 1 city 1 voice components.

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Laura Mousseau

Yeah, and she shared.

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Wendy (Guest)

Yeah, I get that right.

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Laura Mousseau

Uh-huh. Shared purpose is the last part, right? And so as employees working for the city, we all share our purpose to deliver responsible and responsive public service to our growing and diverse Community. We work Better Together when we're united around the shared purpose and we can support a flourishing community that way. So you know outside of the city as an organization, we also share purpose with many community organizations and we know we can do a better job of growing those relationships and ensuring their mutually beneficial as well.

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Wendy (Guest)

Yeah, I was just thinking, as you were talking about 1 voice, you know, all the employees, especially the people who are out doing the day-to-day stuff outside of City Hall, so to speak, you all have to speak with one voice like you are you want everybody on the same page, I guess is what I'm saying.

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Laura Mousseau

Yeah. So you might work in parks and you might get someone coming up to you with a question about water and maybe you don't know the answer, but you know, as one city, you don't say that's not my department. We say, you know what? Here's where you can get some information rather than just just shutting down the conversation.

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Wendy (Guest)

For sure. So what? You know, changes or trends, did you all see that has influenced you to develop this plan?

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Glen Lombard

Yeah, it's a great question. Lots is the short answer. The longer answer really is it was informed by internal feedback from from city staff about how we could as an organization communicate and engage better with with the community. And we also use community input collected through workshops and interviews. The community plan, which was sort of happening in the background at the same time, individual projects, social media conversations like anything that, that, the conversations that were happening in our orbit.

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Glen Lombard

Are all part of what? What?

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Glen Lombard

Shaped how we thought about what needed to change and and where we needed to go.

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Laura Mousseau

Yeah. And of course, you know, public relations, best practice and digital technology are are driving force behind the direction of the plan and then current influences, including today's urgent social justice movement, the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation. And you know, there's a North American wide mistrust in all levels of government. So we know that's something we have to have to work to address.

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Wendy (Guest)

Yeah, that's that fascinates me because we're all bombarded every day with what is true and who's telling the truth and what is a legitimate, reliable source to go to. Right? So I I hadn't really thought about the fact that you as the the municipal government, have to address that as well.

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Laura Mousseau

Umm yes. We want people getting the right information and it doesn't have to be from us, but we have a role to play in making sure the right information is out there for people to use and share.

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Wendy (Guest)

So communication is always key in everything. How do you think that this? Umm, I don't know if I should call it a campaign or your your plan. How do you think that will improve the city's communication? And how will it change how you engage with your citizens?

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Laura Mousseau

Yeah. So you know, most organizations really focus on one way communications, right? That's us talking out, sharing information. And the cities, no exception. We know we can do better there too. So you know, we want to listen more, like deliberately listen more and to more diverse groups, which will mean

better services for everyone. So, you know, we're looking to be intentionally inclusive in our language and images so people feel welcome and engaged. We'll make sure inclusivity is considered and how, where and when we engage.

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Laura Mousseau

So people can feel safe to participate and we wanna grow, nurture those relationships with community organizations. Again, I said earlier, you know, it's the aim of working together to support more people in our community, so.

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Laura Mousseau

That's that's sort of the direction is really listening and working together within the community and and you know that's a big part of communications and engagement.

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Wendy (Guest)

Well, now we've talked in the past in other podcasts about whilst uh strategic plan and the Community plan is this different again.

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Laura Mousseau

It is a different plan, but it was both informed by and it is deeply and fundamentally connected to both the Community plan and the City strategic plan. It's also driven by our city values.

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Laura Mousseau

Umm, you know one one pillar of the city strategic plan is actually working together for our future. And this really ties in with that pillar of the strategic plan. It's about running an effective, fiscally responsible and trusted local government with engaged skilled and collaborative employees and internal communications is a big focus of this breaking down barriers, getting people to collaborate more.

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Laura Mousseau

Umm, you know how we communicate and engage in our organization and in the community is integral to attracting good employees, fostering that cross departmental collaboration and building trust in our community.

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Wendy (Guest)

And oh sorry.

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Glen Lombard

And and if I can. Ohh no, I was just gonna add to that, you know, sort of as the city it's about how we communicate and engage with each other and and people in the community. So it helps us contribute to the Community's vision for Guelph.

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Glen Lombard

Which you know, includes taking care of each other, standing up for what we believe in, making everyone welcome, respecting each other and our environment. In fact, the newest theme of the Community plan, which was developed in the last couple of years as an addition to the original community plan was this theme around we are community and the input collected through the development of that additional theme was instrumental in creating one of the six focus areas of the one City 1 voice shared purpose plan which is.

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Glen Lombard

Putting inclusivity at the core of city communications and engagement.

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Wendy (Guest)

When you were saying that, it's just, it came to me that one of the things that seems to be happening generally is a loss of community. Like there's this feeling like.

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Wendy (Guest)

You know, we're all kind of insular. I don't know if that came from COVID, where we're all bunkered down and we weren't getting out and engaging with people. So that's another part of your job, really, is to make people feel like it's important to care about your community. You're you're living in Guelph. Here's all the things we have to offer and to make sure everybody feels part of that, which is what you're just saying.

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Laura Mousseau

Yeah, absolutely.

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Wendy (Guest)

So when you say communication or streamlining, are you talking digital?

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Laura Mousseau

We're talking all forms, right? So I mean it's conversations. It's somebody calling customer service. It's sending an e-mail to the city and how you get a response. It's how we communicate on our website and through social media channels, how we tell stories with our to local media so they can share information. So it's definitely more than just again us using our own channels to talk to people.

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Laura Mousseau

Again, communications needs to be two ways, so we need to be listening probably more than we talk, at least to do some catching up really here, what people are are feeling and thinking about city services and programs and especially you know those equity deserving or equity denied groups that maybe haven't been heard quite as much.

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Wendy (Guest)

So bringing more people to the table.

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Laura Mousseau

Yes, absolutely.

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Wendy (Guest)

Yeah. And that's got to be a huge job as well to to make sure everyone feels hurt. I'm not quite sure how you do that. I guess that's part of your your major job.

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Glen Lombard

Yeah, it's it's a big part of of what we're working on. I think one of the components of the of 1 city, 1 voice shared purpose is the revitalization modernizing of our our community engagement framework. And that's a project that that the team and I are really excited to move forward. We have an existing framework. It was established in 2014 and in many ways that was the first of its kind and it served as an inspiration for many municipalities in Canada. It it helped the city evolve the way it thought.

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Glen Lombard

About engagement and aligned our approaches with sort of international standards and to your point, we're now here in 2022 and the world has changed enormously in just eight years. On the one hand, of course, yes, our our engagement practices of evolved and matured enormously since 2014. And on the other, we know and are learning more each day about the justice issues and our community we we've sort of seen how COVID has pushed the world to think differently about how we engage through what mediums.

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Glen Lombard

And you know in non traditional ways and forms, we know as Laura referenced earlier that there's declining trust in public institutions and government. There's an there's so much misinformation and disinformation out there. So doing the same thing using the same frameworks and standards and expecting different results, expecting more people to come to the table, it it, it's not gonna get us there. So really updating the community engagement framework is about meeting those realities and creating the conditions for more accessible, more inclusive, more diverse public participation.

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Glen Lombard

And supporting all the city departments to to, you know, be able to leverage the value that comes from that diversity, that that diversity is so critical to helping us make, you know, better decisions, better plans, better, you know.

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Glen Lombard

Better programs and services, so maybe just really quickly just a little bit about how we're gonna go about that work of modernizing the community engagement framework is really sort of the first thing is.

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Glen Lombard

And doing that audit, looking at what other municipalities and public sector institutions are doing, where's the leading edge, where we what's the gap and and how do we try to close that second. I would say it's looking at best practice and research in this field. It's a field that is expanding and burgeoning really rapidly in the last decade and so making sure that we're in tune with those changes. And then maybe lastly, it's engaging with our community and and in the coming months to really get their feedback.

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Glen Lombard

And they're input on engagement practices and so that anything we build in terms of a new community engagement framework is, is really rooted in insights from the community. Some of that's gonna be net new engagement and some of it's gonna rely on things that we've already learned through, things like the community plan and and other expensive community engagement. We've done the last number of years. So it's like I said, something we're really excited about and the community kind of expect to see a new framework during this sort of first half of 2023.

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Wendy (Guest)

So are you have really tangible things, you know, because sometimes and this is the multi year plan, sometimes you know those constit on a shelf and gather dust, you know how are you gonna make sure that this is like a live?

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Glen Lombard

Yeah, it's a tricky question and and I think there's a few things that can contribute to plan sitting on shelves despite all the effort and and best intentions that go into the creation. I think the first is when that strategy is not part of your everyday focus or or life, we tend to forget it's there. And so for for those in in highly operational roles or or roles that are maybe just like slightly disconnected from community from communications and engagement, it's it's easy to keep your head down and and focus on what's right in front of you. It's our role when we talk about plans that have this sort of.

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Glen Lombard

Like cross organizational scope to find ways to integrate them into every everyone's everyday work and mindsets so that you know, that involves reminding people that exists, reminding people how animating this plan shows up in their work, telling stories, celebrating when we get it right and reflecting and changing when we see there's an opportunity to to do better. I think the second thing maybe that contributes to sometimes plans being left on shelves and collecting dust is a lack of clarity around progress looks like.

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Wendy (Guest)

Mm-hmm.

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Glen Lombard

How do we actually know we're making progress on some of these big multi year complex challenges like public public participation, trust in government disinformation and misinformation. So we need we need measures to help us understand that we're moving the needle on these things and and and we're in the process of developing those and depending on what those measures are telling us, we need to act differently. So ongoing measurement and reporting are are really key to helping make sure that the plan is a living thing, not just a.

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Glen Lombard

A collection of pages that live on a on a shelf somewhere.

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Wendy (Guest)

And when you say gauging progress, I'm just thinking perhaps, I mean this is just very simplistic, but you would know if you're getting more phone calls in, you would know if you're getting a lot more emails, you would know if you have a public meeting and it's packed like that kind of thing, right?

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Laura Mousseau

Yeah, we're currently sort of putting together the KPI's and measurement to see to, to make sure that we can actually, tangibly.

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Laura Mousseau

Determine whether what we're doing is working so.

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Laura Mousseau

You know we we know where we want to get and then so it's looking at what would it look like if we got there and then how do we how do we measure that. So that's something that Glen and I've been working on and expect to be able to sort of finalize by the end of the year. So that next year we can we can start sharing our progress and results.

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Wendy (Guest)

So where are we now basically?

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Laura Mousseau

We actually rolled out this plan to staff and our current Council in July, then we shared it publicly with our Community in August and we're planning a new information report for the new term of Council in November to get them caught up on what this is. But you know, we've been actioning the plan really

since the beginning of the year, even before it was finalized, there were a lot of things that we were already putting in place. As Glenn mentioned, we've started on the update to the Community engagement framework.

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Laura Mousseau

Umm, we're running some inclusive language training this month and you know, working on inclusive language and image guidelines for the city.

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Wendy (Guest)

The.

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Laura Mousseau

We've also done a number of things internally, UM, initiatives that are gonna help us work Better Together inside the organization, which ultimately improves service delivery for the community. So for example, we, we reorganized our department, the Strategic Communications and Community Engagement Department based on the needs of both the organization and the Community. So staff and communications and engagement are kind of like the city social intelligence system. It's our job to know what's happening, what's being said about city programs and services.

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Laura Mousseau

Municipal government in general, you know, whether it's in the news, it's on social media, it's through project engagement or special interest groups. So we process, analyze and share this information across the organization to foster more collaborations and connections. And that helps us also ensure that as an organization, we're providing proactive strategic advice in the best interest of our community based on what we see in here. And as Glenn mentioned, we've.

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Laura Mousseau

Carefully sequenced all of this work over the next four years, considering project dependencies or capacity, organizational impacts, and budget needs.

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Laura Mousseau

So for example, things like a new website or new internal communications tools and more frequent satisfaction survey touch points or things that we'll have to budget for in the 2024 multi year budget. So those will take a little bit longer.

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Laura Mousseau

It is.

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Wendy (Guest)

Yeah. I mean, it's a whole new world. I don't think anybody who who was hired, you know a couple

decades ago, one decade ago, five years ago, probably, it's all changed as to what you have to know and you know what you can say and what you shouldn't say and you know that's all part of today's world, right. So.

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Laura Mousseau

Yeah, there's a lot of change for sure.

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Wendy (Guest)

A lot of change. Yeah. So, Umm, obviously community can have input in all of this. How do they do that and when should they do that?

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Glen Lombard

Yeah, great question.

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Laura Mousseau

Right. Well, yeah, yeah, go ahead.

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Glen Lombard

Yeah. Yeah, I think you know, we know that.

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Glen Lombard

You none of this happens by just us, just sort of snapping our fingers and and sort of saying engage with us.

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Glen Lombard

Like we've already talked about, we have to create the conditions for people to feel safer for them to feel like their voices are heard, and that by showing up and contributing their time, their knowledge, their lived experience, that the city makes better decisions, develops more inclusive plans and and delivers programs and services that that reflect the diversity of our city. So that that is really key.

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Laura Mousseau

Yeah, and being able to engage with us means being informed as well. So you know, we really want people to be civically engaged to get involved with local government or at least to know what's happening at the local government level, you know, municipalities or the level of government that really touches people most directly day-to-day. So knowing how your local government works, how decisions are made, what services are provided here at the local level versus at other levels of government, how your property taxes.

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Laura Mousseau

For allocated to schools and different levels of government, like all of that is something people can learn about following us on social media, visiting our website, reading City News releases or or just following local news stories, and so that, you know, that's a really good starting point. Once you know how things work and what's going on, you're better prepared to be able to engage and provide meaningful feedback, which we we really value.

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Wendy (Guest)

Absolutely. So one city, 1 voice shared purpose. Uh, it sounds exciting and daunting at the same time. Thank you so much, Laura and Glenn, for all your time and expertise.

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Laura Mousseau

Yeah. Thanks, Wendy.

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Glen Lombard

Thanks, Wendy.