

Report to Council

Report Title: Website News Module Upgrade

Prepared By: Sarah Johnson, Jr. Deputy Clerk and Fiona Hamilton, Clerk

Department: Clerk's

Date: June 22, 2021

Report Number: CLK2021-23 **File Number:** C11CL, M08

Attachments: Quote from eSolutions for Upgrading Website News Module

Recommendation:

That the Council of the Municipality of Brockton hereby receives Report Number CLK2021-23 - Website News Module Upgrade, prepared by Sarah Johnson, Jr. Deputy Clerk and Fiona Hamilton, Clerk and in doing so provides pre-budget approval to upgrade the news manager module for the municipal website and include the \$4,174 in the 2022 Operating Budget.

Report:

Background:

The Municipality of Brockton's website features a News Manager module allowing residents to subscribe to alternative sources of news and alerts which are then emailed directly to subscribers' inboxes. The Municipality has been using this feature over the past seven (7) years. While the Municipality has upgraded the overall website twice in the past seven (7) years, certain interior components/features of the website remain the same and have not yet been upgraded.

On June 1, 2021 staff received an email from our website provider, eSolutions Group Inc. indicating that the News Manager module would be upgraded to a new version this Winter. The current version would expire and would no longer be supported as of December 15, 2021. As a result, eSolutions have recommended that the Municipality migrate to the new version of the software.

The new version has been upgraded with many new features to assist in complying with accessibility legislation, maintaining security features, and overall equipment processes.

Analysis:

The upgraded News Manager module would allow staff to continue distributing news articles through the website, as well as the ability to:

- Create news pages and alerts

- Create visually engaging News articles with tables, accordions (drop downs), layout builder components, and even pull in shared content snippets
- Create multiple different News listings (views) that contain different Categories to allow users to filter news articles.
- New and improved template for notifications to subscriber ([Example of the new template](#))

However, this new upgrade costs approximately \$4,174 (including a 15% discount), which includes project management, installation and set up of the new categories, migrating existing news items and subscribers, training, and the launch of the platform. A detailed quotation has been attached to this report for Council's information.

Staff contacted eSolutions to inquire about the change, and the short turnaround time involved. eSolutions did apologize for the lack of notice or preparation on this matter, advising that in future, upgrades to services would be communicated to clients over an 18-month period. eSolutions are undergoing a review of the services and products they offer to find efficiencies, and provide a better experience for clients to make the services easier to access, and updated to comply with legislation and technical requirements on a regular basis. Staff were advised that in future, these types of upgrade costs would likely be included within the annual maintenance fee for the website.

Staff were also provided the option of waiting to upgrade the software until January 2022 in order to better assist with the fiscal cycle, and 2022 Budget Deliberations since this cost was not included in the 2021 Municipal Budget. Staff were able to obtain an updated quotation with this option of being invoiced in January 2022, and also including a 15% discount. Staff recommend choosing this option since funds were not budgeted for this recently announced upgrade. Further, there is approximately \$10,000.00 currently in the reserve fund for website upgrades. As the news manager shows, even small component upgrades can be expensive, and significant funds may be required in the future for an overall refresh and update. As a result, staff recommend maintaining the reserve fund as is for potential larger unknown upgrades.

The Municipality have the following News Categories through the website:

- Brockton Buzz Newsletter
- Council and Committee News
- Emergency Alert Banner (Includes the red alert banner on homepage of website – Currently featuring COVID-19 information)
- Homepage Scroll News (News is featured on homepage of website under the search bar)
- News and Alerts
- Public Notices
- Recreation News and Alerts
- Service Disruptions

Though the COVID-19 pandemic has altered the usual news content staff distribute for recreation news/programs, the remaining categories are all still used to share news and alerts with the public, especially through Service Disruptions of road closures, Emergency Alerts about the COVID-19 pandemic, and Public Notices for Media Releases (including those issued by the Province and Grey Bruce Health Unit regarding the pandemic).

Currently, the Municipality has 1,630 subscribers in the website News module, with new subscriptions as recent as June 20, 2021.

As evidenced in the Strategic Action Planning process, including the final Action Items for the Plan, and on the original survey distributed to residents and businesses, the majority of residents enjoy receiving News Items sent straight to their email inbox.

Although, most News Items are also shared consequently on social media to ensure all demographics are aware of the matter, the News Items provide residents with easily accessible news directly to their email, as well as featuring it on our website, and being available in the website's search. For content such as the Brockton Buzz Newsletter which does include online/electronic only issues, the News Module also provides a way to share that newsletter directly to residents.

If the News Manager module were not upgraded, this poses challenges in communicating with residents, and possible impacts to the website structure since the News feature would no longer be established, and residents would only be able to follow our social media accounts, and search our website or use the menu navigation to locate information. Staff would also not be able to post an Alert Banner on the homepage of the website, as currently being used to display COVID-19 information, or sent out emailed News Items to residents. Staff have been encouraging residents to subscribe to this service over the past number of years, also including information in each edition of the Brockton Buzz Newsletter to remind residents of this service.

It should also be noted that staff recommend migrating existing News Items and subscribers to the newer module. If these migration options were not purchased, staff would be starting fresh with all News Items, meaning that any old news would no longer be available, or accessible in searches; and the Municipality would not have any subscriptions to the News Manager - therefore, having to re-advertise and encourage any prior subscribers to sign up again. This would be frustrating to those currently subscribed to the website News who would no longer receive emails when we upgrade the module. The most efficient transition would be to migrate existing news items and subscribers in the new version.

This service continues to benefit residents, and as staff continue to update the website content for annual refreshes, as well as updates resulting from the Land Use Planning Review, and Strategic Action Plan, and preparing for the 2022 Election, staff recommend upgrading the News Manager module.

Sustainability Checklist:

What aspect of the Brockton Sustainable Strategic Plan does the content/recommendations in this report help advance?

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| • Do the recommendations help move the Municipality closer to its Vision? | Yes |
| • Do the recommendations contribute to achieving Cultural Vibrancy? | Yes |
| • Do the recommendations contribute to achieving Economic Prosperity? | Yes |
| • Do the recommendations contribute to Environmental Integrity? | Yes |
| • Do the recommendations contribute to the Social Equity? | Yes |

Financial Impacts/Source of Funding:

- Do the recommendations represent a sound financial investment from a sustainability perspective? Yes

Since funds were not budgeted in 2021 for this upgrade, staff were provided with the option to upgrade the module and be invoiced in January 2022 including a 15% discount on the original quote.

Therefore, as per the 15% discount quote, it would cost a total of \$4,174 to upgrade the News Module (which includes project management, installation/integration of templates, configuring the News setup, migrating existing News Items and subscribers, training, and launching the entire module). Staff are requesting pre-budget approval for these funds to be included in the 2022 operating budget so that the upgrade can occur seamlessly for residents.

Reviewed By:



Trish Serratore, Chief Financial Officer

Respectfully Submitted by:



Sarah Johnson, Jr. Deputy Clerk



Fiona Hamilton, Clerk

Reviewed By:



Sonya Watson, Chief Administrative Officer