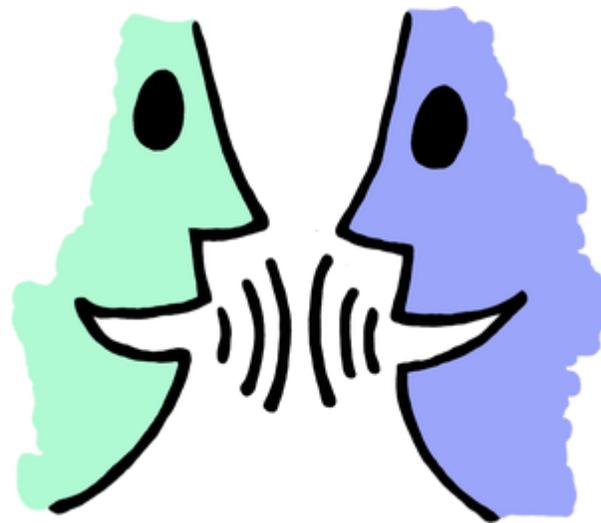




**STRATHCONA
COUNTY**

**2020 June SCOOP Mixed Topic Survey:
Communication from Strathcona County
during COVID**



Research Results

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Communications

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I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In June 2020, Strathcona County conducted an online survey as part of its Strathcona County Online Opinion Panel (SCOOP) initiative. This project, entitled *the Mixed Topic Survey*, consisted of different survey areas whereby only a limited number of questions were asked within one or more topic areas and was exclusive to residents who signed up to be part of SCOOP. The June 2020 mix topic survey consisted of questions pertaining to how well the County communicated with residents during the COVID pandemic and with one's recreation experiences during COVID.

Obtaining primary data from residents directly will provide Strathcona County departments with information and enable County officials to make decisions that accurately reflect the perspectives and attitudes of residents. This report will provide a comprehensive review of all steps undertaken in the development and implementation of the survey, as well as a detailed summary of the results. The results from this study were prepared by Phil Kreisel, Ph.D. (Communications) in June 2020; SPSS was used for the data analysis.

This report covers a series of questions associated with Strathcona County's communication efforts with residents during the COVID pandemic situation. A review of the methodology associated in the development and implementation all aspects of the survey can be found in the next section of this report.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. The Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was new, using questions that were submitted by department representatives from Communication. Using these questions, the survey was created, reviewed and modified where necessary by members of Survey Central for wording, question ordering and general understanding. This included a final check of the content by FOIP¹ prior to the release of the survey to the public.

B. Sampling Design and Data Collection Procedure

The sample frame used in this study consisted of 502 people who had previously signed up to be part of SCOOP, Strathcona County’s online opinion panel. Overall, 74.1% of the participants lived in the urban area, 23.1% came from rural parts of Strathcona County, and the remaining 2.8% worked in Strathcona County but did not live there.

The sample frame provided overall results² accurate to within $\pm 4.4\%$, 19 times out of 20. The data was gathered via the online SCOOP platform in June 2020.

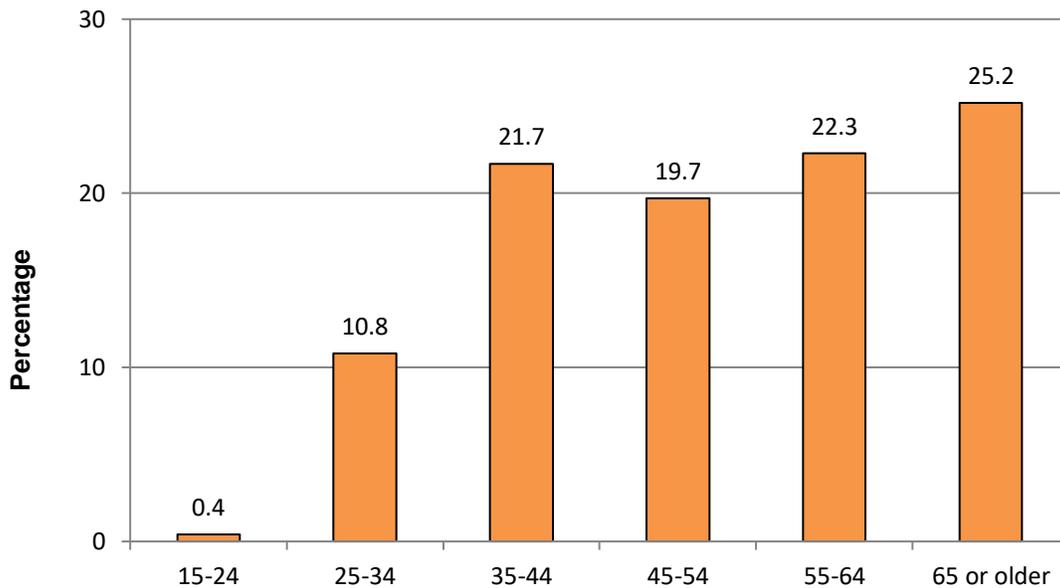
During the fielding of the survey, respondents had the option to skip a section if they felt that the topic had no relevance to them.

¹ FOIP stands for Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy and was reviewed by selected members from Strathcona County’s Legislation and Legal Department (LLS).

² The $\pm 4.4\%$ is the *margin of error* associated with this study and refers to the potential percentage spread that exists within answers to particular questions. This means that an answer could be up to 4.4% higher or lower than what is reported. Please note, however, that the data was gathered through an online survey and no controls were undertaken to make this a random sample.

As seen in Figure 1, the majority of respondents who participated in the survey are over the age of 44, with 32.5% of the participants between the age of 25 and 44. Only a very small percentage of participants were under 25. Overall, 62.8% of participants were female while 37.2% were male.

FIGURE 1
Age of Respondents



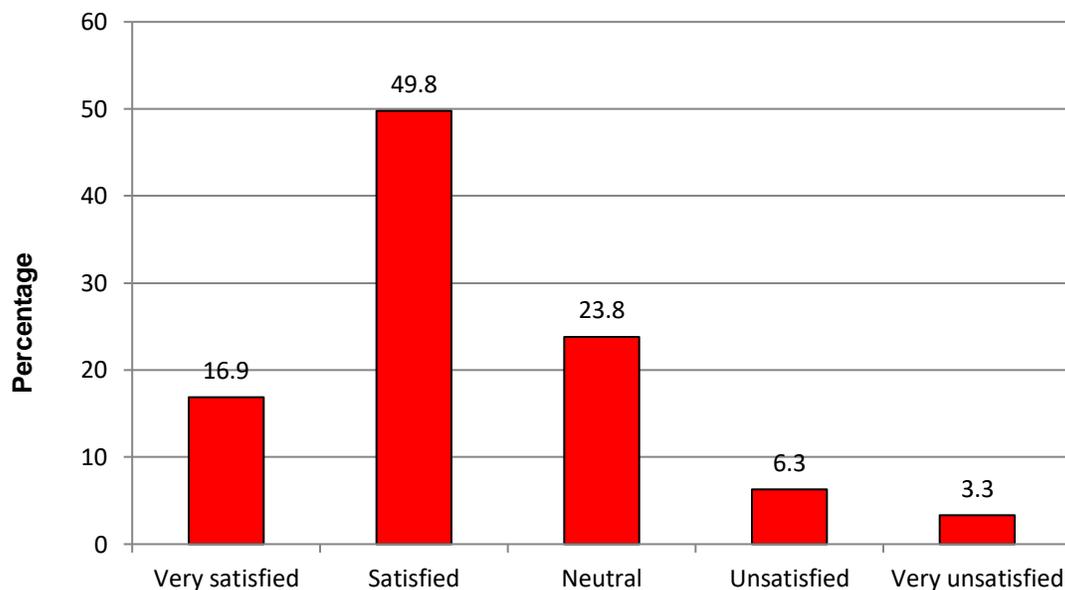
III. SURVEY RESULTS

Respondents were asked if they would like to answer a series of questions about Strathcona County’s communication efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, 98% of the participants opted to answer questions on this topic.

A. Quality of Communication Messages

Respondents who opted to answer questions on this topic area were initially asked how satisfied they were overall with the quality of communication messages coming from Strathcona County related to COVID-19. It can be seen from Figure 2 that 66.7% were either very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of the messages. With the remaining responses, 23.8% gave these a neutral rating, while 9.6% were not satisfied.

FIGURE 2
Overall satisfaction with the quality of communication from Strathcona County



There were no differences seen with respect to urban/rural residents for this question. With respect to age groups, a further analysis found that satisfaction levels (a combined very satisfied/satisfied) on the quality of communication were highest among those aged 15-34 (81.1%) compared to those aged 35-64 (66.9%) and those aged 65 or older (62.8%).

B. Reasons for not being satisfied with Communication Messages

Respondents were asked to elaborate on what the reasons were for rating the quality of communication messages sent out by the County on COVID-19. Among those who were not satisfied with the messages:

- Aside from two or three texts, have heard very little. County was boasting early in the pandemic that all other surrounding municipalities had staff layoffs but the County had not. This is NOT a good thing from a taxpayer's standpoint. Why are we paying people who worked at closed facilities???
- Confusing information coming from many sources. Exactly what is the correct procedure? In hospitals the techs do not even wear masks or gloves in some areas. To wear a mask or not to?
- Didn't have any info that wasn't already provided.
- Didn't look for any until recently regarding opening up the fields.
- I did not hear or see anybody communication from the County in regards to COVID, other than roadside signs telling us to social distance.
- I find the Strathcona website frustrating to maneuver and have been checking the local paper but the information is not timely. Updates could be sent through an app that residents could download
- I haven't gotten any info. unless I looked for it.
- I heard most from chat groups on face book or from the news! How was the county relaying the information?
- I stopped using SC Alerts because it was being used to talk about mental health and counselling - those are not emergency bulletins.
- Increased reiteration of provincial and federal guidelines, as it would pertain to SC, would have been useful. Generally, the frequency of communication was low, at least on social media platforms.
- More county specific info on news stations. It seems our county is ALWAYS left out

- Most of the information I read in Strathcona is focused more on the economical side of this virus. What is happening at our doctor's offices and our Medi center?
- Nothing much on Strathcona County or specifically Sherwood Park on the TV i.e. Global
- Number of COVID-19 don't reflect true ... (*sentence not completed by respondent*)
- Perhaps we could have a site-specific posting for only Sherwood Park and Strathcona County instead of having to go to Alberta site to see cases. Perhaps a site for restaurants open and doing take out...instead of relying on FB site to keep us updated. This is where we live...anything pertaining to SP and SC should be on a site that's easy to maneuver.
- Slow and vague communication, seem to always be a few steps behind
- The Family and Community Services in my opinion were very poor in communicating anything. Strathcona County was fair in communication. What was communicated was good information. But, really had to find it myself.
- The paper flyer sent to every home in Strathcona was a waste of tax payers' money. It was totally redundant. It gave no more information than that which was broadcast on every news service, 4 times a day, every day for the previous 2 months
- Very little online and we had no access to papers
- What communications? The only thing I have seen is what's in the Sherwood Park papers.
- YouTube is not a good way to share information.

C. Reasons for Being Satisfied with Communication Messages

A number of ideas were also put forward by those who were satisfied with the messages sent out, though many residents have blurred the lines between those messages produced by Strathcona County and those from other sources. There were, however, those who were in favor of Mayor Frank's various messages:

- A lot of duplication of information available from provincial sources.
- Appreciated Mayor Frank's updates on Facebook.
- County communications have been timely and on point throughout.

- Found out information from local newspapers, TV news updates with Deena Hinshaw as well as Fort Saskatchewan radio program
- Have been following Mayor Frank on FB
- I appreciate how the Mayor has personally improved his communications during this pandemic. Regular updates from him on multiple platforms helped prevent the spread of misinformation and builds trust during an unsettling time. His communications in addition to the County COVID -19 resources are appreciated! I believe information needs to be shared frequently as the situation is evolving every day.
- I appreciate RPC's FB post on June 9 after Kenney's announcement for Stage 2 opening early. A very responsible communication, well written.
- I appreciate the Mayor's communication on Facebook. I feel that the County did the best they could with all the last minute changes the province had made.
- I appreciated the Mayor's use of video over social media platforms to engage with the community. I think that gave more people the opportunity to participate and have their questions heard.
- I didn't feel an SC Alert was required about mental health supports. This information was shared, but it seemed strange coming as an alert.
- I especially liked the daily updates in Facebook by Mayor Frank.
- I feel that the County was simply repeating news we'd heard from the province. Too much of the same message often results in becoming desensitized to the message and we don't hear.
- I followed Rod Frank's updates on Facebook (his account with the black and white photo). That was my go-to for COVID19 communications. Clear, concise, and I could get the most important information without being sucked into a black hole of reading about the doom and gloom of COVID19. Really appreciated his posts!!!
- I have followed the provincial rules and the food bank. I believe the signs and information boards are very effective.
- I knew info was here but I went with the news from the province.
- I love that this mayor has taken to social media to inform us - by the time we get the paper, its old news.
- I mainly rely on the province for COVID19 updates.
- I really enjoy the Mayor's form (s) of constant communication. I'm thinking he should head up the communication department in his spare time. Lol. He has done a top-notch job of communicating!
- I was impressed to see the signage out on the roads.

- Important to support all area newspapers, not just in Sh. Park, as Strathcona has a wide-ranging market area and small towns within 50-100 km rely on local newspapers to get news even more than in larger centres.
- Information is coming from ALL levels of Government - sometimes it feels like we just get the same information over and over.
- It was not information overkill so we appreciated that.
- It's always helpful for any information that the County knows to pass it along as quickly as possible - either through scoop or newspapers
- Kudos to the Communications Dept. ...You have done a great job relaying the Provincial updates as well as keeping residents informed of the changes & updates from Strathcona, this cannot be an easy task!
- Like the signage all over the county and the website with easy to find details
- Liked that the response was clear, firm, and immediate
- Lots of information coming out, responding when the Province releases a large update. I think it's been going very well.
- Mayor report on FaceTime is great but I have missed parts of it. I hope the county follows what council believes and not what the premier's office dictates.
- Mayor's videos were a good outlet for reaching residents would encourage councilors to do the same.
- more available tracking/illness numbers
- More details about what is opening when. I.e. splash parks, pools,
- No problems with communication
- Not sure what they can do better with fed gov't non-decisions
- Sometimes unsure if information is true or not
- The communication from the County has been great. The only reason I didn't mark very satisfied is that at times I felt it may have been too much. Several different sources releasing updates with no new or additional information.
- The County did a good job of keeping residents updated.
- The County has done a good job. Thank you
- The county has shared COVID - 19 information quite well
- The mayor has been wonderful at relaying info about COVID 19
- The Mayor's communication, in particular, has been great
- The SC Alerts messages were getting a little long. Shorter messages with directions of where to get more info would have been nice.

- The signage and information are very helpful in reminding people...
- The signage at the different facilities was readily accessed ... bright and large
- There has been a lot of information in the community paper
- There is always room for improvement.
- There was a lot of info and plenty of repetition. I tended to skim and focus on new info. I liked the process you used.
- We are bombarded with information about COVID from many sources and it's all overwhelming - Strathcona County is not providing any different information than we are getting from everywhere.
- We have found the County Paper to be good with information
- Whenever new announcements have happened, I've checked the county website and there has always seemed to be fast, clear information about how the newest announcements relate to the county specifically. I also had my daughter enrolled in Pre-K with the county in March when the shutdowns happened, and the cancellations were communicated clearly and quickly as well. The updates on the app about playgrounds opening/closing have been helpful as well.
- Why is the Ardrossan recycling station not open for phase 2?
- Your communications teams have done an excellent job. Clear messages, effective tone ... well done! And thank you for including and reiterating the support available through the family and community services department. Their work is so very important during this time, and will continue to be post-pandemic. Even if not accessed directly, just being aware that there is support available can have its own positive impact.

D. Reasons for taking a Neutral Stance with Communication Messages

A number of ideas were also put forward by those who took a neutral stance with the messages sent out. Some residents were unaware that Strathcona County was communicating with residents specifically about COVID, and many of the comments leaned toward negative perceptions and those from other sources. There were also some people who thought that the entire COVID-19 pandemic was overblown, and it appears that no messages created would convince this portion of the population otherwise. The comments start below:

- A lot of conflicting information

- County did its best as always, task force in place but the info is often useless because no one knows where incidents occurred. So it's just info that scares people and doesn't inform to make proper adult decisions where to avoid if needed
- Did not know the County was communicating about COVID.
- Hard to find online.
- Honestly I've mostly gone to Alberta.ca for info.
- I actually can't think of many communications.
- I am not sure that I have received any communication from the county regarding COVID.
- I did not get out much except to work and back home.
- I didn't read the newspaper or do social media for Strathcona county during COVID.
- I don't look to S.C. for any information on COVID-19.
- I don't recall any info on Sherwood Park's COVID -19 effects.
- I don't recall seeing anything specific about the county.
- I follow news to find out what's happening, and the decisions are being made that affect me WAY above the county level. But I trust that the county would be an effective messenger if the need arose
- I found info from Sherwood Park News which was often old.
- I have not heard a lot from the county.
- I have not turned to County resources. I have been using local news and websites for updates.
- I have seen posts on FaceBook etc. but I really don't want to watch a coffee session with the Mayor and people to get information.
- I haven't been relying on County information, mostly on that from the province, and my wife and I are both provincial employees.
- I haven't seen much info from Strathcona County specifically.
- I think it was all overstated! That's the gov'ts doing!
- I'm not on social media do the only County-doe I fix info I received was from the local paper.
- I'm not sure what locally would be critical to communicate as all the direction has been provincial, with municipalities just following along.
- I've not heard much coming from the county.
- If we wanted to know something about the county we used the county website. Were there any other sources?
- In my opinion, this virus has been over blown and has added extra stress to people's livesboth financially and mentally. Not once has

there been talk about building one's immune system by taking vitamins and minerals. Once again, just my opinion, our governments are up to something and it is not a good thing. Our freedoms are slowly being stripped away. This virus was not any different than the previous that have come and gone.

- Information should be sent with utility bills.
- Mixed messages- County rules different from Edmonton or St Albert.
- More detail is better, rather than just doing things or keeping it short.
- Most information I heard was from provincial and national sources.
- Most of the info I have received came from the provincial government via radio and TV news. I don't recall any specific news coming from the county.
- Mostly it was hearsay, not direct communication.
- Never get any communication or notification when and if facilities are opening or scheduled to open via email.
- Not interested.
- Not too sure where the information was posted.
- Other than occasionally seeing the mayor on Facebook, I have not really received any communication re COVID.
- Overblown
- Rec'd info through the local paper only.
- Received very little information specific to county matters.
- The only info I've seen is in the Sherwood Parks News - which is getting harder and harder to find.
- Update information started slow in the County. Online was there somewhat but not everyone (some seniors) can access that.
- Would be nice to have more advertising showing the ways people can clean or sanitize during this time.
- Would have appreciated having statistics readily available.
- Would have liked to know how many cases were active weekly.
- You're just repeating what the provincial or federal government is saying.

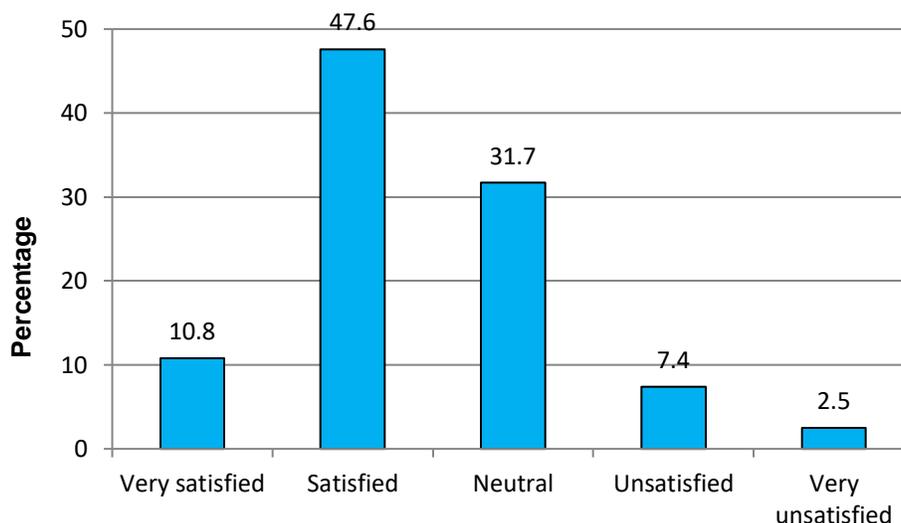
E. Other Research Questions pertaining to Communication Messaging

It was also found that 4.9% of respondents felt overwhelmed by the amount of communication coming from Strathcona County related to COVID-19. No differences were seen between urban/rural or age groups for this question.

With respect to value, 72.2% of respondents found the information shared by Strathcona County on COVID-19 to be valuable to them. Respondents were also asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the overall frequency of communication messages on COVID-19. No differences were seen between urban/rural or age groups for this question.

It can be seen in Figure 3 that 59.4% were either very satisfied or satisfied with this, with most of the remaining people taking a neutral stance. Only 9.9% were unsatisfied (or very unsatisfied) with this.

FIGURE 3
Overall satisfaction with the frequency of communication messages
Strathcona County



A further analysis found that those living in rural Strathcona were slightly more satisfied with the frequency of messages (64.6%) compared to

those living in Sherwood Park (57.2%), but the difference was not statistically significant.

The last question in the survey on COVID-19 communications presented respondents with a list asking them to indicate where they had been finding the majority of information related to any COVID-19 municipal updates from Strathcona County. The results were as follows:

- Local newspaper – 47.2%
- Strathcona County’s Website – 44.1%
- Strathcona County Alerts – 38.6%
- Strathcona County’s Facebook page(s) - 28.9%
- Word of mouth – 24.2%
- Facebook group – 15.4%
- Strathcona County’s Twitter – 11.6%
- Strathcona County’s Instagram – 5.5%
- Other (63 responses) – 12.8% - These included messages from sources outside the County, such as Alberta Health Services, Billboards, TV, radio or news websites. There were also a number of residents who cited messages obtained from Mayor Ron Frank, either through Facebook presentations by him, posts or twitter feeds. A few residents also recalled community signage.