

2024 City of Fort Saskatchewan Brand Review

Report Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a high-level overview of the key findings and Administration's recommendations from the Brand Review project.

Summary of Work Completed

The project commenced in late 2023 and continued into early 2024. The project was divided into three phases:

- **Phase 1: Technical Audit**
 - A detailed analysis of existing branding assets.
 - Evaluation using a grading matrix to score the standards and consistency of brand elements.
 - Identification of gaps and areas needing improvement.
- **Phase 2: Public Engagement**
 - Conducted public surveys to gather input on the current brand perception.
 - Organized multiple workshop sessions with staff, stakeholders, and community members.
 - Collected and analyzed qualitative feedback from key industry participants.
- **Phase 3: Internal Review**
 - Evaluated processes, policies, and personnel to determine opportunities and barriers.
 - Engaged with various departments to understand the current use of branding materials.
 - Assessed the alignment between internal practices and the external brand image.

Overview of Findings and Administration's Recommendations

Phase 1: Technical Audit

The Technical Audit produced three findings:

1. **Finding 1: Opportunity to Develop a Citywide Brand Strategy**
 - The City currently lacks a Master Brand Strategy, which ensures unified brands and campaigns with long-term goals. This strategy provides a framework for all branding efforts, promoting consistency and overall cohesion.
 - Developing this formal strategy can help the City and its departments unify their marketing and advertising efforts, reducing brand confusion and increasing brand awareness.

Recommendations:

- Develop a comprehensive Citywide Master Brand strategy that includes standards and policies for the City, department sub-brands, and campaigns.
- Update existing brands to align with the new strategy, considering cost-effectiveness. Brand assets due for maintenance or replacement soon can be grandfathered in, with plans to update them as part of the regular maintenance cycle.
- Eliminate brands that do not fit the new strategy to streamline the brand family, simplify brand management, enhance comprehension, and strengthen recognition. A brand family is the collection of all City and department brand assets.

2. Finding 2: Opportunity to Complete and Enhance Brand Components

- Critical brand assets across the City and departments are incomplete or missing due to various constraints or evolving brand requirements (e.g. new digital requirements).
- Issues include missing logo files, underdeveloped brands and brand guidelines (e.g. unclear guidelines on fonts, logo usage, colours, or tone), and limited brand templates.

Recommendations:

- Address barriers to ensure future brand developments have the necessary assets for successful management.
- Dedicate resources to finalize logo and brand assets as required.
- Update all graphic design platforms to support strong brand management (e.g. ensuring all fonts and colours are preset), ensure easy access to department brand files, and provide brand guidelines education.

3. Finding 3: Opportunity to Establish Clear, Citywide Brand Standards

- The City's various brands, designs, tones, and messages do not consistently meet industry standards, leading to mixed experiences and perceptions.
- These inconsistencies impact the City's ability to develop a cohesive voice, build trust and credibility with the community, and implement a strong overall brand strategy.

Recommendations:

- Establish and educate staff on Citywide brand standards and expectations.
- Maintain and enhance the practice of having all City brands, marketing, advertising, and communications managed by Corporate Communications and approved vendors.
- Strengthen the [Communications and Marketing policy \(GEN-008-A\)](#) to clarify processes and expectations for brand standards and management.
- Conduct regular checks on designed-based programs (e.g. Canva), facilities, and consumer experiences to gauge compliance with policies and procedures.
- Conduct regular branding reminders and workshops, share success stories, and provide ongoing support to increase engagement with Corporate Communications.

Phase 2: Public Engagement

1. Public Online Survey:

- **Participation:**
 - A total of 797 contributors submitted 875 contributions during the survey phase.
 - Majority of respondents identified as residents (91.8%), followed by local business owners (8.2%), City staff (8.0%), and local community partners (6.5%). (Note: Multiple selections were possible)
- **Key Findings:**
 - **Community Perceptions:** Responses to the questions “When you think of our city, what are the first three words or phrases that come to mind?” and “What message do you think our City’s brand/image should communicate to the world?” reinforced the City’s understanding of the community’s perceptions and values, and key messages to external audiences.
 - **Suggestions for Improvements:** Common themes for suggested improvements included design and aesthetic enhancements, simplicity and cohesion, and better representation of diversity and our unique identifiers.
 - **Master City Logo Findings:**
 - **Appeal:** Over 80% of respondents rated the logo with at least average appeal: 40% average, and 41% above average or high appeal.
 - **Connection:** Approximately 60% of respondents felt moderately, very, or strongly connected to the logo.
 - **Representation:**
 - 74% indicated the logo represents the city’s culture and community values moderately, well, or very well.
 - 56% indicated the logo somewhat to not-at-all adequately reflects the community’s diversity.
 - **Department Logos and Marketing Materials Findings:** (included Dow Centennial Centre, Harbour Pool, Fort Heritage Precinct, Shell Theatre, Family and Community Support Services, and Fort Sask Transit)
 - **Logo Familiarity:** Dow Centennial Centre had the highest level of familiarity, followed by Fort Sask Transit and Fort Heritage Precinct. Harbour Pool had the lowest familiarity, followed by FCSS, then Shell Theatre.
 - **Logo Appeal:** Fort Heritage Precinct’s logo was the most appealing, followed by Fort Sask Transit and FCSS. Harbour Pool’s logo was scored as the least appealing, followed by Dow Centennial Centre. Shell Theatre’s logo appeal scored “Average.”
 - **Marketing Materials Appeal:** Shell Theatre had the highest appeal for marketing materials, followed by Fort Heritage Precinct and Fort Sask Transit.

Dow Centennial Centre had the lowest appeal, followed by Harbour Pool. FCSS scored “Average.”

- **Overall Survey Insights:**

- The City’s master logo generally performed well. There is no strong indication that an extensive City redesign is desired or required.
- There is an opportunity to enhance the representation of community diversity. Integrating elements that reflect this diversity and including diverse content in marketing and communications materials could help the public perceive the City’s master brand as inclusive and representative.
- Major department logos and marketing materials should aim for at least “Moderately Familiar” ratings, as they represent key City services and facilities. This can be achieved through improved branding, brand management, promotions, and community engagement.
- The branding and marketing materials of the recreation departments were identified as needing the most improvement.

2. **Brand Review Workshops:**

- **Staff Workshop:**

- **Attendance:** 24 staff members from all departments participated.
- **Insights:**
 - The workshop format was designed to include participants with varying levels of branding experience, which led to general questions and answers, resulting in limited branding insights in several question areas.
 - Potential brand tones and character-building opportunities within the City’s master brand were identified. Key feedback described Fort Saskatchewan as being on the “Cusp of Adulthood,” showing a mix of underdeveloped and sophisticated brand elements and experiences.
 - The City’s master brand needs a clear, distinct character and defined values and purpose.
 - Targeted, department-specific workshops are recommended in the future. These would be conducted in-house by the Corporate Communications department.

- **Community and Industry Workshop:**

- **Attendance:** Five participants.
- **Insights:**
 - The low attendance hindered the ability to gather formal findings or insights.
 - Some community groups and industry partners may not have had the time or interest to participate.
 - A new approach is needed to engage this group effectively.

- **Public Workshop:**

- **Attendance:** 32 participants, including residents, businesses, and visitors.
- **Insights:**
 - Participants were educated about the project, the City's brand family, and the current branding system. They were particularly surprised by the complexity and depth of the City's brand system and generally expressed their support for the current master brand.
 - Attendees provided questions and insights, contributing to the overall understanding of the City's branding. Attendees shared similar insights to those of the staff group.

3. Overall Public Engagement Findings:

- **Complexity of Branding:**
 - Some participants did not fully understand the concept of branding. A disproportionate emphasis was placed on the City's master logo.
 - Based on inferences, a strong preference for the City's master logo likely reflects a strong connection to the community and its history, as opposed to the shapes, colours, and fonts used in the logo itself.
- **Social Media Feedback:**
 - Social media, particularly Facebook, often skews negative and should not be the primary feedback source.
 - Engagement tactics not explicitly connected to the "Brand Review" received more positive social media responses. For example, 10 social media polls conducted without mentioning the Brand Review project received positive feedback and comments.
- **Awareness of Department Brands:**
 - Limited marketing exposure, incomplete brand assets, niche audiences or service offerings, or suboptimal brand management processes may have contributed to low awareness.
 - Multiple brands require increased awareness, a brand management strategy, and a reinforcement plan.

Phase 3: Internal Review

1. Findings 1: Opportunity to Enhance Corporate Communications Integration and Setup

- Corporate Communications' current service level setup, integration with other departments, and asset ownership policy impact other departments' overall branding and marketing success.
- The Corporate Communications team is not always positioned to lead the required work due to several factors, indicating an opportunity for improved setup and training.

Recommendations:

- Establish Corporate Communications to function like an in-house advertising, marketing, and communications agency to ensure all basic needs are met and managed by professionals regardless of other departments' budgets or staffing capacities. Establish regular touchpoints with every department to stay on top of their needs.
- Reduce dependency on external vendors for standard department requirements. Ensure all Corporate Communications staff are well-positioned, trained, and capable of developing and managing marketing, advertising, and communications plans for all City departments.
- Increase the department's annual training and seminar budget to ensure staff can stay up-to-date with the ever-evolving marketing and digital best practices.
- Better integrate Corporate Communications into all departments, ensuring they are viewed as part of the other departments' day-to-day team.

2. Findings 2: Opportunity to Enhance Corporate Communications' Size and Capabilities:

- Team size and budget limitations often necessitate outsourcing to less experienced professionals or relying on internal DIY production, resulting in varying quality and standards.
- The review highlighted that Corporate Communications' ability to provide internal services is limited, specifically with creative and media services.

Recommendations:

- Review the service delivery model to assess the benefits and limitations of additional in-house communications support versus external contracted support.
- This review would consider the potential need for professionals, such as graphic designers, copywriters, and media personnel, to oversee and enhance the City's brand ecosystem, ensuring consistency, professionalism, and strategic growth. It would also look at cost benefits.

3. Findings 3: Opportunity to Enhance Role Clarity and Department Cooperation

- Clarify the roles between departments and Corporate Communications to ensure clear ownership of branding, marketing, advertising, and communications. This will reduce confusion, promote consistent approaches and outcomes, and enhance standards and community experiences.
- Continue assessing and addressing any possible barriers, internally or externally, to further support a positive, cooperative, and strategic approach to developing work.

Recommendations:

- Foster a strong understanding of the value of branding, communications, and marketing throughout the organization.
- Establish clear expectations for maintaining high standards in all branding and communications efforts.
- Support collaboration between departments and Corporate Communications to ensure cohesive branding and marketing initiatives.

- Prevent barriers from impacting the City's branding strategies.

4. Findings 4: Opportunity to Improve Marketing Budget Management

- Marketing budgets are currently distributed across various departments. This fragmented allocation results in varied approaches to marketing management, resource utilization, and campaign effectiveness, leading to a lack of cohesion and unified representation of the City's brands.
- Individual departments can procure media and creative services without input from Corporate Communications, further increasing inconsistencies.

Recommendations:

- Consolidate marketing-based GL codes into the Corporate Communications department. Corporate Communications would then be better able to set Citywide marketing goals, buy bulk media and creative services, streamline messages and channels, limit redundant or ineffective spending, and apply high standards.
- Strengthen the relationship between departments to create a clear and streamlined path for collaboration, workflow, and approvals. This will help ensure that all marketing efforts are aligned, efficient, and consistently represent the city's brand.

Summary of Next Steps

1. Enhance the City Master Brand

- Establish a clear brand character and tone, expanding guidelines to include comprehensive standards and expectations.
- Develop secondary colours and a responsive logo system.
- Showcase more community diversity in marketing and advertising assets and explore incorporating this diversity into the master brand.
- Design a streamlined, designer-friendly logo (e.g. "Fort Sask") to complement the master brand logo.

2. Create a Citywide Brand Strategy

- Develop a comprehensive brand strategy encompassing City, sub-brand, and campaign standards.
- Update or grandfather existing brands to align with the new strategy.

3. Streamline Brand Management

- Remove non-aligned brands to simplify the brand system and enhance recognition.
- Ensure all brands have the necessary assets for maintenance.
- Reduce barriers and ensure adequate funding before developing new brands.
- Consider enhancing the Corporate Communications team to reduce outsourcing and have more control over brand standards and development.

4. Improve Brand Familiarity and Appeal

- Major department logos and materials should achieve at least "Moderately Familiar" scores.

- Focus on improving branding and marketing for recreation departments.
- Conduct targeted workshops for department-specific branding education and needs.

5. Increase Professional Oversight

- Ensure all branding, marketing, and communications are managed by Corporate Communications or Corporate Communications-approved professionals.
- Reduce access to design programs to reduce DIY designs.
- Conduct regular checks to ensure compliance with policies.

6. Update Platforms and Policies

- Streamline design and brand management platforms.
- Establish clear Citywide brand standards adopted by all staff.
- Reinforce City policy on brand standards and management processes.

7. Consolidate Marketing-based Budgets

- Consolidate marketing-based budgets into Corporate Communications.
- Set Citywide marketing goals, buy bulk media, and reinforce high standards.
- Ensure all design, copy, and media work is professionally managed.
- Create a clear path for work and approval processes.

Conclusion

The Brand Review project has provided insights into the City's branding ecosystem, highlighting its strengths and identifying areas for improvement. By addressing minor gaps and inconsistencies, further developing a comprehensive brand strategy, and enhancing the role of Corporate Communications, the City can create an even more cohesive and compelling brand family and system. This will resonate more deeply with the community and accurately represent the city's values and aspirations while enhancing the City's image and reputation.