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**For Information**

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REPORT TITLE: **“Peel Talks Housing” Podcast Series**

FROM: Janice Sheehy, Commissioner of Human Services

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**OBJECTIVE**

To inform Council about the podcast series “Peel Talks Housing”.

**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- Affordable housing is an incredibly complex and nuanced issue. It can be difficult to accurately capture the weight of the issue with traditional communications tactics and media relations.
  - As such, a new 12-episode series podcast, called “Peel Talks Housing” is being produced to create an opportunity to invite our community into a deeper discussion about affordable housing.
  - “Peel Talks Housing” is part of a comprehensive communications plan to advance the Peel Housing and Homelessness Plan, improve knowledge of housing and homeless issues and encourage Peel residents and other stakeholders to be part of the solution.
  - The first podcast will be released before the end of February 2022, and new podcasts will be released bi-weekly until July 2022. A robust social media promotion plan has been developed. Staff will send an alert to Regional Council the day before each podcast airs.
  - Regional staff will review and edit each podcast episode before it is published and made available to the public; a disclaimer will be used at the beginning of each episode indicating that any opinions expressed may not reflect the opinions of the Region of Peel or direction provided by Regional Council.
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**DISCUSSION**

**1. Background**

The Region of Peel is facing an affordable housing crisis. Buying or renting a home at market rate is unaffordable for 80 per cent of Peel residents, and there is a significantly higher demand for affordable housing than available supply. In the face of these challenges, Peel is implementing innovative, multi-pronged solutions to the housing crisis with the Peel Housing and Homelessness Plan (“Plan”). The Plan identifies five strategies to help residents get and keep housing:

- Transform Service
- Build More Affordable Housing
- Maximize Planning Tools and Incentives
- Optimize Existing Stock
- Increase Supportive Housing

As significant strides are made under each strategy and more direct housing support is delivered to residents in need, we recognize that the affordable housing crisis is incredibly

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complex and nuanced. It can be difficult to grasp the complexity and weight of the issue in media soundbites. As such, a new 12-episode series podcast, called ‘Peel Talks Housing’ has been produced to create an opportunity to invite our community into a deeper discussion about affordable housing.

### **2. Podcasts: An Effective Communications Tool**

Podcasts have proven to be an effective communications tool. Since the onset of the pandemic, podcast consumption on Spotify has doubled, and experts predict an estimated 160 million podcast listeners in 2023. Podcast-listening has shown to be ‘pandemic-proof’ in Canada with weekly and monthly listening rising steadily throughout COVID-19. As well, Canadian listeners are responding to Canadian podcasts with targeted content. Nearly half of all podcast listeners in Canada are under 35 years old and are a uniquely young, educated, diverse audience who are listening more as growth trends have continued climbing over the past five years.

It is still early in the realm, but podcasts are becoming mainstream media that has a valuable public relations investment for organizations. Podcasts can establish and strengthen trust and credibility with listeners and have changed the way thought leaders can reach their target audience. By regularly producing podcasts, an organization is committed to bringing relevant and engaging content to their listeners. It also demonstrates that the organization is open to meaningful interactions with partners in the field and people with differing views and experiences. As well, establishing a podcast suggests that the organization is receptive to dialogue and feedback from the audience. BC housing recently released the first episode of a new podcast series they are making focussed on the creation of new affordable housing in that province.

Podcasts can be a cost-effective solution to reaching new audiences and inviting untapped stakeholders to join conversations around solving the affordable housing crisis in Peel. The return on investment is strong. Because podcasts are so easy to access, virtually anyone can opt into the discussions from the comfort of their homes, or while in transit and become active participants in the cause. With new audiences ‘tuning in’, there is the potential to encourage action that furthers our affordable housing goals. The engagement potential is significantly less costly than traditional outreach efforts such as in-person events/conferences.

### **3. Peel Talks Housing**

In November 2020, the Region of Peel engaged the services of Obie and Ax Inc., to produce 12 podcast episodes in the estimated amount of \$55,000 plus applicable taxes, approximately \$4,500 per podcast. This includes Ideation, Design and Concepts, Production, Marketing and Promotion, and Management.

“Peel Talks Housing” is a 12-episode podcast series focused on meaningful, relatable, and thought-provoking discussions on housing issues (see Appendix I for episode details). These discussions range from policy to innovation to challenges Peel faces in Affordable Housing. Each episode will run 45-60 minutes and will include both an audio and visual component. The podcasts will be available for download on most major podcast platforms. Episodes will also be video-recorded and will be made available on Region of Peel channels (website and social media).

Each episode will include ‘show notes’ - a list of resources to complement the discussion, guest biographies, and messaging around what the Region of Peel is doing to help residents

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get and keep housing. These episodes and resources will also prove beneficial as training tools for Peel staff and its partners.

The first podcast will be released before the end of February 2022 and new podcasts will be released thereafter. A robust social media promotion plan has been developed. Staff will send an alert to Regional Council the day before each podcast airs. Listener engagement and feedback will be tracked. Further, recommendations will be offered on how to optimize the listener experience, include specific calls-to-action, and incorporate podcasts in onboarding/training for Peel staff and members of Regional Council.

It is worth noting that podcasts are considered ‘owned media’. So, while the spirit of “Peel Talks Housing” is free-flowing, honest conversations, the Region will have oversight of each episode and when they are released.

## **RISK CONSIDERATIONS**

Podcast guests will represent a diversity of experiences and perspectives. There may be instances where guests share views and recommendations that are not aligned with the Region of Peel’s strategic plans. Listeners may incorrectly assume that through the podcasts, Peel is committing to specific actions. Also, as the podcasts are being published by the Region of Peel, there is a risk of the Region being exposed to liability resulting from the content of the podcasts (for example, a claim of defamation based on comments made by a guest).

To mitigate against this risk, regional staff will review and edit each podcast episode before it is published and made available to the public. In addition, a disclaimer will be used at the beginning of each episode indicating that any opinions expressed are those of the individuals expressing them and may not reflect the opinions of the Region of Peel or the direction of Regional Council.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The cost of production of 12 podcast episodes by Obie and Ax Inc. was previously approved in accordance with the Procurement By-law, through the authority of the Director of Procurement in the amount of \$55,000 plus applicable taxes, approximately \$4,500 per podcast.

## **CONCLUSION**

With Council’s ongoing commitment to increase affordable housing in Peel, staff continue to look for ways to move the Affordable Housing agenda forward. Staff will return to Council with a report on the podcast experience, lessons learned, and recommendations about continuing with or expanding podcast use across the organization.

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix I – “Peel Talks Housing” Episodes

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