



City of San Leandro

Meeting Date: December 21, 2015

Staff Report

File Number: 15-677 **Agenda Section:** PRESENTATIONS

Agenda Number: 3.B.

TO: City Council

FROM: Chris Zapata
City Manager

BY: Lianne Marshall
Assistant City Manager

FINANCE REVIEW: Not Applicable

TITLE: Staff Report for Citywide Communications Update

RECOMMENDATION

The City Manager recommends that the City Council review this assessment of existing City wide communications efforts, provide direction to staff, and authorize implementation of proposed strategies to enhance communications.

Introduction

According to the City of San Leandro's mission statement, the City is committed to "...*servicing the citizens of this community. We strive at all times to achieve the highest professional standards, to communicate a vision of the future, and to enhance the quality of life for every citizen.*" Along these lines, the City recognizes the important role that citizen involvement plays in ensuring good governance and informed decision-making. Additionally, the City recognizes the importance of proactively sharing news and information about the programs and activities carried out by the City.

As further testament to the importance of citizen engagement, one of the City Council's 2015-2016 goals is to "*Support and implement programs, activities and strengthen communication that enhances the quality of life and wellness, celebrates the arts and diversity and promotes civic pride*". To advance this goal, the City currently maintains a wide range of programs and activities designed to facilitate communication and information sharing between City government and community residents.

San Leandro's demographic profile continues to change as the City grows. In the period between 2000 and 2010, Latino and Asian populations grew by 7.4% and 6.7%, respectively, and San Leandro is now one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the United States. As the City's diverse population grows, so too the needs for all those who live in, work in, and visit San Leandro. There is growing demand from the community for prompt, coordinated and accurate communications, delivered through contemporary channels using the latest available

technology. The increased use of social media and mobile devices is also raising public expectations for immediate access to information as well as opportunities for prompt feedback and input. Finally, the City Council has expressed interest in expanding the City's outreach efforts with the community, while ensuring that such communications are aligned with Council goals, well-coordinated across departments, and with a cohesive voice that can be readily understood by all segments of the community.

This report is designed to 1) provide the City Council with an inventory of the various communications platforms and efforts that are already in place, and 2) propose a number of new initiatives and strategies intended to enhance the City's outreach efforts.

Inventory of Existing Communication Platforms

The City's current communications efforts are guided by the City Council's adopted goals and policy directives, and disseminated by departments at the direction of the City Manager. The platform utilized to broadcast information about a particular topic or issue is content-driven, meaning that City departments attempt to utilize the most readily available platform that best suits the type of news or information to be delivered.

The list below shows current media, events, forums, and communication platforms utilized by the City to communicate and facilitate information sharing.

Community Outreach Meetings & Events

- Mayor's State of the City
- City Council meetings
- City Council Work Sessions
- District and topic-specific Town Hall meetings and workshops
- Boards and Commission meetings
- Community and neighborhood meetings
- Home Owner Association Meetings
- Chamber of Commerce, business roundtable, and downtown-focused meetings and events

Electronic

- City Website
- City Calendar
- Blogs
- Nixle 360
- Virtual Emergency Operations Center (Veoci)

Earned Media

- Newspaper
- Television
- Radio
- Local News Blogs

Department Outreach Initiatives & Campaign

- SLNext

- United for Safety

Paid Media

- Paid Advertisements (special public meetings, public hearings, ordinances and election information)
- Produced Videos

Print

- Posters
- Pamphlets
- Flyers
- Recreation & Human Services Department Seasonal Activities Guide
- Library Activities Guides and Calendar
- Letters to the Editor
- Announcements of Initiatives and Projects
- City-developed Content for Community & Neighborhood newsletters

Social Media

- Instagram
- Next Door
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Tumblr
- Virtual Town Hall
- Weibo

Special Population Accommodations (ADA included)

- Real-time Translation Through Language Line
- Translation and ADA accommodations for public meetings, facilitated by City Manager's Office, as requested

Analysis

Citywide communications is an important ongoing concern of the City Council and the City Manager. In January 2015, the City Council held its annual planning retreat, where it discussed the City's communications strategy and adopted a communications-related goal as a priority focus area for the coming year.

In March 2015, senior managers from across the City organization attended a management retreat, at which the topic of communications was a major focus. At the retreat, city management staff discussed and shared best practices, challenges and ideas for a citywide communications strategy. Best practices identified as having already been implemented include the use of new social media platforms such as Weibo by the Police Department, the expanded use of Next Door, and the integration of social media platforms in a blog format by Community Development, such as San Leandro Next.

Staff also identified some of the challenges encountered, such as identifying the optimal

platform or forum to convey complex bureaucratic processes and projects, the dedicated staff time that is needed to consistently maintain community outreach platforms, the need to expand multi-lingual communications, and to fully utilize existing platforms. In accordance with City Council direction, the City Manager's Office filled the previously vacant Administrative Analyst position in August of 2015 to assist with addressing many of these and other communications and community relations needs.

By the end of September of 2015, staff from the City Manager's office had met with each City Council member to solicit their impressions of existing communications efforts, as well as to garner feedback about how these efforts could be improved. Some of the common themes and ideas that came out of those meetings included:

- a desire to better coordinate the dissemination of news and information across all departments, using unified voice and branding;
- a need to expand outreach in multiple languages;
- a desire to reach a broader cross-section of the community;
- a desire to facilitate more information sharing amongst local residents, businesses, service clubs, community service organizations and non-profits;
- a need to increase citizen participation in governance;
- a desire to re-establish a community newsletter

Although the City has already established many avenues of communication and outreach, there are more steps that can be taken to expand City efforts. The intent of such efforts is to sharpen the various existing tools as well as implement new strategies that complement them. As a result, City staff developed a number of new proposed initiatives and strategies, which are described below.

Communication Initiatives

Citywide Public Information Team

Like many other public agencies, the City's current communications ecosystem is department-centric due to the diversity and complexity of the work being done within different segments of the organization. The City Manager's Office plans to launch a new Public Information Team ("PIT"), which would be comprised of at least one staff member from each city department. PIT will meet on a regular basis to share information and collaborate regarding upcoming initiatives, programs, or events, and to facilitate coordinated messaging across the entire City organization.

Special Population Communications

San Leandro is rich in cultural and ethnic diversity. According to the latest census data, 49% of San Leandro residents speak a language other than English at home. As a result of these factors, the City already offers real-time translation services via phone (as needed) and at Town Hall and community meetings, Council meetings, and various other Commission and community engagement events. In addition, the City regularly includes notices in Spanish and Chinese at the conclusion of many announcements offering points of contact for further assistance in those languages.

Nevertheless, there remains room for expanded assistance in the area of multi-lingual

communications; the City Council has interest in prioritizing such efforts. Currently, Human Resources staff is researching and creating a policy that would enable the City to better leverage the existing employees who speak languages other than English. This policy would provide guidelines, procedures, testing and evaluation to ensure that translation services executed by City employees are proficient, certified and culturally sensitive.

Moving forward, staff needs further direction from the City Council regarding the specific programs and activities for which multi-lingual translation should be prioritized to help inform the potential costs and budget impacts associated with implementing these efforts.

Coordinated Online Presence and Expansion of Social Media Use

In January 2016, the City Manager's Office intends to launch three new City-wide social media pages: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to provide a cohesive, unified online presence for the City. In addition, the City Manager's office will collaborate closely with each City department to facilitate coordinated messaging, while balancing the need for existing webpages and platforms to reflect each department's respective mission and voice.

Community Newsletter

The City Manager's Office will reinstate the community newsletter, formerly titled "San Leandro News", which has remained dormant since May, 2014 due to staffing limitations. The online newsletter will be released quarterly with an option to download and print. It will provide a forum for residents to receive news and information about upcoming projects, programs, or events that would be of interest to local residents. Certain sections of the newsletter will remain throughout the year, with each quarterly edition providing a departmental or service area focus, as follows:

Quarterly Focus Areas

- Quarter 1 Budget & Finance
- Quarter 2 City Services and Public Works
- Quarter 3 Development
- Quarter 4 Public Safety

Recurring Sections

- Calendar of Events
- Policy Updates
- City Council Goals related content
- Capital Improvement Program (CIP) project updates
- New City Employees
- Department Contact information
- City Council Meeting Information

Monitor and Update City Webpages

During the period from November 8 through December 8, 2015, the City of San Leandro website was visited a total of 43,807 times. Of those visits, 23,581 were by first time visitors who viewed an average of 2-3 pages per session. Given this sheer volume of visitors, it is now more important than ever to ensure that the information on the City website is accurate and current. Accordingly, City staff will establish a plan to regularly monitor departmental pages and implement updated content.

Explore Emerging Platforms

As outlined above, technologies continue to advance and the public's expectations from government are rapidly changing. Therefore, staff will track and monitor emerging platforms and check for compatibility with City use. As new tools become available, City staff will attempt to explore those platforms to determine whether they could assist the City in better disseminating its news and information, while balancing budgetary and staffing constraints.

Conclusion & Next Steps

Communication with community residents is a basic obligation of local government and forms an essential component to good governance. The City of San Leandro is committed to improving communication with its residents, businesses and community organizations and will continue to improve existing platforms while exploring new ones to better serve the community.

If approved by the City Council, City staff will launch three social media pages, reinstate a community newsletter, and launch a new Public Information Team as first steps in implementing its new communications initiatives. These efforts will expand the City's outreach and engage new sectors of the San Leandro community.

Fiscal Impact

Sufficient budgetary and staffing resources are already programmed into the adopted budget in order to implement the three new social media pages, community newsletter, and Public Information Team as outlined above. Implementation of additional strategies could result in additional staffing and budgetary impacts, which will be further evaluated and presented for the City Council's consideration based upon the direction provided to staff.

ATTACHMENT(S)

None

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