



Staff Report

TO: City Council
FROM: Todd Parton, City Manager
DATE: October 5, 2021
SUBJECT: Strategic Communications Update

Background and Analysis:

The City of Beaumont has implemented a number of proactive and re-active communications platforms. These platforms have been developed so that they leverage the manner in which the majority of citizens access information and engage with the community.

In 2020 a Community Livability Survey was conducted by National Research Center, Inc., to determine how the community as a whole felt about the desirability of the City as a place to live. An element of the survey was how citizens engage and their sources of information. A copy of the survey report is attached to this staff report. Page 31 of the report shows the manner in which citizens engage with the City. The top four methods of engagement were: using or checking email (95%), accessing the internet from home (92%), accessing the internet from a cell phone (91%), or visiting social media sites like Facebook (79%). Conversely, the four methods of engagement least used were: contacting elected officials (11%), campaigning or advocating (13%), attending a local meeting (22%), and watching a public meeting (22%). The survey also showed that 47% contacted the City for help or information.

Mission of Communication Operations

The mission and priority of City communications is to send and receive important information to and from citizens. Keeping the community abreast of important topics is key to improving public trust and to continue to renew the City's image. Another component to this mission is to provide a quick-access platform for citizens to voice concerns and ask questions of the City.

Current Messaging Platforms

Current messaging platforms have been implemented in order to facilitate pro-active and re-active communications. They include online, social media, and traditional media outlets. Below is a summary of the primary communication methods.

Tangible Information

While citizens utilize City services at City facilities, Transit services and City hosted events these opportunities are used to provide information via flyers, handouts and posted notices.

City Website

A new City website was launched to improve accessibility to information and facilitate day-to-day City business. Many citizens access the website to obtain a wide variety of City content on topics like major projects, upcoming events, City operations, City employment, utility billing and to conduct business like accessing forms, applications, paying fees and wastewater bills.

Social Media

Social media platforms are efficient forms of two-way communication that continue to grow in popularity and capability. A large and growing audience may be reached in a short amount of time. The City uses mainstream social media platforms to provide information ranging from immediate safety information to upcoming events. Social media has become a go-to for information for a majority of citizens and has proven to be one of the most effective communication tools. City staff maintains a presence on these platforms with frequent posts from various City departments.

Traditional Communication Platforms

City communications strategies still include traditional methods, such as press releases, newsletters, editorials, etc. Press releases are sent to all media outlets and are intended to expand the reach of critical communications. Likewise the other traditional communication pieces are disseminated as is appropriate to the specific piece. Citizens who sign up for the notification subscription on the City's website will also receive emailed or text message notifications of press releases, newsletters, and other informational items. The City also uses a reverse 9-1-1 emergency notification system in the event of a local emergency a telephone notification is sent.

Citizen Initiated Communications

The City provides several ways for the public to contact City staff with questions, concerns and requests. The City maintains public access at City facilities with customer service staff, over the phone customer service, social media direct messaging, online portal requests and email. Citizen service requests submitted online are automatically

forwarded to the corresponding departments/staff and a work order is generated. Staff then completes and closes out the work order.

Responsive Communication Strategies

City staff monitors online and social media sites for City-related content. This allows staff to proactively address misinformation or provide clarity on important topics. It also helps City staff to understand growing issues of importance within the community. Responses to questions and concerns are done in a thorough and informational manner to provide factual information in an effort to dispel rumors and clear up misinformation.

Future of Communications

Communication strategies must continue to evolve to ensure the City is effective in reaching citizens. City staff is working to launch a City mobile application to provide a more intuitive and user friendly point of access to City information while providing an additional avenue to contact the City with questions or concerns. On-going modifications will continue to the City's website to provide user-friendly access to information regarding all City aspects and departments. The City will also develop unique informational items to keep citizens and the business community updated on critical programs and activities. For example, City staff is working with a firm on a professionally produced capital improvement project update to provide information on the City's major capital projects and show how they help achieve the City's overall vision. This will be distributed in digital and hard copy formats.

Fiscal Impact:

City staff estimates the cost to prepare this staff report was \$2,240.

Recommended Action:

Provide direction to City staff as deemed necessary by the City Council.

Attachments:

- A. Strategic Communications Plan
- B. Beaumont Community Livability Report