

TO: David Chanski, City Administrator/Clerk
FROM: Daniel Eick, Assistant City Administrator
RE: Communications Improvements
DATE: May 22, 2023



Summary

At the direction of the City Council staff has been working to develop various improvements to the City's communications and planning processes. A summary of those developments is outlined below. Staff is seeking comment and direction from Council on the below items to further guide their development.

Communications Priorities

1. Social Media through <https://nextdoor.com/>.

Staff are seeking approval from Council on the development of a City Nextdoor page. Nextdoor has a strong presence in the broader Breezy Point community and will benefit the city through greater reach and communicative depth. The purpose of Nextdoor is not to replace current channels but to supplement the City's broader communications planning with shared content across multiple channels.

Nextdoor has been developing their product since 2008 when the company first formed. The platform gives specific geographic communities, known as "neighborhoods", greater control over local group communications. This is because neighborhoods and content moderators can limit and control access by location. Additionally, Nextdoor as a platform places a higher priority on human reviewed moderation than its competitors.

Given the established presence of Nextdoor in the community, staff is requesting Council direct us to create and operate an account at the discretion of the City Administrator.

2. Press Releases and Media Relations

On several occasions the City Council and members of the public have voiced frustration regarding a lack of press coverage and engagement on the part of local media. While the Pine and Lakes Echo Journal generally does a great job covering City events, the easiest way to increase coverage is to engage the press ourselves as opposed to waiting for them to come to us.

Staff believes the benefits of creating such releases substantially outweigh the costs in increased outreach. As such, staff is requesting the Council direct us to begin creating and implementing Press Releases at the discretion of the City Administrator.

3. City Newsletter

The City Council has voiced interest in developing or publishing a regular newsletter in comments multiple times. While city newsletters are not uncommon, and often serve as locations for project updates and community trust building, their development can be complex and burdensome. As such, staff would like the Council to consider the following questions ahead of production:

- What length should the newsletter be?
- How does the City plan to distribute the newsletter?
- What kinds of content should the newsletter contain?
- What format will the newsletter be; digital or physical?
- What times should the newsletter be sent; weekly, monthly, quarterly, yearly?

Staff is requesting guidance from the Council on these questions to bring this item back in July for further consideration.

4. Planning, Policy, and Branding

Finally, staff is requesting the Council look at the big picture and imagine how they would like City communications to look in the future. Based upon previous conversations the following questions may help guide this conversation:

- What should our guiding documentation look like?
- What kinds of Policies and Procedures should be put into place?
- How should our communications function at the organizational level?
- What kinds of departments or community support resources should we offer?
- What kind of branding should the City have? Should it be departmentally unified?

Council Action

With the above items in mind, staff is seeking Council approval to proceed with developing two of these four items. Those items are:

1. Direct staff to create a municipal level account on Nextdoor and begin sharing information on the platform at the Administrator's discretion immediately.
2. Direct staff to begin drafting and designing Press Releases for media distribution at the Administrator's discretion as soon as possible.