



Communicating with the Public Guidelines

City Council

City of Green Cove Springs, FL

Strong communication with constituents is crucial for building trust and maintaining transparency with the public. It encourages active participation from the community and shows that public input is valued and respected. City Council Members bridge the gap between the public and the City by voicing community concerns and advocating for residents' needs. This involves staying attuned to local issues and being accessible to those they represent.

Here are best practices to guide City Council Members in effectively managing public inquiries and engaging with the public.

Maintain Legal Compliance

- Florida Sunshine Law: City Council Members cannot discuss or deliberate on matters that may come before the Council with other City Council Members outside of publicly noticed meetings. However, they can respond individually to public inquiries if it doesn't lead to a violation of this law.
- Public Records Law: Any written communication, such as emails or letters, may be subject to public records requests, so City Council Members should ensure their responses are professional, factual, and appropriate.

Remain Calm and Professional, Even When Faced with Criticism

- City Council Members should take time to process the inquiry before crafting a response and avoid reacting defensively or using a hostile tone.
- The response should be respectful and focused on addressing the issue constructively (if possible).
- The City Council Member has the authority to direct the City Manager and the Public Information Officer to respond to the inquiry on their behalf.

Be Transparent, Factual, and Consistent

- City Council Members should ensure their responses align with the City's official messaging and policies to avoid confusion or misrepresentation.
- Responses must be respectful, factual, and free from bias or opinion when speaking in their official capacity.
- City Council Members are encouraged to avoid sharing their personal opinions on City Council decisions when interacting with the public, as the Council is perceived as a unified body by the community.
- Avoid Commitments: They should not promise specific outcomes or take actions they do not have the authority to implement individually.



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- City Council Members are asked to share the inquiry and their response (if appropriate) with the City Manager and the Public Information Officer to maintain openness.

Collaborate with City Staff

- If the inquiry involves operational or technical issues (e.g., public works, utilities), the City Council Member can refer the citizen to the relevant City department or staff member who can address the issue more effectively.
- For complex or policy-related inquiries, it is advisable to collaborate with the City Manager and the Public Information Officer to ensure accurate and comprehensive responses.

Encourage Public Engagement

- City Council Members can use inquiries as an opportunity to invite the public to attend meetings, participate in forums, or utilize existing resources like the City's website or social media for more information.

Keep Records

- It's a good practice to document the interaction in case the inquiry needs to be referenced later or if it evolves into a larger issue requiring Council discussion.

Social Media Inquiry Responses:

- City Council Members are encouraged to respond to inquiries on social media as long as they adhere to the City's External Social Media Policy. The guidelines outlined above are also applicable to social media interactions.

Common Questions and Appropriate Responses

"There's a big pothole on my street that hasn't been fixed. Can you do something about it?"

- Response: "Thank you for bringing this to my attention. While I cannot personally arrange for repairs, I will report this to our Public Works Department to ensure it's addressed. You can also report issues like this directly to Public Work by calling 904-297-7500 during normal business hours or utilizing TextMyGov after hours. I'll follow up to make sure it's being handled."

"I don't agree with the City's new policy on zoning restrictions. Can you change it?"



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- Response: “I appreciate your feedback on this policy. While I can’t change policies on my own, I value hearing from residents like you to understand community concerns. I encourage you to attend the next Planning and Zoning and City Council meeting or submit your comments in writing so the entire Council can hear your perspective. I’m happy to discuss the issue further or share resources to help explain the policy.”

“When is the next budget meeting? I’d like to voice my thoughts.”

- Response: “Thank you for your interest in our budget process! The next budget meeting is scheduled for [date, time, and location]. You’re encouraged to attend and share your input during the public comment portion. You can also find the full meeting agenda on the City’s website at www.greencovesprings.com. If you have specific concerns, I’d be happy to listen or help you prepare your comments.”

“I’m unhappy with the XYZ program changes. Why did this happen?”

- Response: “I understand your concerns about the changes to the XYZ program. The decision was made based on [state facts], but we’re always open to hearing feedback to improve. I encourage you to share your thoughts at the next Council meeting or submit your feedback to City Clerk Erin West at ewest@greencovesprings.com. I’ll also make sure your concerns are noted as we continue reviewing the program’s effectiveness.”

“Are there plans to bring more businesses to Green Cove Springs?”

- Response: “Yes, economic development is a priority for our city. We’re actively working on attracting new businesses while supporting those already here. If you’d like, I can share updates on upcoming projects or direct you to the City’s Development Services team for more details. Your input on what kinds of businesses you’d like to see is always welcome!”

“Why did you vote for the new rate increase? It’s unfair to residents!”

- Response: “Thank you for sharing your concerns. My vote was based on [specific reasoning, e.g., ensuring funding for public safety, infrastructure]. I understand that not everyone agrees, and I want to hear all perspectives. If you’d like to discuss this further, I’m happy to meet or direct you to resources explaining the decision. I also encourage you to share your views during public meetings where the Council discusses these matters.”