



1 North San Antonio Road
Los Altos, California 94022-3087

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 4, 2016
TO: City Council
FROM: Mayor Pro Tem Prochnow and Councilmember Pepper
SUBJECT: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS UPDATE

BACKGROUND

The City Council identified Community Engagement as a 2014 priority. At the March 25, 2014 City Council meeting a Council ad hoc subcommittee was formed of Councilmembers Pepper and Bruins who were tasked to develop and host up to two public forums where residents can:

- Tell the City about how they use the communication and participation channels that are currently in place
- React to approaches other cities use to communicate with their residents
- Share their own ideas about what Los Altos could do.

The first of these two Community Engagement Roundtables was held on Tuesday, August 12, 2014. The results of that roundtable were reported back to the City Council on October 28, 2014 and the agenda memo is attached.

The recommended next steps as presented in the Council report were:

- 1) Host a second community engagement roundtable with the purpose of trying to reach the young family demographic (those not typically engaged today)
- 2) Form a working group composed of the Council ad hoc subcommittee, staff and community members to further explore/develop the concept of neighborhood meetings. Elements of the workplan could include: look more closely at what other communities do, identify general topics, identify 'customized' elements for each neighborhood, look at frequency/rotation/participation issues, etc. The workgroup would develop a proposal for consideration.

- 3) Form a working group composed of the Council ad hoc subcommittee, staff and community members, to develop objectives and priorities for the use of technology to engage the public in meaningful ways. Elements of this workplan could include: define the needs, identify preferred tools/applications, evaluation by staff on cost, feasibility and sustainability, projection of how effective tools/applications will be in accomplishing enhanced community engagement. The workgroup would develop a proposal that either staff could implement and/or bring back to Council for consideration.

- 4) Staff evaluation of strategies to encourage use of current technologies/tools.

DISCUSSION

The City Council members have changed since the first roundtable as has one of the members of the ad hoc subcommittee. Mayor Bruins has appointed Mayor Pro Tem Prochnow to take her place on this ad hoc subcommittee. Mayor Pro Tem Prochnow and Councilmember Pepper are thereby continuing the Community Engagement work in 2016 as the Council ad hoc subcommittee.

With regard to the first item above, the Council ad hoc subcommittee is contacting the Los Altos School District, the PTA council of presidents, the Cupertino School District, and the associated PTA presidents to determine the best format and schedule for the next community engagement roundtable specifically targeted for the young school-age family demographic. The Council will be notified when the details are finalized for this next roundtable event.

With regard to the second and third items above, the attendees at both roundtables will be contacted as to their interest in participating in future working group(s) related to community engagement..

Attachment: October 28, 2014 City Council report



DATE: October 28, 2014

AGENDA ITEM # 8

TO: City Council
FROM: Mayor Pro Tem Pepper and Councilmember Bruins
SUBJECT: Community engagement roundtable

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive a report regarding the August 12, 2014 community engagement roundtable and provide direction on next steps

SUMMARY:

Estimated Fiscal Impact:

Amount: None

Budgeted: Not applicable

Public Hearing Notice: Not applicable

Previous Council Consideration: September 17, 2013 and March 25, 2014

CEQA Status: Not applicable

Attachments:

1. Panelist Presentations – Cities of Los Altos, Palo Alto and Mountain View
2. Roundtable Breakout Group Notes
3. Roundtable Feedback Form and Results
4. Quick Survey Form and Results

BACKGROUND

The City Council identified Community Engagement as a 2014 priority. At the March 25, 2014 City Council meeting a Council subcommittee was formed. Councilmembers Pepper and Bruins were tasked to develop and host up to two public forums where residents can:

- Tell the City about how they use the communication and participation channels that are currently in place
- React to approaches other cities use to communicate with their residents
- Share their own ideas about what Los Altos could do.

A Community Engagement Roundtable was held on Tuesday, August 12, 2014. The meeting consisted of presentations by three panelists followed by small break-out groups (roundtables) and a report out.

Attendees. The roundtable was a noticed public meeting that utilized multiple channels to reach residents. Approximately 70 residents attended the roundtable, along with nine City Staff. Tony Levitan, a Senior Vice President at Proteus Digital Health, served as the overall meeting facilitator and nine individuals were recruited to serve as roundtable (break-out group) facilitators.

Panelists. A speaker panel was set up for the purpose of (1) educating attendees to what is done in Los Altos (since much has changed over the past two years), (2) exposing attendees to one city's "high tech" practices, and (3) exposing attendees to another city's "high touch" practices. The panel consisted of staff members from the Cities of Los Altos, Palo Alto and Mountain View. Erica Ray, Public Information Coordinator, City of Los Altos, presented an overview of Community Engagement channels currently in use. Peter Pirnejad, Development Services Director, City of Palo Alto, presented information on how Palo Alto is using technology to further civic engagement. Linda Lauzze, Administrative and Neighborhood Services Manager, City of Mountain View, presented information on their popular neighborhood meetings. Attendees were given an opportunity to ask questions. Copies of the presentations are included in Attachment 1.

Roundtable Discussions. Following the panel presentations and Q&A session, attendees formed small break-out groups of 7 to 8 people each with a trained facilitator and a volunteer notetaker. Each group was asked to answer and discuss four questions:

1. Are there barriers for you that are inhibiting YOUR participating in Los Alto City government?
2. What are those barriers?
3. If the barriers were tackled in some way, would YOU increase your involvement and participation in local government?
4. Are there specific practices that you heard about tonight or can suggest in addition to those we heard that would increase your involvement and participation?

A compilation of the notes from each breakout group are included as Attachment 2.

Roundtable Feedback. Participants were invited to complete a feedback form to provide feedback on the meeting itself. Overall attendees were satisfied. The feedback form and results are in Attachment 3.

DISCUSSION

The Community Engagement Roundtable helped to identify some barriers to community engagement, provide insight into how current communication and participation channels are used, and generated several ideas and suggestions that residents felt would help increase overall community engagement in Los Altos.

Objective 1: Understand how current communication and participation channels are used

In an attempt to get a more quantitative assessment of resident's familiarity and use of practices currently used by the City of Los Altos, a "Quick Survey" provided to each participant. At the start of the meeting, participants were asked to indicate which of the engagement methods they currently use or have used. After hearing Erica's presentation, they were asked to indicate which of the engagement methods they were likely to start using. In addition to the survey, discussions that took place in the roundtable groups also provided some insight.

Insights gained from survey:

- In general, many of the participants were residents that are already engaged at some level.
- After learning about the "new" website, likely users moved from 69% to 85%.
- Similarly, there appears to be an opportunity to increase the number of residents who subscribe to eNotify (moving from 37-41% to 63-68%)
- The greatest opportunity for improving engagement levels is with the use of community workshops, where there is more interaction and collaboration through break-out sessions. Likely attendees moved from 40% to 72%.
- Attendees were not heavy users of the City's social media channels or of KMVT nor are they likely to begin using these channels any time soon. This may be due to the age demographics of this particular set of attendees. Young families were not represented.

Since building awareness is typically the starting point for community engagement, the survey also asked attendees to let us know how they heard about the meeting. Many learned about it through multiple channels. Some had a broader reach -- eNotify and community group email lists (such as LANN, Los Altos Forward), the Town Crier (with the article drawing more attention than the advertisement), and Nextdoor. The use of A-frame signs also had a good impact on generating awareness of the Community Engagement Roundtable. The results of this quick survey are found in Attachment 4.

Objective 2: Gage reactions to approaches used by other cities

Roundtable participants indicated that both “high tech” and “high touch” are needed.

Seven of the eight roundtable groups would like the City to make use of neighborhood meetings. There are a number of ideas as to how, what, where, when, etc. To explore this concept it would be best to create a workgroup to develop a specific proposal.

Five of the eight roundtable groups discussed the use of technology. The sense was that the City should be exploring options that could (1) increase awareness of community meetings, (2) inform residents of “things” happening that affect them, and (3) gather resident feedback. Staff is already exploring the use of technology. Attendees felt strongly that it would be beneficial to create a resident workgroup to work with city staff to develop specific proposals.

Objective 3: Gather other ideas about what Los Altos could do

A number of ideas were presented during the roundtable report outs:

- Neighborhood meetings
 - In addition to informing residents, such meetings help to put a face on city government, provide an informal opportunity for dialogue between residents, council and staff, and makes city government accessible
- Speaker Series
 - 4x/year; hot topics; best practices; navigating city government
- ‘Government 101’ column
 - Where to find information: Navigating the website, e-notify, LATC, “City Hall Concierge”, etc.
 - Public Comments: what to expect, why 1-3 minutes
- ‘Coming Soon’ column
 - What’s happening in each neighborhood: street projects, sewer projects, traffic/safety projects
 - Commercial developments: what’s in the hopper, status of approved developments
- Reinstitute a Quarterly Newsletter
- New resident welcome packet
 - Distribute via Realtors or Mission Trail Waste System
- Electronic Tools/Use of technology
 - Increase awareness of community meetings (e.g. use Nextdoor)
 - Inform residents of “things” happening that affect them (e.g. road projects)
 - Gather resident feedback (e.g. allow for resident inputs via surveying types of tools that allow for taking a “Quick” as well for indepth feedback on relevant issues)

Barriers to Community Engagement

Participants were asked what, if any, barriers exist that inhibit participation. Three themes surfaced.

- Community engagement methods – The City has taken some positive steps forward. The new website and eNotify are examples of what has improved. There is a desire to keep moving forward. The consensus was that both “high touch” AND “high tech” solutions are needed in order to have an engaged community. Additionally we need both push and pull solutions with the greatest void being in the pull. Resident demographics – seniors to young families – and the expanded use of technology in neighboring communities are driving the desire to do more. Participants are looking for ways to engage without having to physically attend meetings.
- Educate public on how government works – The City would benefit from helping residents to understand how and why government operates the way it does. Standard practices (many of which are driven by the Brown Act) are viewed as Council imposed constraints. Most cited is the 2 – 3 minutes given to a speaker addressing Council. The time limit is viewed as arbitrary.
- Educate Council on public perception – The most consistent barrier given in seven of the eight roundtable groups dealt with how Councilmembers (and members of staff) are perceived by the public. Sentiments expressed include:
 - Councilmembers lack openness and integrity
 - Not approachable
 - ‘Black hole’, no feedback
 - Don’t listen, petition or mass attendance the only way to get heard
 - Rude to public/speakers
 - Don’t provide rationale for decisions
 - Desire is a ‘culture of respect’

Recommendation

Based on the feedback received at the Community Engagement Roundtable, we seek council direction on the recommended next steps:

- 1) Host a second community engagement roundtable with the purpose of trying to reach the young family demographic (those not typically engaged today)
- 2) Form a working group, composed of the Council ad hoc subcommittee, staff and community members, to further explore/develop the concept of neighborhood meetings. Elements of the workplan could include: look more closely at what other communities do, identify general topics, identify ‘customized’ elements for each

- neighborhood, look at frequency/rotation/participation issues, etc. The workgroup would develop a proposal for consideration.
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 - 4) Staff evaluation of strategies to encourage use of current technologies/tools.

FISCAL IMPACT

None

PUBLIC CONTACT

Posting of the meeting agenda serves as notice to the general public.