

(24-015)
RESIDENT SERVICES AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE
MEETING REPORT
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2024 @ 7:00 P.M.

Attendees: Councillor Matt Leming, Committee Chair; Councillor Anna Callahan; Councillor Emily Lazzaro; Councillor Justin Tseng; City Clerk Adam Hurtubise; Communications Director Steve Smirti; other participants as noted in the body of this report.

Chair Leming called the meeting to order at 7:11 p.m. on March 13, 2024 in the Medford City Council Chamber and via Zoom. The start was delayed by a committee meeting immediately beforehand. The purpose of the meeting was to address Paper **24-015**, a resolution to discuss modernizing Council communications and outreach strategy.

Chair Leming thanked participants for attending. Councillor Tseng said that Communications Director Smirti said he could help with some of these communications needs. He said that the Council could vote monthly on a newsletter to be sent out.

Councillor Tseng said it is often easier to engage residents with a short-form video. He said it would behoove us to create short-form videos. He said that Kevin Harrington explained how this can be done.

Councillor Tseng said that there was continuous work to be done on the idea of distribution. Councillor Callahan cautioned about opt-in rules for e-mail distribution lists. Councillor Tseng said that the question of distribution is important. He said we need to distribute in a way that folks prefer, that is more casual and accessible. He said he wanted to get feedback from the Committee first.

Director Smirti said that the actual distribution should be coming from the City Council side but that he could help with other parts of this. Councillor Tseng said that creating our own distribution systems is also important.

Patty Caya, 1 Monument Street, said that this is a great idea and a great way to reach constituents where they live. She said she appreciates the initiative to expand communications. She said she would like to understand the boundaries of official communication and if there is any policing of official communication. She said she is concerned that this could go from simple fact-based reporting that could devolve into opinion or spin. She said she would like to understand this better to understand the difference between official communication and a Councillor's opinion.

Director Smirti said that there are differences between official communications and campaign communications. He said that there is an agency that monitors these activities. He said as a government employee, he cannot put out campaign

communications, only official communications. He said that the same rules would apply to Council communications.

Ms. Caya said she wasn't talking about pure campaigning. She asked how you would enforce news versus an opinion. She said she attended last night's meeting and she thought it was a massacre.

Director Smirti said he does not want to speak for the Council but that the Mayor puts out her own statements on policy. He said that elected officials are in a position to advocate for their stances, and that is part of their government jobs.

Councillor Lazzaro said that every elected official has an obligation to inform constituents when they are doing their job, and that they have been kind of remiss in that at some times. She said that last night, the Council voted to send discussion about a potential transfer tax to the Planning and Permitting Committee. She said that Councillors need to share their work, and constituents can be in favor of that work or not in favor of that work. She said that one reason to have a rotating group of Councillors participating is so people can explain how things went and how people voted.

Councillor Tseng said that he wanted to have Councillor Scarpelli on this committee. Councillor Callahan said she is more excited about things that are upcoming rather than things that have already happened.

Councillor Lazzaro said that there was a lot of misinformation going around about last night's meeting and that we could have avoided that if we had had this kind of system in place already. She said that the short video format will be really good for that.

Chair Leming said he maintains his own blog and uses it to communicate. He said that the goal is to keep people informed on Council activities.

Councillor Callahan said she needed some clarification on what Councillor Tseng wanted to offer in the form of motions. She said she wasn't sure "newsletter" would be the best word to use. Chair Leming said that he thought "newsletter" is the best word for the communication. The City Clerk detailed his opt-in e-mail list.

Director Smirti said that there is a direct link to the City Council page. Councillor Tseng asked if there is a fee to use the City system. Director Smirti said he is not sure how many accounts are allowed on the system, but that he would check into all of that. Director Smirti also said it would be helpful to develop a policy around social media.

Councillor Tseng said that there are multiple ways to use social media, but the most important part is to decide which platforms to use, and then what the policy would look like, and that perhaps the Committee could move to have Councillor Tseng draft a social media policy.

Chair Leming said each social media platform should be treated as a separate entity. Councillor Callahan said that if we want to get to as many people as possible, we need to get on all of these platforms. She said we should at least consider texting, WhatsApp, and Discourse. She said we should at least consider those or we might be blocking off certain people and certain forms of engagement.

Chair Leming said he supports multiple platforms and Councillor Lazzaro said she agreed. She said that if content will be similar, we should start with content and come back to social media next time. Director Smirti said it might be helpful to put out a survey to the constituencies to see where they get their content and messages. He said he would also recommend setting up a calendar. She said you don't want to drop off in content because you will lose followers.

Councillor Tseng moved to start City Council Newsletter content to summarize important City Council meetings and discussions, as well as inform the public as to upcoming meetings, to be distributed to committee members prior to and approved at each meeting of the Committee on Resident Services and Public Engagement (Councillor Lazzaro second)—

Councillor Tseng moved for the Chair of the Committee on Resident Services and Public Engagement to create and distribute a sign-up form of Councilors who will rotate responsibilities in writing the City Council Newsletter content and/or making short form video summaries in collaboration with Medford Community media and to authorize the Chair to create a calendar for these responsibilities (Councillor Callahan second)—

Councillor Tseng moved for the Chair of the Committee on Resident Services and Public Engagement and/or his designee to work with our Communications Director and other city staff to distribute the City Council Newsletter content and create an email list for the City Council to use (Councillor Callahan second)—

Councillor Lazzaro moved to draft a social media policy for review (Councillor Tseng second)—

Councillor Tseng said it would be powerful to act as a committee.

Councillor Tseng moved to present a draft of a budget input survey at the next meeting (Councillor Lazzaro) second—

Councillor Callahan moved to join and approve all motions (Councillor Tseng second)—approved.

Councillor Tseng said that he had spoken with Director Smirti with the website and in signing up for an e-mail list. He said that there is a paper in committee to discuss reforming the City website. He said he would like to meet in the future and publicize this meeting widely. He said that we should create another paper about meeting with under-represented groups. He suggested a listening tour with under-represented groups.

Councillor Callahan said she can create a paper to put on the agenda.

Councillor Callahan moved to adjourn at 8:11 p.m. (Councillor Lazzaro second)—
approved.

Chair Leming adjourned the meeting at 8:11 p.m.