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To: Honorable Mayor and City Council

From: Planning Director, Mac Corthell

Date: June 23, 2021

Re: Planning Director's Report on Departmental Activities

Recent events have highlighted a gap in the tools City Staff has available to effectively engage the community. The need for a Public Information Officer (PIO) was highlighted in the Council's annual goal setting and continues to grow more acute as time passes. However, a PIO can only be as effective as the tools they have at their disposal to communicate with the interested parties on a given project or initiative.

The Planning Department has taken the initiative in bridging the communication gap by researching and identifying tools that will enhance community engagement immediately, and provide a future PIO with the tools they'll need to push community engagement to even higher levels in the future.

Examples

The City of Sandy is in setup phase, and multiple other localities in the region and state are utilizing this digital solution to reach their communities. I've provided a selection below and other examples are available, just email me and I can point you to them as desired.

4 Minute Demonstration Video: <https://www.bangthetable.com/engagementhq-4-minute-demo-watch-exclusive/>

Ridgefield, WA – Ridgefield Roundtable – This is managed by a single individual, please note the "Fact or Fiction" ongoing conversation portal at the bottom of the page: <https://ridgefieldroundtable.org/>.

Kamloops, Canada – Lets Talk Kamloops – Please note the Columbia Corridor Upgrades project with timelines, traffic plans, and other information: <https://letstalk.kamloops.ca/>. Also note the button on the City's homepage in the middle, below the search bar "Lets Talk Kamloops": <https://www.kamloops.ca/>.

Tigard, OR – Engage Tigard – Please note the Parks Master Plan, Library Survey and Police 'can you ID me': <https://www.engage.tigard-or.gov/>.

Milwaukie, OR – Engage Milwaukie – Please note the Comprehensive Plan section: <https://www.engage.tigard-or.gov/>.

Uses

-This application can be used for Projects, Events, Long-Term Planning, and anything else in which community engagement is advisable or required.

-The back end also provides significant data analytics that can help advise on whether and how messaging is being received, and what the community pulse is on the particular message.

- A newsletter suite is automatically included that will provide information on each "project" set up in the application, including updates, at the push of a button.
- The software links with social media for publishing messages as desired.
- Surveys, Q & A, Conversations, and more communication widgets are easily set up for a project based on the interaction the City is looking for.
- Registration requirement can be turned on and off as desired to comment or view a particular project.
- Overcome misinformation and provide a centralized forum for community input and engagement, as well as a resource for accurate, readily available information.
- Removes the conversation from social media where the vocal minority can control the (mis)information being shared and places it in an interactive, highly informative forum that can be updated and assessed to ensure messaging is reaching the community, and that the messaging contains the most accurate information available.

Staff Feedback on Demonstration

A selection of City Staff that would be most likely to maintain the system until a PIO is sought and hired, recently received a demonstration of "Bang the Table" community outreach application.

1. I really enjoyed the presentation. It was extremely informative and professional, that is a great first sign of a product of value. The included training and ongoing support is a pleasant surprise as well!

From just the short 45 minutes spent, it seems as though this software is user friendly (for both admins and citizens) and easy for the public to navigate. I am excited at the potential of transparency in our city projects, programs and offerings. This is something that the city is severely lacking, other than the false narratives the public engage in on social media. It gives the city and staff the first opportunity to thoughtfully think through each posting with accurate information and provides facts to our citizens which allows them an opportunity to voice their thoughts based on facts not rumors. I also enjoy that there can be factful and positive engagement with our citizens somewhere other than social media.

The largest complaint I see over and over again is that currently our website is difficult to navigate and extremely hard to find information on. This is partly where the false information begins. The biggest sell is that this software can be integrated into our current website and is easy, honest and navigable seems like a no brainer for transparency and will hopefully quash much of the negativity that surrounds city staff.

-Julie Larson

2. I have the same thoughts as Julie. I really like the program. The "backend" of the program he showed us reminded me a lot of the blog creation templates that are out there to use. Super user friendly and simple. I love all the options of things that you can embed in the page. This would be great for a large program at the library, like summer reading, 1000 books before kindergarten. My mind is already spinning...

I know that when I researched the company a bit, they sound like they provide the same personnel support that our online reading program company, Beanstack, does. We have a representative assigned to us, and I am the point person that she checks in with every several months. It is very nice to have a specific person in the company to check in with and provide me with answers to questions instead of just navigating things on my own. We have had a very positive experience with this kind of one-on-one relationship.

Thanks for involving me in this introduction! I really hope this is something the city will move forward with!

-Rebekah Murcra

3. I thought it looked great!!! With the templates they have in place along with the training, I feel it would be very easy to use. It would be a much better platform to get information out than Facebook!!!

-Darlene Bishop

Final Thoughts

The City of Molalla is not alone in our quest to effectively engage the community in the modern world. By and large, people are no longer interested or able to attend Town Halls/Public Meetings, and Staff Capacity to conduct massive in-person outreach is not economically feasible. Conversations that take place on social media are often filled with misinformation and are only fueled by a perceived information vacuum.

People today want a place they can go any time of the day to learn about, comment on, get involved, or ask questions about various activities of their local government. This solution provides all of that in an easy to manage, user friendly (for admins and customers), highly informative, integrated (with social media as desired), and analytical package. Every tool in this package was designed to engage the community and assess how effective that engagement is.