

Council Business Meeting

January 31, 2023

Agenda Item	City of Ashland Communications	
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SUMMARY

The City has been without a fulltime general communications person since September 2017. The City has a Communications Plan that was developed in 2010 and needs revitalization.

Until recently, the Parks and Recreation Department has been the only City department with a dedicated communications FTE staff person. As of August 2022, Parks & Recreation and City Management share the one (1) FTE, approximately 50/50. The position is supervised by Parks and Recreation with work also assigned as needed by City Manager's Office. The FTE is funded by the General Fund and monies from TOT (Transient Occupancy Tax).

BACKGROUND AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Current Communication Status

City communications is provided as follows using the below listed types and modes of communication:

- Parks & Recreation information is provided to the public on a scheduled or regular recurring basis per seasonal recreation programs or parks activity basis
- General City information is provided to the public on a response need or on-demand basis
- Communication funding may also be located in line items of department's operating budgets for items such as planning notices, public meeting notices, etc. that are department specific communications

Types of Communication

- News releases
- Social media posts
- Monitoring and responding to the City's new Q & A feature, "Let Curiosity Be Your Guide"
- Website updates to offer general and clear communication

Modes of Communication

- City Website
- Social Media (Facebook and Twitter)
- Local Media
- Signage
- Email (internal and external)

General Communication Accomplishments

The following has been accomplished since August 2022:

- Vision & Values adopted by Council in summer 2022 – Signage for the new Vision & Values developed and posted in City workplaces and public access points. The Vision and Values statements are posted on the City website and have been posted on the City social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter
- In celebration of the newly adopted Vision & Values statements, the City is revitalizing its brand and creating a VALUE brand for the City of Ashland that includes refreshed logo variations, new color scheme, new fonts and a new tagline, “Better Together!” The new look is unified with the Ashland Chamber of Commerce and Travel Ashland and highlights the partnership between the entities and recognizes that the City is “Better Together.” The new tagline signifies how we can work and play together, engage, listen and strengthen relationships and partnerships
- “Let Curiosity Be Your Guide,” new Q & A feature on the City website
- Procured nearly 50 iconic Ashland photos to be used in communications, the new City website and in OpenGov to help tell our story (OpenGov is an online platform that allows the City to share budget data effectively with transparency and accountability)
- Development of community partnerships and collaboration with organizations like the Ashland Chamber of Commerce and Travel Ashland
- Issued news releases on demand or as requested by City Management

RECOMMENDATIONS & PRIORITIES

The potential to do more for general City Communications, externally and internally, is strong and exceeds 1.0 FTE. Opportunities to engage with the public and staff are not being taken advantage of due to time constraints. Potential communication workplan items include the following:

CITY PRIORITIES AND BUSINESS UPDATES

- Use social media, City website and other modes of communication to inform/update the community on City policy and budget topics
- Investigate Strategic Initiatives on the OpenGov information/budget transparency tool – Community priorities/goals can be highlighted in OpenGov and tagged to a budget line item. This allows the City to report on the priorities later. For example, if a priority/goal is ‘safer streets in Ashland,’ we could highlight, and tag, the purchase of a K-9 unit, or body cameras
- Assist, in general, to tell the City’s story on OpenGov with inviting text and pictures
- Develop surveys/polls as needed on OpenGov via their platform Community Engage
- Draft a social media policy recommendation for consideration by the City Council
- Internally create a monthly communications report that will culminate into an annual communications report
- Internally create and maintain a Strategic Communications & Marketing Plan for the City

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

- Revive the City Newsletter for City website posting and/or to incorporate into the City Utility bill (include information about the City budget in newsletter)
- Develop new City website
- Increase engagement on social media, and set up an Instagram account for the City, and consider NextDoor

- Reinstated Team Ashland to inform the community on City services and promote volunteer opportunities

ECONOMY & TOURISM

- Link City and community activity information with Travel Ashland and other community partner websites/social media to promote a consistent community brand/message
- Create a City Calendar for Ashland and community partners. The goal is to let citizens and tourists know what there is to do in Ashland real-time
- Work to develop Ashland as not only a destination, but a basecamp to take in all that there is to do in Southern Oregon

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

- Help develop an updated Emergency Management Plan to anticipate potential risks and prepare for expedient and accurate communications during a crisis. The plan would assure timely, coordinated and consistent communication with Ashland households, businesses, public organizations and visitors
- Engage in emergency operations trainings for crisis communications

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

- Develop a City Communication Guide for internal organization/employee use to ensure brand use consistency and recommend training or guidance where needed
- Use news releases, City website, social media and a revived City Newsletter to promote community awareness of City services, recognize the work of staff and build community pride. Examples include:
 - Chris Chambers' trip to Spain to teach about fuels reduction
 - The Fire Mitigation Plan set for the City Electric Department
 - Stories honoring/recognizing those who serve on Committees/Commissions

The Communications person is currently working as time allows on developing the internal City Communication Guide that will outline design and brand guidelines for the City. The timeline is to have this in place the first quarter of 2023. The goal is to ensure brand consistency.

The above workplan items could be undertaken with one (1) Communications FTE for the City, in addition to a limited contracted marketing consultant, to also assure current department marketing efforts maintained. If communication resources are increased in the next biennium, a Strategic Communications & Marketing Plan will be developed. The plan will connect and promote Council priorities/goals with the Citizens of Ashland, support the City's Vision & Values and increase awareness about City services by providing modes of regular, clear and transparent communication. In addition, the plan will provide internal communication strategies with staff and create a culture that is supportive and inclusive. The plan will strive to continue to cultivate relationships with stakeholders and encourage two-way communication.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION

N/A

FISCAL IMPACTS

N/A

ACTIONS, OPTIONS & POTENTIAL MOTIONS

N/A

REFERENCES & ATTACHMENTS

None