



## CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE

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## CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

Meeting: December 7, 2021

### **Subject**

Discuss public engagement strategies

### **Recommended Action**

Discuss public engagement strategies

### **Background**

On July 20, 2021, the City Council directed the City Manager to return to the Council with a public engagement strategy. Public engagement is critical to local governments striving to make informed decisions in a transparent and effective manner. It also ensures that important policy and program decisions reflect the needs and challenges of a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including residents and businesses. The City utilizes numerous tools for public engagement to reach targeted audiences.

This report presents the City's current public engagement efforts, and provides a public engagement strategy including improved outreach, alternative engagement strategies, special events, and potential new approaches and mechanisms to enhance engagement and resident communications.

### **Discussion**

#### **Current City Engagement**

The City currently deploys a wide array of public engagement tools depending on the circumstance or need, including: digital media (City website, social media, e-notifications, Engage Cupertino online platform, newsletters); traditional media (press releases, Scene newsletters, flyers, postcards); in-person and online interactions (community meetings, event tabling, Council and commission meetings); and multimedia (City Channel, YouTube, radio, and electronic bulletin boards).

To clarify the depth of the City's outreach this calendar year to date, some data points include:

- More than 500 e-notifications sent to City email subscribers to inform the public about City meetings, events, services, and programs.

- More than 900 social media posts made across the City's platforms, which include Facebook, Nextdoor, Instagram, and Twitter
- Approximately 180 videos uploaded to the City's YouTube page. In 2021, the City's YouTube videos have been viewed 116,459 times, which translates to a cumulative watch time of 12,400 hours.
- The City website has received between 50,000 to 70,000 visits each month.
- The Scene, the City's newsletter, is sent to more than 23,000 households.
- 373 public Zoom webinars have been held as of late October which includes a combination of City meetings, special events, and Parks and Recreation classes. These meetings and events have attracted close to 8,000 attendees in total.

In addition, the City hosts more than 50 community special events each year, with some of the more popular ones being the State of the City Address, Independence Day Celebration, Earth and Arbor Day Festival, Tree Lighting Ceremony, and Bobateeno. The City also sponsors and supports other local organizations' events, such as the Cherry Blossom Festival, Diwali Festival, Kids 'N Fun Festival, and Day 'N Night Fun Fest (formerly the Fall Festival).

In addition, City staff, especially in Public Works and Community Development, regularly meet with residents, neighborhoods, and other groups to discuss specific issues and concerns, such as street and traffic improvements, school safety, planning projects, code enforcement concerns, cell phone tower installations, and more.

### Outreach

Although the City already uses a wide variety of public engagement tools, City staff has researched best practices used by other noteworthy jurisdictions and agencies, including five cities, one county, and three other regional agencies. That research indicates that some cities and agencies have adopted public engagement frameworks that guide public engagement efforts. These frameworks identify various levels of public engagement and create a roadmap to help standardize the engagement approach within an agency.

Adopting a public engagement framework will help ensure that an effective, consistent process is followed. The proposed framework categorizes engagement into three levels of engagement - inform, consult, collaborate - which are defined below. This has been adapted from the best practices identified by the Institute for Local Government (ILG) and the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).

- **Inform:** This level of engagement is designed to provide balanced and objective information to the community. This level is the most common and should always be used when engaging the community.
- **Consult:** This level of engagement is designed to obtain feedback from the community on analysis, alternatives and/ or decisions to ensure that issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered. This level is used for items that impact the community and should be used for the majority of new projects, services, programs, and policies.

- **Collaborate:** This level of engagement is used when we are inviting the community to help design the solution to a problem or a project. This level is used for high-stakes items with long lasting impacts to the community. Due to limited resources, including cost and time, this level should be used sparingly for no more than three to four items annually.

Below is the proposed framework. The framework includes a breakdown of each engagement level (inform, consult, collaborate) and provides guidance on when each level should be used and what strategies should be used at a minimum. These recommended strategies are in addition to any noticing required by law. Any given engagement must implement all baseline strategies according to the engagement level at a minimum, but may also exceed the minimum requirements as appropriate

Level of Engagement	Appropriate for	Baseline Strategies	Examples
<b>Inform</b> (Provide information)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing updates on existing programs</li> <li>• Regular updates on normal procedures</li> <li>• Policies mandated by law</li> <li>• Emergency related updates/policies that need to be delivered quickly</li> <li>• Non-controversial policies/programs with no perceived negative impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give updates on the City website</li> <li>• Provide information in City publications in digital and/or non-digital formats (i.e. email notifications, the Scene, newsletters, flyers, or mailers, social media)</li> <li>• Ensure impacted residents and businesses have access to necessary information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Mask Mandate</li> <li>• Suicide Prevention Policy</li> <li>• Festival Announcements</li> <li>• City Hall Closure</li> <li>• Parks and Rec Class Schedule</li> <li>• Organic Waste Ordinance (SB 1383)</li> </ul>
<b>Consult</b> (Gather feedback/input)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New programs or changes to existing programs that impact the community</li> <li>• Gathering public feedback on proposed policies, resolutions, and ordinances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform the public with strategies listed above</li> <li>• Ensure information is mailed citywide through Scene or mailer</li> <li>• Receive input from relevant Commissions/ Committees</li> <li>• Gather stakeholder feedback</li> <li>• Host at least one community meeting/ workshop or dedicated Council meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flavored Tobacco Ordinance</li> <li>• Via Shuttle Pilot Program</li> <li>• Athletic Field Use Policy</li> <li>• Single-Use Plastics Initiative</li> <li>• Secondhand Smoke</li> <li>• Junipero Serra Trail</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create project webpage on Engage Cupertino, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Survey</li> <li>○ Q&amp;A section</li> <li>○ Idea board</li> <li>○ Key timelines</li> <li>○ Project updates/ documents</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Garbage and Recycling Rate Increase</li> <li>• New Playground Structures</li> <li>• Bird Safe / Light pollution ordinances</li> </ul>
<i><b>Collaborate</b></i> (Invite community to design the solution)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highest priority programs/policies that will significantly affect residents and/or have a lasting impact on people's livelihood</li> <li>• Programs/policies where the City is inviting the community to help design the solution of a project.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform and consult the public with strategies listed above</li> <li>• Host a series of community meetings/workshops (could include charrettes)</li> <li>• Set up a project committee, focus group, or task force with key stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate Action Plan</li> <li>• Housing Element</li> <li>• Lawrence Mitty Park Design</li> <li>• Memorial Park Master Plan</li> </ul>

In addition to the recommended public engagement framework, the City is exploring the following ways to improve outreach:

- **Text Messaging Outreach:** The City is looking into the possibility of a text messaging service to enhance communications with the public. Such a platform would allow the public to send text messages directly to the City by using keywords that will trigger a response to answer the question or concern. It would also allow the City to send notifications regarding events, public meetings, and news alerts straight to residents' smartphones.
- **Outreach Report:** To better monitor outreach to guide improvements, the City is developing methods to collect data for outreach reports. Such reports could include social media metrics, event attendance data, and more. This will help measure progress and inform where adjustments need to be made.
- **Block Leader and Neighborhood Watch Programs:** In the past, Block Leaders received intermittent information on important City news, events, engagement opportunities, and updates from the Sheriff's Office and the City's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). As part of the FY 21-22 City Work Program, the program is being revamped to grow the program to be more inclusive of

additional community members and to enhance communications to and from the group as an important conduit of community engagement.

### Special Events

As described above, the City typically hosts more than 50 community special events in a normal year and supports multiple festivals put on by community organizations. While COVID-19 put a pause on many special events, the City has hosted virtual versions of many of these and is fully prepared to implement their return post-pandemic.

As the City heads toward post-pandemic life and more in-person events, Councilmembers can be supported in several ways to engage with residents through special events:

- Monthly Town Halls with a theme chosen by one or two councilmembers.
- Smaller Q&A style gatherings such as Coffee Talks, which can be held up to once a month with rotating councilmembers.
- Council tabling with staff supported set up at official City or City-sponsored events.

To further engagement, the City is investigating making slight changes to existing events. One example is moving the Pride Flag Raising and India Independence Day flag raising events to Friday evenings or weekends. This could draw larger crowds and give Councilmembers more exposure to residents. The City is evaluating its events to determine how to incorporate more face-time with Councilmembers with existing resources. The library addition opening next year is a prime example of an event that could span weekday and weekend opportunities to maximize public awareness and engagement. Events will be scheduled to encourage public participation as feasible. If there is the need for more events and support, the City would need to evaluate staffing resources.

### City Image

The perception of government and community, or the City's "image," can directly affect public engagement. The challenge of this factor has been compounded by deteriorating national and social discourse, and further complicated by the ongoing pandemic and significantly decreased face-to-face communications.

To foster a sense of community, cities often need to engage key stakeholders such as residents and businesses alike. But declining trust in all levels of government, as well as private businesses and organizations (including the media and non-profits), makes it even more challenging to engage stakeholders in meaningful discussions and problem-solving, rather than just positional or even political statements and advocacy.

Some Councilmembers have expressed a desire to build and maintain a more positive public image for the City, particularly regarding its efforts to build more housing in the community. Through our communication channels, the City has made a concerted effort

to identify good news stories in advance and ensure they are relayed to the public. To further enhance Cupertino's image and in turn promote productive public engagement, a three-tiered approach is recommended.

- **Tier 1: Pushing Out Positive Stories**

Building on recent work, the City will increasingly utilize storytelling and communication best practices to highlight the City's favorable attributes. Through this ongoing series of positive stories about Cupertino, we strive to raise awareness, change perceptions, and engage our key stakeholders in robust ways. These positive stories can serve to inform the public and to promote buy-in and feedback, and can also build community connection, and promote Cupertino as an attractive place to live, work, shop, and play. In addition to cultivating local pride, this effort will help establish a positive City image for external audiences that could assist in attracting new retailers, tourists, conferences, entrepreneurs, investors, industries, company headquarters and global capital to Cupertino. The strategy will focus on both internal (within the Cupertino community), and external (outside City boundaries) audiences. A key component of this effort will be generating content from City initiatives as well as highlights from throughout the community.

- **Tier 2: Targeted Marketing Campaigns**

As a complement to pushing out positive stories, the City will also undertake targeted marketing campaigns for high-impact, high-priority topics. Initial areas of focus will include the Housing Element update and Civic Engagement in general as we emerge from the pandemic. Means for implementing this could be social media campaigns, radio ads, community surveys, local newspapers, and ethnic communication channels to increase awareness. This component would seek to provide stakeholders a deeper understanding of the opportunities, challenges, and key next steps envisioned to address the topic at hand. This content will be tailored in a way that best addresses the concerns and interests of different stakeholders in a user-friendly format to get clear, effective messaging across.

- **Tier 3: Opinions/Subjective Communications**

While the use of City resources and official outreach must be objective and devoid of changing political perspectives and direction, individual Councilmembers can voice their own opinions and political viewpoints as public officials. City executive staff and limited consultant resources can provide advisory support only to Councilmembers pursuing individual subjective communications as long as they are non-political and do not violate state restrictions on public communications.

Through this tiered approach, the City aims to identify, position, and market Cupertino's unique attributes in order to promote the City's value proposition to key audiences. A

clearly-defined marketing plan must be deployed to share this value proposition broadly, thereby continuing to reinforce the enhanced image.

To facilitate the desired outcomes and to ensure a consistent, integrated, and effective approach, staff recommends exploring the possibility of contracting with an “image consultant” or a public relations agency that specializes in areas such as storytelling, influencer marketing, social media campaigns, and media relations. The consultant would collaborate with City staff to develop content and messaging, apply storytelling techniques to outbound communications, and conduct outreach to media and national influencers to pitch stories on Cupertino’s value proposition to relevant top-tier publications.

This is an exciting proposition, given the community’s strengths and the great opportunities currently and on the horizon in Cupertino. We look forward to sharing the story of our amazing City.

**Sustainability Impact**

No sustainability impact.

**Fiscal Impact**

If directed by Council, the cost of a public relations consultant will be evaluated. Preliminary research conducted by staff shows the annual cost of an image consultant can range from \$75,000 to \$150,000 depending on the level and types of services.

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