

**STUDY SESSION
OF THE UNIVERSITY CITY COUNCIL**
5th Floor of City Hall
6801 Delmar
December 9, 2019

AGENDA

Requested by the City Manager

1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

The City Council Study Session was held in Council Chambers on the fifth floor of City Hall, on Monday, December 9, 2019. Mayor Terry Crow called the Study Session to order at 5:30 p.m.

In addition to the Mayor, the following members of Council were present:

Councilmember Steven McMahon
Councilmember Paulette Carr
Councilmember Jeffrey Hales
Councilmember Tim Cusick
Councilmember Stacy Clay
Councilmember Bwayne Smotherson

Also in attendance were City Manager, Gregory Rose; City Attorney, John F. Mulligan Jr., and Director of Communications, Allison Bamberger.

2. CHANGES TO REGULAR COUNCIL AGENDA

Mr. Rose requested that Item J (3) of the Consent Agenda; Habitat for Humanity St. Louis Letter of Support, be moved to the City Manager's Report.

Councilmember Cusick stated Ms. Reese informed him that Donna Marin is no longer eligible to serve on the Historic Preservation Commission because she has already served two terms. Therefore, she should be removed from the appointments.

3. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Rose stated one of the most important responsibilities this administration has is to make sure residents are informed about the City's activities. Allison Bamberger, the Director of Communications, will present the different forms of communications being utilized in order to accomplish that task.

Ms. Bamberger stated this presentation illustrates how the City's communications efforts in the following areas have developed over the past year and her Department's goals for the future.

- Communications Philosophy
- Keys to Messaging
- Major Modes of External Communication
- ROARS
- Social Media

- Website
- Videos
- Calendar
- Internal Communications

Communications Philosophy

In order to build trust with those that we serve, there is a need to:

- Consistent, proactive communication both externally and internally with employees
- Communication should be equal among residents, stakeholders, and the business community
- Communicate with people the way they want to be communicated with; i.e., an easy mode of communication that reaches people where they are
- Listen

Keys to Messaging

All we do is to the benefit of our residents, and our messaging should reflect that.

- All of our services should benefit residents in efficient, convenient ways that are easily accessible
- Information to the public should be clear, concise and free from jargon when possible
- Communication should exist in consistent ways; i.e., Website, ROARS, Social Media, Council, Board, and Commission meetings, et cetera
- We should share the most possible information
- We should be responsive in our communication by answering questions

Major Modes of External Communications

- **ROARS Newsletter**
 - ROARS received an incredibly high score in the Citizen's Satisfaction Survey with respect to how people liked to receive communications and its effectiveness.
 - 2019 Distribution Method
 - ROARS was mailed out every other month at a cost of \$60,000 per year
 - Utilization of a design firm at a cost of \$24,000 a year
 - 2020 Distribution Proposal
 - Mailed out every three months, to include monthly online and printed mini issues. Hardcopies of the mini issues will be made available at City Hall, the Library, and Centennial Commons. This method of distribution will continue to provide consistent and accessible updates in a more cost-effective manner, resulting in a savings of \$10,000 for printing and postage.
 - In-house design, layout, and printing, resulting in a cost savings of \$24,000.
- **Social Media: NextDoor, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram**
 - An extremely popular way to engage residents and stakeholders of all ages.
 - Excellent mode of communication for social listening.

- **Social Media Strategies:**
 - U City Facebook groups and countless NextDoor threads provide staff with insight into what people are talking about in their neighborhoods. Provides the City with the ability to build relationships with major social media participants who can help disseminate its messages i.e., subdivision trustees, the Historical Society, U City in Bloom, Arts & Letters, et cetera
 - Staff is encouraged to place all posts and answers to questions on the City's official webpage to ensure residents know exactly where they can go to get information that comes directly from the source.
 - The Missouri Legislature will be reviewing social media and its impact on the Sunshine Law during its next session. As these laws develop and change, the implementation of social media archive software will be needed to keep track of the City's social media posts which will then be considered public documents.

Social Media: NextDoor

- The City initiated its Agency Account in January 2019.
 - An Agency Account is different than a personal account in that it comes directly from the Director of Communications, allows you to post to a much larger audience, and provides a greater sense of power or influence.
- Staff makes an average of five (5) posts each week.
- Posts are sent directly to more than 8,000 registered residents, which represents an estimated 30 percent of the 23,000 households in University City.
- In the 2019 Citizen Satisfaction Survey, NextDoor was rated Number 2 as the most preferred way to get information from the City.
- Discussion on Council's expectations regarding NextDoor postings.

Mr. Rose stated a decision was made at the staff level to disseminate postings on social media outlets that were outside of the City's accounts. However, in previous discussions, Council expressed a desire for the City to disseminate information acknowledging its awareness of any incident that might capture the media's attention, as well as, its goal to provide as much detailed information as possible at a later date. So, the question is whether Council is comfortable with posting this type of information on NextDoor, which is increasingly starting to become the norm?

Councilmember Carr stated she would like to see this information posted on the City's website with some kind of bullet that says, "Important Announcement," so that people don't have to hunt to find it. Some of us avoid NextDoor or other social media outlets, and she is also concerned about those people who do not have or do not want to have access to the internet. Mr. Rose stated anything posted on NextDoor could also be posted on the City's Facebook or Twitter accounts.

Councilmember Carr stated for some of us Facebook has become an anaffma due to the harvesting of data. And she thinks a lot more people will start to drop off. So no matter what staff does on the other social media platforms they should always have this type of information on the City's own platform. Mr. Rose acknowledged that going forward, that would be the practice staff will be instructed to follow.

Ms. Bamberger stated she understands there are some folks who don't want to go online at all and would rather receive a phone call, so she will address some alternatives, and how the City's website can grow as she moves forward in her presentation.

Social Media: Facebook

- The City's official page has been in existence for a number of years.
- Staff makes an average of five (5) posts per week.
- There are approximately 2,700 followers.
- Facebook pages are also maintained by the Fire Department, Parks and Recreation, Centennial Commons, and several Boards and Commissions, who do a great job of posting information about their programs.
- Non-city sponsored pages also exist that are monitored, but not controlled by staff; i.e., U City On The Record, U City Positively, et cetera.

Social Media: Twitter

- The City's account was restarted in January 2019.
 - The last post was in 2017.
- Staff makes an average of five (5) original posts per week, and twenty (20) re-tweets about the weather, county information, and local business information.
- There are approximately 1,700 followers consisting mostly of journalists.
- The best use of Twitter is to get media information out to local outlets.

Social Media: Instagram

- The City's account began in January 2019.
- Staff posts several times a month.
- There are approximately 200 followers.
- There is some interest with Millennials and college-aged residents.
- Instagram's algorithms make it a difficult outlet to use for spreading information.
- Best use; to highlight the attractive features of U City.

The 2020 Website

The website is currently going through a redesign, with the help of CivicPlus,

- A more modern look
- Clearer news and calendar features
- Clearer search features
- New feature; jobs
- Data analytics used to reorganize information
- Scheduled to launch in January 2020; *(A snapshot and brief explanation of the new homepage was provided to Council)*

Notify Me

A feature on the City's website managed by CivicPlus and used to send an emailed message to residents when events/agendas are posted.

- Approximately 500 residents are currently signed up to receive this service.
- Other options that are more robust and do not require the use of CivicPlus: Nixle, RAVE Alert, Code Red.
 - These programs can also be used for emergency communications, via specifically targeted emails, text messages or phone calls.

- The approximate cost is \$5,000 a year
- Joint proposal to be drafted by the Communications and Police Departments in 2020.

Public Meetings and Live Stream

- Currently, all public meetings on the 5th floor of City Hall are live-streamed to both YouTube and Facebook; (*Changes made within Facebook's software have caused problems with live streaming.*)
- Older infrastructure, such as microphones will need to be replaced in the future
- All servers are scheduled to be replaced in the next budget year to achieve quicker infrastructure communications.

Press Conferences and Ribbon Cuttings

In 2019 the City had two press conferences/ribbon cuttings:

- Olive and 1-70 Redevelopment in May
- Return of in-house EMS
- The goal for 2020 is to conduct at least three or potentially one every other month to tell our stories
- Council's expectations on the types of events to be celebrated

Mr. Rose stated staff's intention is to work with Council when setting up ribbon cuttings or press conferences. However, if Council would prefer to go in a different direction please let him know.

Video Program

- Monthly Department Videos with Mr. Rose, who sits down with each department to ascertain their status and provide updates.
 - Forsyth Improvement Project
 - Safety improvements within the Delmar Garage and forthcoming mural
 - City Recycling Tips
- More to come in 2020:
 - How to videos; How to get an Occupancy Permit, et cetera
 - The City's new website
- All videos are posted on YouTube and published across the City's website and social media sites.
- Most videos get approximately 200 to 250 views.

City Calendar

- Great partnerships with Jenny Wendt, the City's Sustainability Coordinator, and the Arts & Letter Commission.
- For the 2020 Mannequins on the Loop staff was able to combine information on sustainability with photos of the mannequins to increase education and informational resources.
- Looking to incorporate more educational and resource materials into next year's calendar.
- A PDF version of the calendar will be made available online.

Internal Communications

- All departments have been switched over to Microsoft Office 365.
 - Great feedback from detectives who really like the feature that allows them to share information in real-time to a shared document hosted in the cloud.
 - Some officers now have email for the first time.
 - Resolution of issues associated with the maxing out of storage space.
 - Training will continue in 2020
- Possible Employee Newsletter in 2020 to enhance communications between departments.

Councilmember Carr stated traditionally, members of Council have not had a City address, which leads to questions about whether the information was sent to their personal addresses, and problems with the ability to access her entire Ward. So she would ask that consideration be given to providing Council with a City address. Ms. Bamberger stated a City address is something that can be considered.

Councilmember Clay posed the following questions to Ms. Bamberger:

Q. I have concerns about the timeliness of the information being presented by volunteers who maintain their Board or Commission's Facebook page. Can you talk a little bit about how that works and how staff supports these entities?

A. Not every Board or Commission has a Facebook page, and in fact, most do not. But you're right, those that do, have a tendency to not update them as frequently. And since they are volunteers, she has not required them to register their pages with the Department or implemented any requirements as to what they can or cannot do. So at this point, she has simply been monitoring them and providing support when it is requested.

Q. One of the strategies listed for outreach was public meetings. Were you only thinking of the standard Council meetings or is there a larger vision?

A. Ms. Bamberger stated she has been encouraging every department to conduct public meetings, especially when they involve partner agencies like MSD, who will soon be starting a project on 82nd Street. It is something she would like to make a priority because these kinds of meetings can help bring a project and the community together.

Councilmember Clay stated he is glad to hear that, even though as a veteran of public meetings he can appreciate that oftentimes they do not yield in attendance what you might like to see. But he does think there is a benefit to Council and staff being out in the community. Ms. Bamberger stated the benefit of having public meetings in a space like this is the ability to film and archive it for future reference. Although they do have access to a camera with the capability of uploading videos to YouTube for meetings held at the Community Center.

Q. I appreciate the information we received from the Citizen's Satisfaction Survey but is there a way to take it a step further and engage our residents in some sort of focus groups in order to dig a little deeper in terms of things they would like to hear or do?

A. *The first Study Session in January will be with ETC, the company that conducted the survey. They will provide Council with a breakdown of things the City is doing well, and the areas for improvement. From that, if Council determines there are certain parts where they would like more information, she thinks it would be a great idea to conduct a listening session with the public.*

Q. Every now and then Council may become involved in things that are controversial or find the need to make decisions that may not please the entirety of this community. So what is your philosophy or thinking about how we can be proactive with respect to getting out in front of these issues with ready answers that provide the community with better clarification or understanding?

A. *I am always ready to assist with putting together any kind of Q & A, fact sheet or talking points for anyone on a specific topic. In fact, she works with all of the directors when there are media inquiries to get that type of information solidified ahead of time prior to conducting interviews.*

Mr. Rose stated staff's interest is in making sure that complete and accurate information is disseminated. These days, anyone that has a computer can be a journalist, but the expectation of getting good information from a local government is vastly different than an individual with a blog. So whenever a situation arises where they do not readily have a comprehensive response to an incident, they will be instructed to utilize the communication methods previously discussed at tonight's meeting.

Councilmember Smotherson posed the following questions to Ms. Bamberger:

Q. Do you have a breakdown by Ward of the 8,000 folks registered on the City's social media sites? A lot of folks in the 3rd Ward are not connected to social media, so the numbers would be important to help them determine how effective NextDoor really is in his community.

A. *Although I do not have that breakdown it is something I can get from NextDoor. But when staff looks at the GIS maps from the Citizen's Satisfaction Survey they can cross-reference that data to found out how some people from each Ward responded to the question about how they prefer to receive communications. So she can provide that breakdown by tomorrow.*

Q. In the past, more often than not, reporters have drifted off to the negative aspect of a story. So, while "Tell our story; but make sure it's special," is an excellent goal, what connections has the City made in the St. Louis media world that will ensure our story gets told?

A. *The West End Word's reporting is often very good; The Post Dispatch does a good job of covering the City, and there are reporters from Channels 2, 4 and 5, that she talks to all the time. But most importantly, when the City engages in these events it is connecting with its residents and directly telling that story by self-publishing.*

Councilmember Hales stated he really appreciated a lot of the posts made this summer. The Forsyth construction project impacted the 1st Ward and during that construction, a curb cut was installed that extended too far out into the roadway. Residents immediately responded, and not only did the City address it, but they also issued a subsequent video documenting those changes. So for him, one of the greatest benefits comes from communicating with residents because he heard a lot of positive feedback.

Those communications clearly demonstrated the City was listening; a value that is really had to quantify.

Councilmember Carr stated she would like to echo Councilmember Hales' admiration. When the street collapsed in Ward 2 the City uploaded a wonderful video that explained exactly what was going on, which pacified a lot of people who had viewed the reports on TV. She stated her newsletters used to be a major source of information, in spite of the fact that her preference would have been that this information comes from the City so citizens would have been able to hear what the administration was saying. And she thinks that is what's being done today. Ms. Bamberger has just started, and while there is always room for improvement, from her perspective she is doing a wonderful job of reaching and disseminating various types of information.

Councilmember Carr stated encouraging citizens to use the Library may be another way for residents to access information. The Library has a bank of computers and librarians that would be happy to help them. It's simply a matter of educating people about how they can access these multimodal communication practices.

Mayor Crow stated based on his years of experience with the press; they have been inclined to gravitate to the negative side of a story. Perhaps, because it draws a larger audience than the positive narrative the City tries to publish. But, before a final decision is made, he would like staff to reflect on why the City should reduce the number of ROARS publications to every three months if it received such a high score from Citizens as being an effective means of communication? Mr. Rose stated staff's proposal is not just to reduce this publication, but to expand the City's message by issuing monthly mini issues. The goal is to do a better job of disseminating information not just through ROARS, but the utilization of various communication resources. So they could certainly continue ROARS on a bimonthly basis but that might be a little excessive if there is still interest in creating the mini issues. Mayor Crow asked if the mini issues would only be available online? Mr. Rose stated that they would be.

Mayor Crow stated while he can see the cost-effectiveness of performing the design in-house, his thoughts are that a smoother transition might be to start the mini issues and continue the bi-monthly issues of ROARS for a period of time until people have a clear understanding and comfort level with the new process. Because in all honesty, in spite of the fact that he gets a lot of his information online he actually looks forward to receiving his copy of ROARS in the mail. And that fact alone makes him think that folks who are older than he is are probably going to feel the same way. Mr. Rose and Ms. Bamberger both agreed that staff had the capacity to carry out the Mayor's suggestion over the course of the next year.

Councilmember Hales stated he thinks the Mayor's point is well taken and wonders if staff could also utilize Councilmember Carr's suggestion to begin educating residents over the next year about these mini issues and encouraging them to sign up and become a part of listserv. Because if you could get people to start utilizing this service, over time, that would certainly help with the transition.

Ms. Bamberger stated the list is relatively small, so staff will start making a more robust effort to educate folks about the availability of these resources.

She stated even though a lot of her counterparts are cutting back on printed copies for reasons associated with sustainability and the reduction of costs, there were several reasons why she was drawn to the idea of an online version of ROARS. Staff must start gathering information for the bi-monthly edition almost a month and a half before the issue goes out. By the time it reaches your mailbox, sometimes the information is outdated or incorrect. The mini issues make sure residents are receiving the most up-to-date information. However, this is just one out of a variety of options that can be considered.

Mr. Rose stated he's putting his plug in for the mini issues, which staff has suggested to be called "*The Cub*".

Councilmember Carr stated since some people may not be willing to provide their email address in order to access these new mini issues, she would once again encourage staff to post them on the City's website. She stated that she really would like to see more traffic on the website, as opposed to it just being a holding place.

Ms. Bamberger stated in the future, the process will consist of posting each issue on the website, along with a link to NextDoor and Twitter. PDF(s) will be mailed out to folks that sign up for listserv

Councilmember Smotherson stated if the Olive Redevelopment Project takes off as planned people will want to know what's going on, and Council will be bombarded with a lot of calls. Are there any communication initiatives or resources being contemplated to make sure everyone is engaged and up-to-date about what is or will be occurring?

He stated that his last question is for the Mayor, and that is, who requested tonight's presentation? Mayor Crow stated his recollection is that the topic of communications was presented at the Planning Session and determined to be a high priority among the list of subjects Council would like to see discussed in greater detail.

Mayor Crow stated he thinks it would be wise for staff to make contact with other municipalities that have experience in the process that encompasses planning for a major development; i.e., Maplewood and Richmond Heights, to learn what they did well; especially in the form of communications, and of course, what they could have done better.

Secondly, now that U City has restored its Mutual Aid Agreement, he has been curious to know the impact it has had with respect to reciprocal calls for assistance among its agency partners. This was a hot button issue for a vast number of citizens, and he thinks this data is something the public, as well as the City's neighboring partners, might be interested in knowing.

Councilmember Carr stated as members of this Council, each of us have a responsibility to communicate with our constituents; especially the seniors in our Wards, and those pockets of citizens who may not have good avenues for the receipt of information. So, when we become aware of new projects or issues that may be problematic, there is nothing wrong with making a phone call, sending a letter, initiating a Town Hall meeting, or even dropping printed materials off at someone's doorstep.

Councilmember Carr stated even though the City's communication program is much more comprehensive, and a useful asset, she thinks Council has an obligation to take some of the responsibility for outreach.

Mr. Rose stated he would like to make two comments in response to tonight's discussions. Currently, NOVUS is in the property acquisition and financing phase of the Olive/I-170 Redevelopment Project. However, once they get to the construction phase staff will distribute an informational packet to residents that will include a calendar of events.

The second comment is related to Study Sessions. Mr. Rose stated his goal has been to provide Council with tentative agendas for Study Sessions three months in advance so that if there are questions or concerns regarding a subject matter being proposed, Council will have ample opportunity to bring that to his attention. He stated he wanted to remind Council about this process and encourage anyone who would like to see a meeting or proposed agenda item revised, to please let him know.

4. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Crow informed his colleagues that there will be a Closed Session after the Regular Council Session, and adjourned the Study Session at 6:23 p.m.

LaRette Reese
City Clerk