CITY OF PORTSMOUTH
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
REPORT

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Suzanne Woodland, Deputy City Manager
Beverly Zendt, Planning Director
Stephanie Seacord, Public Information Officer
Laura Horwood-Benton, Library Assistant Director

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IN THIS REPORT

At the May 16, 2022 City Council meeting, Councilor Tabor requested a report back from City Staff on Community Engagement initiatives. We have outlined here communications channels and processes currently in place and additional opportunities.

This report summarizes:

- **Existing communications channels**
- **A consideration of new technologies**
- **Performance metrics, best practices and recommendations**

EXISTING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

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The City engages residents in person, across City-managed communications platforms and public media, and through surveys and other interactive initiatives.

DIRECT RESIDENT FEEDBACK

- Public comment at City Council meetings & Work Sessions

- Public hearing comment at City Council meetings

- Public dialogues (like Budget listening sessions)

- Public comment at all Board, Commission and Committee meetings

- City Department "Open Door" and "Office Hours" opportunities - for Planning, Inspections, City Manager, Mayor, DPW, etc.

- Staff at Citywide Neighborhood Committee Ward Forums, meetings and National Night Out

- Staff at Farmers' Market, Market Square Day, Childrens Day, Fall Family Fun Fest

- DPW Project Public Information Meetings

- Special Topic information meetings - such as Inspections, Department workshops, Water Forum, Community Power Informational Event, Joint Planning/ Conservation Commission meeting on watershed zoning.

- Public participation in the Capital Improvement Plan and Budget process

- Click 'n Fix – for tracking and reporting maintenance issues

- Along with neighborhood events, to reach the widest base possible, Informal feedback at public service points: (Recreation, Library, City Hall, Transfer Station)

- Health & School Departments outreach

- Comments and direct messages on social media

- Email form on city website:
    - City Council members
    - On major DPW projects
    - City staff

- Emails to **hotline@cityofportsmouth.com**

CITY CHANNELS FOR INFORMING RESIDENTS

City Website

CityofPortsmouth.com

Provides current information and full details on City Departments, current projects, and City Boards, Commissions and Committees as well as archives of proceedings.

The website is a portal for conducting business with the City, including:

- scheduling inspections
- paying bills
- making donations
- signing up to be kept informed on specific projects

Channel 22/Video Recording

A vital communications channel for hard to reach Portsmouth residents and those without Internet access. City Council meetings are broadcast and repeated, along with regular bulletins on street closure notices, snow parking bans, vaccination clinics, cooling centers, etc. Video recordings of all City meetings are live-broadcast and archived on the YouTube channel.

Email Newsletters

The City Newsletter (distributed electronically Monday & Wednesday) has **3,873 subscribers** (as of June **2022**). It is also converted to PDF format and posted to the website and social media, and emailed to media, CNC, Chamber and others.

Focused newsletters for city departments include: Library, Recreation, and Schools.
DPW Project e-blasts covering **1,461 subscribers** for various projects, "push" eblasts and "pull" comment forms.

Financial Reports

The Finance Department prepares and makes public the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, Popular Annual Financial Report and Annual Budget documents for each fiscal years – in print and interactive electronic form.

Media Relations

The Public Information Officer (PIO) maintains the City's relationship with local/regional media, providing press releases, media/photo opp advisories and op-eds, fielding inquiries and providing follow-up materials. The PIO is also trained in the State of NH WebEOC Emergency Response Network to liaise with the Emergency Operations Center Director (Fire Chief) if required.

Smart911 (formerly CodeRED)

Maintained by PPD for emergency notices. Used most often for snow parking ban notices. The new system has a polling capability as well as the 'push' notifications offered by the previous CodeRED (text, email and voicemail),

Emergency bulletins are also communicated with color-coded Channel 22 "crawls," website banners, Facebook (CityHallPortsmouthNH, UnofficialPortsmouthNH, PortsmouthNH) and Twitter posts and via media alerts.

Direct Mail

This includes water bill inserts, annual Water System Reports, "Think Blue" postcard series, abutter notices, and periodic mailers from Library. The Inspections Department has also created its own list of contractors/users of the online permitting system to push out notices of conferences, code changes and other information.

Social Media

Facebook

- **CityHallPortsmouthNH**
  19,807 reached in June,
  up 54.% over May 2022
- **Fire Department:**
  3,500 followers
- **Library:** 4,700
- **Police Department:** 21,000
- **Recreation Department:** 1,400
- **Schools:** 882
- Sharing with **Unofficial Portsmouth** (18,400) and **PortsmouthNH** (28,800) groups

Twitter

- **City**
- **DPW**
- **Combined Sewer Overflow Alert**
- **Fire Department**
- **Human Resources**
- **Library**
- **ParkPortsmouth**
- **Planning Department**
- **Police Department**
- **Recreation Department**
- **Schools**

Instagram

- **Think Blue Portsmouth NH**
- **Library**
- **ParkPortsmouth**
- **Recreation**

YouTube

- **City**
- **Think Blue**
- **Library**

LinkedIn

- **Human Resources**
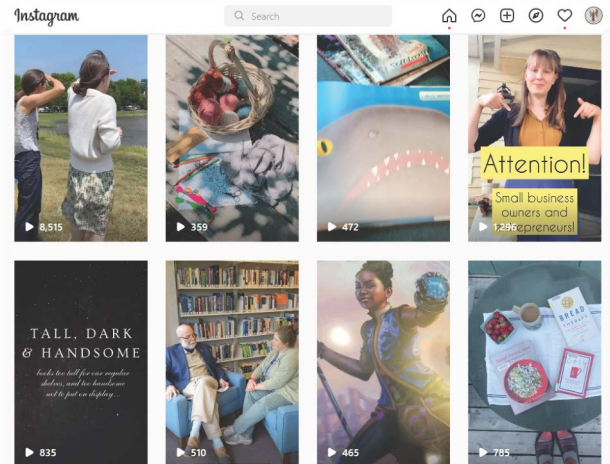
POLLS & SURVEYS

Focus Groups

The City uses formal focus groups directed by communications facilitators for major projects such as the McIntyre Project (Portsmouth Listens and the Principle Group), the Recreational Needs Study (Placework/Horsley Witten Group, Inc.), the Prescott Park Master Planning process, and the ADU zoning update.

Mailchimp/Survey Monkey

The City uses both of these survey platforms to solicit feedback on specific projects and issues, like the Neighborhood Parking Program, ADUs, Middle Street Bike Lanes, Maple Haven/ Pannaway Manor sidewalk projects, Fleet Street redesign and the Recreational Needs Study. Portsmouth Public Library regularly conducts event feedback surveys and plans to launch a Strategic Plan survey in the fall.

QR codes

With the renaissance of QR code use since the pandemic, City staff have found these an effective and easy way for residents to participate in surveys.
For example, Public Works solicited input last year for the Fleet Street project, and a QR code allowed users of the street to easily weigh in.

Door-to-door

As needed, residents are informed of DPW projects with flyers delivered to their doors. Some projects such as the Middle Street Bike Lane and Peverly Hill Road solicited feedback through door-to-door canvassing.

Instant Polling

The City is now using Sli.do for instant polling (in-person and Zoom audience) at public meetings, like the Water Forum and Community Power Information Event.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

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There are numerous ways social media and other electronic communications channels can be leveraged for local government, and Portsmouth has already found innovative, intriguing and safe ways to deploy these technologies.

City staff **are** exploring new platforms for engaging the public, including the following.

Miro.com Virtual Whiteboard

Principle Group used several interactive means for community participation in the McIntyre Project discussion: Portsmouth Listens focus groups, surveys and the dynamic Miro whiteboard technology during online public meetings (posted on the **McIntyre Project page**).

Virtual Lobby

A **Virtual Lobby** allows virtual engagement similar to a workshop or charrette. The resident begins in a virtual City Hall foyer with a video recording from the Mayor and can visit different kiosks with information or surveys.

Podcasting

The City of Dover, NH currently uses a podcast to provide updates on City events and issues of interest (**The Dover Download**). Portsmouth Library has offered a podcast in the past.

Pulse.com/Let's Connect

Planning Director Beverly Zendt used this **monthly information/ polling platform** in Redmond, WA, which provided residents with information on specific topics.

Government Delivery Listserv

This tool allows residents to subscribe to topics are that most interesting to them. The City can select those specific sub-lists when sending out information e.g. land use board issues.

Consider.it

Recommended by a resident as a **platform for public dialogue** on the Climate Action Plan because "It allows people to voice their opinion in a more robust way than by simply being 'for or against' something, and more than just checking a box on a survey. It also allows them to read, consider, and even amplify other peoples' ideas. The broad spectrum of peoples' opinions is graphically displayed in a user-friendly format and the site can be moderated to keep the dialogu**e** on point and respectful (there is even a 'code of conduct' agreement when people register)."

# PERFORMANCE METRICS, BEST PRACTICES & RECOMMENDATIONS

PERFORMANCE METRICS

Quantifiable measures like number of subscribers, fol lowers, respondents and reach can be measured for future improvements.

Beyond looking for increases across the board, each channel would benefit from a review and evaluation of qualitative measures, such as:

- What topics receive the most feedback?
- What channels are essential
- Should timing of messaging be adjusted? (Note: Sli.do polls can be useful for this, as well as in-person feedback in settings, where appropriate.)

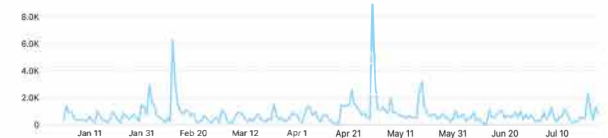In addition, the City Budget includes Accomplishments/ Achievements and Goals as ways to measure performance.

Your Tweets earned **2.7K impressions** over this **28 day** period

Results   Export
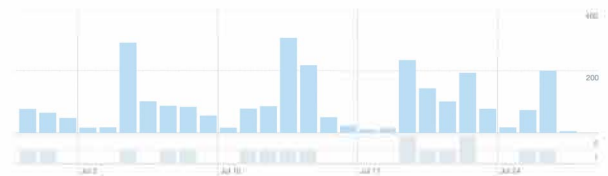
Facebook Page reach

50,513 ↓ 14.7%

Instagram reach

61,530 ↑ 100%

BEST PRACTICES

Moving ahead with efforts to bolster two-way communication with residents, the City will keep in mind evolving best practices. Here are some themes to consider:

Integrating Communications Directly with Services

Currently examples include DPW's Click 'n Fix app, the OpenGov permitting portal, and the informal feedback received at public service desks. Further integration may be beneficial in some departments.

Increasing Responsiveness

This includes both a faster response time to feedback and inquiries, as well as following up on priorities determined by public input. For example, the expanded use of the OpenGov platform has allowed us to be more interactive with our customers.

Developing a Brand and Identity

Ensuring that residents know communications come directly from the City and that they're using a trusted platform, with consistent design and branding.

Telling a Story

Finding the moments in our work that will spark public interest and demonstrate what City staff and officials accomplish, in clear and understandable language, will continue to be a focus.

Sources

"4 strategies that are defining the future of city communications" **Bloomberg Cities**

"Creating a Welcoming and Connected City" **ICMA**

"Twitter, blogs and other Web 2.0 tools revolutionize government business" **FCW**

"Best Practices and Trends for Marketing Communications in the Public Government" **Roberta Cinus**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Here are some recommendations for next steps from City of Portsmouth staff.

Test a Communications Campaign inviting resident engagement, modeling the process proven to be effective: small focus groups, surveys, public information meeting to provide results, further refinement, adoption of recommendations.

Collect Performance Metrics on a regular schedule, and evaluate.

Focus on Continuous Improvement in adopting and incorporating best practices.

Beta Test New Technologies on specific programs. For example, trying Consider.It for the Climate Action Plan.

Assign a Communications Specialist to social media monitoring, trending topics and response. **(M**id-year b**u**dg**e**t**)**

Assemble a Community Engagement Team from across departments to meet and discuss best practices, lessons, and work collaboratively on new projects.