

***Community Engagement Committee Members***

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**MEETING OF THE  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE  
Wednesday November 18, 2020 - 6:30 p.m.  
Vadnais Heights City Hall**

**AGENDA**

1. Welcome – Mayor Gunderson
  - A. Brief History (Sandvik)
2. Committee Member Introductions
3. Discussion of Current City Communication/Engagement Strategies
  - A. What does engagement mean to Committee Members
4. Next steps
  - A. Information desired by Committee Members
  - B. Set next meeting date – December 2020
5. Adjourn

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## *Memorandum:*

TO: Community Engagement Committee

DATE: November 18, 2020

SUBJECT: Inaugural Vadnais Heights - Community Engagement Committee Meeting

This memorandum is designed to guide the initial discussion of the Community Engagement Committee by providing an outline from which to work, including:

- A welcome from Mayor Gunderson
- A Brief History – ‘How we got here...’
- Outline of Current Communication/Engagement Strategies – explore additional opportunities
- Discuss next steps

### **Welcome from Mayor Gunderson**

Mayor Gunderson will provide a welcome to the group and provide parameters for the group as defined by the City Council through the process of the creation of the Community Engagement Committee.

### **Brief History**

In the spring of 2019, the City Council hosted a Goal Setting session to establish Top Priorities and Objective for the City Council in 2019-2020. Item 5 was labeled as “Develop communication/engagement strategies for greater community participation”. The full document from this session is attached.

As the City remains a lean operation in both staff and resources available, staff prepared materials for Council during the 2019 budgeting season for future consideration. Upon approval of the 2020 budget (September, 2019), the City included increased funding for communications. In early 2020, staff met with Mayor Gunderson to explore how this might be best facilitated (staff time, additional staff, contracted services, etc...). Unfortunately, this conversation halted in March due to the pandemic.

Starting the discussion again in June of 2020, Council reestablished the desire of increased communication and engagement with residents. In July, the Council formally approved the formation of the Community Engagement Committee and staff immediately began to solicit ‘Letters of Interest’ from potential participants.

Original messaging requested those who were interested in participating to provide desired goals and/or a vision for the group and staff received varying responses. As a reminder, the original submission deadline for Letters of Interest in mid-August resulted in less than a handful of Letters received. Staff was directed to extend the deadline for additional submissions for review at the September 1, 2020 Council meeting. In wanting resident feedback to help guide the goals of the C.E.C., staff created messaging stating (in part)

“In your letter, please share your experience as a Vadnais Heights resident and what vision or goals you would have for working with the Community Engagement Committee.” At the second deadline of August 27, 2020, staff received a total of ten (10) Letters of Interest. Unfortunately, after further consideration a number candidates withdrew their names for consideration in participating in the C.E.C.

However, after electronic and phone conversations with the remaining candidates, staff presented a list to Council for approval. With committee membership established, staff used the month of October to schedule phone calls, zoom calls and in-person meetings with each member of the C.E.C. to help understand goals and visions for the committee. Combing these conversations, staff has put materials together for the initial meeting.

While there was no unanimous set of goals, staff recognized a few themes to advance discussion. It was found it would be helpful to better understand current communication/engagement strategies, ask –“What does engagement mean to committee Members?”, and better understand the programs and services the City provides and identify those (programs and services) outside the jurisdiction of the City that residents could be connected with.

### **Committee Member Introductions**

Community Engagement Committee members will be asked to introduce themselves.

### **Current Communication/Engagement Strategies**

An ongoing theme staff heard from committee members was it would be helpful to know current engagement/communication strategies before identifying potential gaps. Staff will walk through the attached Communications document to show how the City currently communicates/engages with residents. While not complete, it is designed to show the variety of strategy as well as content.

### **What does engagement mean?**

Another ongoing theme staff heard from committee members was that it would be helpful to hear the variety of perspectives within the C.E.C. All Committee members are encouraged to participate in this discussion to help identify potential gaps.

### **Next Steps**

At its core, the City provides a basic set of programs and services. The Council desires to ensure that all residents have access to these, and all residents have the opportunity to engage with the City. Further, there may be programs and services available to our residents outside the jurisdiction of the City, but the City may play a role in communicating those opportunities. To better understand content for upcoming meetings, staff is requesting C.E.C. members make requests for information to be presented. Please remember, if between meetings, members have questions, comments, or concerns, they are highly recommended to contact City staff.

# City of Vadnais Heights 2019-2020 Workplan

## Top Priorities and Objectives

- 1. Develop a Street Reinvestment Plan**
  - Evaluate current conditions of city streets
  - Rate based on approved criteria
  - Establish city relationship between service level expectations and funding
  - Create one- and five-year plans
  - Implement plan and assess accordingly
- 2. Formulate and adopt a 20-year Capital Improvement Plan**
  - Assess current infrastructure and equipment
  - Prioritize ownership, lease, share or other methods of providing equipment
  - Identify acquisition options (selection)
  - Develop the funding plan
  - Develop narrative and communication plan, sell it
- 3. Develop a proactive Economic Development Plan**
  - Collaborate and coordinate with VHEDC
  - Analyze potential financial incentives/business subsidy policy
  - Review existing TIF tools and future uses
  - Assess demographics within certain city segments
- 4. Create and utilize a service-level budgeting approach**
  - Assess programs and operations within each department
  - Retool budget document and process to tell the story (narrative)
  - Council evaluate cost priorities
  - Incorporate CIP for manageable levy increase
- 5. Develop communication/engagement strategies for greater community participation**
  - Identify our demographics and how they access information
  - Tell our story as identified by goals and priorities
  - Connect to understand desired level of engagement
  - Marketing/Education
  - Face-to-Face opportunities, such as special events, partnerships, coffee w/your Council member – get creative and make it fun!
- 6. Maintain or increase housing values through Housing Preservation Plan**
  - Consider subsidizing home improvements
  - Analyze existing programs by other agencies
  - Consider proactive code enforcement
  - Analyze existing property maintenance violations
- 7. Preserve and Expand the City's trail system**
  - Evaluate and look for gaps in trail system; solicit public feedback
  - Look for high priority projects – Vadnais Lake
  - Establish funding
  - Create maintenance plan
  - Implement and evaluate



# Communications Analysis

## Challenge

The City of Vadnais Heights wishes to explore new opportunities for public engagement to ensure we effectively promote access to the programs and services the City provides. Further, the City functions as a conduit connecting residents to programs and services outside its jurisdiction; and while staff continually works to identify ways to make these potential connections, it is helpful to have community feedback on potentially desired outside resources. Admittedly, the City recognizes opportunities for improvement with communication and engagement and believes the Community Engagement Committee will help improve City efforts.

Committee members largely agreed that before assessing gaps in communication and engagement, it would be helpful to understand current strategies. Staff has compiled a few lists thinking in terms on a spectrum of sharing information to engaging

## Baseline Communications

By law, the city is required to issue communication notices for specific circumstances. This may include a variety of services including functions related to Finance, Community Development, and Public Works. While these items may be required, they are the first step for many in receiving communication from the City and first step to the engagement process (which may or may not include public hearing and or open houses). Some examples include:

- Street vacation.
- Annexation by ordinance.
- Approval of local improvement project to be paid for with special assessments.
- Consideration of proposed special assessments.
- Purchase and improvement of waterworks, sewers, drains, and storm sewers by storm sewer improvement districts.
- Adoption of a resolution establishing a housing redevelopment authority.
- Adoption of a resolution establishing an economic development authority.
- Sale of port authority land.
- Sale of EDA land.
- Increase of EDA levy.
- Continuation of a municipal liquor store after a net loss for two of three consecutive years.
- Truth in taxation.
- Adoption or amendment of zoning ordinance.
- Subdivision applications.
- Conditional use permits.
- Adoption of a charter amendment by ordinance.
- Adoption of interim ordinance that regulates, restricts, or prohibits a housing proposal.

## Current Engagement Strategies

The city aims to further reach the the public through a multitude of communications strategies including online, social media, print and electronic signs. Know the variety of demographics the City serves prefers communication and engagement in different mediums, the City maintains multiple channels.

Outlet	Name	Frequency - Strategy
In Person	Commission Work	4-12 meetings Annually - Advisory
In Person	Committee/Task Force	Ongoing –Public Engagement, Advisory
Online	Website	Constant – Comprehensive Resource
Online/Cable	City Meetings	2-4 times per month - broadcast
Social media	Facebook	At least daily – Promote Engagement
Social media	Twitter	At least daily – Promote Engagement
Print	City Newsletter	Tri-Annual – Promote/share resources
Print	Utility Bill	Quarterly – Time sensitive messaging
Print	Press Publications	Weekly – promote immediate
Print	Senior Newsletter	Monthly – Share ongoing resources
Print	Various	Ongoing – Promote General Projects
Parks Event	Heritage Days	Annual – Full City, Comm. engagement
Parks Event	Music in the Parks	5 times per year – engage neighborhoods
Parks Event	5 Annual Events	Egg Hunt, ICS, MIP, Halloween Event, PJs with Santa
Parks Event	Senior Lunch Series	2-4 Annual – Connect Seniors
VHFD	Fire Prevention Week	Annual – Promote Safety

## New Opportunities for Engagement

*Community conversations?*

*Events targeted to under-served or under engaged neighborhoods?*