

Community Engagement Committee Members

Tim Cheesebrow
Leslie Duling McCollam
Heather Gustafson
Lucie Passus
Candace Yates

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City Council Liaison

Erik Goebel
Mayor Heidi Gunderson (alternate)

Staff Liaison

Tim Sandvik

**MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE
Wednesday January 20, 2021 - 6:30 p.m.
MEETING VIA ZOOM: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83718412297>**

AGENDA

1. Call to order
2. Review December 16, 2020 Minutes
3. Review January 14, 2021 Memo to Committee Members
4. Respond to Questions posed by Committee Members
5. Assign Topics to Committee Members
6. Next Steps
 - A. Staff Updates
 - B. Committee Updates
 - C. Set next meeting date – February 2021
7. Adjourn

Community Engagement Committee

Held via Zoom

Meeting Minutes

December 16, 2020

Attendees: Mayor Gunderson, City Administrator Watson, Assistant City Administrator Sandvik, and Community Engagement Committee Members Erik Goebel, Candace Yates, Leslie Duling McCollam and Heather Gustafson, Tim Cheesebrow, Lucie Passus.

Not present: Katrina Cole.

Others present: Brook Thomson

Assistant City Administrator Sandvik opened the meeting.

1. **Minutes:** Presented minutes of the November 18, 2020 meeting. Corrected spelling of Leslie Duling McCollam's name.
2. **Committee Logistics:** Sandvik noted that some standing committees and commissions will operate with a Chair, but since the meetings are recorded, we would not necessarily need a secretary. The Committee discussed whether it wants to have a Chair and whether it should adopt Roberts Rules of Order. Lucie Passus recommended that the Committee recommend a Chair at this meeting and vote on it.

Heather Gustafson recommended appointing Lucie Passus as Chair of the CEC. There were no other recommendations, and Lucie accepted the nomination.

3. **Review and Discuss Agenda Supplement:** Sandvik reviewed the agenda supplement that was put together based on Committee feedback. The Committee discussed the supplement which included: US Census Data for the City; the City's Winter 2020 Newsletter; Polco survey results; data on Social Media (Facebook and Twitter); and City Website Analytics. Passus suggested that the City look at having an outside party review the newsletter to see if it is written in plain language and easy to read to see if it connects with everyday people. She also recommended having more diversity in the newsletter. Candace Yates asked how it is decided what is included in the Friends & Neighbors section. Sandvik said that they usually add any new hires and that sometimes we include business owners or non-profits, but there is no formal process for filling this section.

The Committee discussed who writes the text/data in the newsletter. Sandvik noted that the content is typically written by Department Heads.

The Committee discussed the Polco survey, who created it, who responded. 57 people responded. Mayor Gunderson reviewed how the City decided to use Polco as a tool to engage the community.

4. **Improve Connecting Residents to Engagement Efforts**

Sandvik noted that tonight was set up to review what Committee members asked for and then there was 2A and 2B. 2A was to look at what the City is doing. Materials were given last month. Now that people have had time to review, input from the Committee members will be very valuable. Sandvik asked Committee members to share their observations. Passus questioned how much of what Sandvik does is directly shaped by the Council. Trying to understand staff's relationship with the Council and the Mayor and who makes final decisions on what types of tools the City will work with. Sandvik noted that staff serve at the direction of the Council.

5. Next Steps

A. Information desired by Committee Members:

Committee talked about how to get information/recommendations to the Council.

What is the purpose of this Committee? Develop a list of goals and how the process will work.

More information on what is an advisory committee.

How would the Committee implement changes/recommendations.

Memo explaining the history and formation of the Advisory and what the Council see's the vision of the Committee to be.

Define what tools are available/what type of data to help define gaps.

B. Set next meeting date – January 2021: Next meeting date set for Wednesday, January 20, 2020

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Memorandum:

TO: Community Engagement Committee (C.E.C.)

FROM: Tim Sandvik, Assistant City Administrator

DATE: January 14, 2021

SUBJECT: C.E.C. Updates

Following the December 16, 2020 Community Engagement Committee meeting, staff had two big ‘takeaways’:

- First, there is some confusion as to how the C.E.C. came to be and what are the goals the committee going forward
- Second, it is unclear what authority the C.E.C. has and how does this contrast to other non-elected bodies who serve the City of Vadnais Heights (e.g. a City Commissions or Task Force)

Formation and Goals of the C.E.C.

In the spring of 2019, the City Council established a list of priorities that the Council and staff use as guidance over time. One of these priorities included increased/improved communication and engagement. In the fall of 2019 and early 2020, formal actions were made to implement this goal, but the onset of the pandemic halted efforts that spring. In June of 2020, Council formally directed staff to take next steps on these efforts, including the recruiting of community members for input.

At the core of City functions, a set of programs and services are provided for residents, businesses, and visitors of Vadnais Heights and the opportunity for communication and engagement should be available to everyone. Admittedly, the capacity of staff limits communication and engagement, but in wanting to continually improve these efforts, staff sought feedback from the community. With the formation of the C.E.C., staff hopes to identify gaps in our efforts and correct them. Further, if there are programs and services offered outside the jurisdiction of the City, the City would like to promote as appropriate.

Finally, the Goals of the C.E.C. were initially created in a limited capacity on purpose. The Council approved the formation of the C.E.C. to identify gaps in our communication and engagement efforts; however, it is the desire of Council to take candid feedback from the community (specifically the C.E.C.) and establish collective goals to potentially implement shared ideas and visions. As staff has noted, some ideas may be easy to implement immediately, and other more complex considerations may be considered as a part of recommendations made to the City Council.

Authority of the C.E.C. (Differences between Commissions, Task Forces, and Committees)

There has been some confusion as to the authority of the Committee and the roles (other) non-elected bodies play in local government. **City Commissions** are defined by City Code and may serve in capacities required by state statute (for example, the Planning Commission may hold Public Hearings required by statute); however, they (Commissions) all serve in an advisory capacity. Whether the Planning, Parks, or Health and Public Safety Commission, they advise the City Council. This means recommendations may be approved or denied by the Council as they (Council) have authority. **Committees** are often created to address ongoing considerations, but similar to Commissions, serve in an advisory capacity. A **Task Force** is typically formed to address a single issue or single set of issues, and again, serve in an advisory capacity.

Next Steps... The first two meetings of the C.E.C. included a comprehensive review of current communication efforts by the City and an in-depth review of materials. As has been shared, the C.E.C. will ultimately present recommendations to the Council this spring; however, staff is still looking for feedback. For upcoming agendas, please consider:

- What would you like to know about City operations?
- What topics would you like to be considered on future C.E.C. agendas?
- Having a better understanding of City efforts for Communications and Engagement and City operations, are there organizations (government, non-profit, other...) that serve Vadnais Heights that should be a part of this conversation?

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Memorandum:

TO: Community Engagement Committee

FROM: Tim Sandvik, Assistant City Administrator

DATE: January 20, 2021

SUBJECT: Community Engagement Committee Meeting

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

Respond to Questions Posed by Committee Members

*all bullets are directly copied/pasted from Committee Members, responses have been prepared by staff

- How is data used to make decisions, and how is data pertaining to citizens' preferences collected and analyzed?
 - Each department in the City uses data differently. The City routinely uses different data sets in different capacities. For example, in 2019, the City conducted a city-wide street survey to create a Pavement Condition Index of PCI. This allowed the City to prioritize street projects and incorporate more strategic and long-term planning for street projects. Citizen's preferences are measured both anecdotally and statistically when appropriate. At the December CEC meeting, a discussion on communications efforts described these efforts in challenges and future opportunities to improve.
- Does the city have someone on staff to collect, analyze and interpret data for this purpose?
 - Again, different departments utilize data in different capacities. There is no single person dedicated to data analysis; rather, it is the job of many staff to collectively observe data sets.
- Is there a liaison program or person for local schools, businesses and organizations?
 - The City participates in a number of capacities with other jurisdictions who serve Vadnais Heights, non-profits, and businesses. Again, with a lean staff these relationships are maintained through different departments, often department heads. For example working with Ramsey County depends on the area of service – the City's Engineer would be the direct liaison for Public Works related projects and the Community Development Director would serve in that same capacity for development projects; however, many projects include overlap which means multiple liaisons to different projects/organizations. While lean, City staff remains very involved in these relationships.
- Is there a city grantwriter for finding opportunities and seeking partnerships?
 - There is no dedicated grant-writer for the City. Grants are explored as opportunities arise within existing programs/services and future City goals. Two recent projects that received grant funding include the Parks Department successfully acquired roughly \$40,000 in grant funding for playground equipment and the Fire Department secured over \$300,000 for SCBAs.

- Each process was very different, but was lead by that department and ultimately included Council approval for grant application(s), submission, and the receiving of grant funds.
- How can we get more young people and elders involved in this process?
 - Great question! A number of our (normal) Parks events are heavily reliant on youth volunteers. Further, the City participates with groups like the White Bear Area Senior Program to promote activities for active adults but we are always looking for opportunities to further engage. As the CEC discussed in November and December meetings, generally speaking there are demographics who prefer communications in different mediums; therefore, the City intends to continue a variety of communication efforts.
 - How can we, as a city, demonstrate hospitality to minority races, faiths, gender/orientation, etc.?
 - Staff isn't sure what is meant by "hospitality" in this question. As a reminder, the CEC has been tasked with identifying gaps in communication and engagement, the City hopes to receive feedback from the CEC on these gaps and identify opportunities to eliminate those gaps.
 - Having a better understanding of City efforts for Communications and Engagement and City operations, are there organizations (government, non-profit, other...) that serve Vadnais Heights that should be a part of this conversation?
 - Staff has some recommendations for partnerships, but is hoping these recommendations will come from the CEC first. Again, the CEC will collectively present recommendations for Council considerations at a Workshop in the near future which may include enhanced relationships.

CEC Member Recommendations – Assign Topics to Committee Members

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- I would like to learn more about who lives in our city, where they stand on key issues, general demographic information, and how to contact them. Some of this information I'm sure we already have, some of it we need to figure out how to get.
 - This is at the core of CEC goals established by the City Council. Staff has prepared data requested by CEC members and presented at the November and December CEC meetings. In wanting to gain feedback from the community, staff is looking for CEC recommendations on enhancing current efforts and exploring future opportunities. If there are immediate, appropriate actions staff can take, staff will happily do so. However, if there are more long-term, strategic and/or policy recommendations, those can be presented to the City Council at a future workshop for their consideration.
- I would like to consider city-wide events and maybe find new ways to engage people and get them together on a regular basis.
 - Staff would happily consider recommendations to update existing events. Further, if the CEC recommends an expansion of general programming/services provided by the City, it may make sense to include recommendations to Council.
- I wish I knew which orgs serve Vadnais. It's had to know which resources are city, county or state, and it's even harder to know which private orgs are active in the area.
 - Staff can compile a list, but being comprehensive may be difficult. While this can be prepared for February's meeting, it would be helpful if CEC members had a specific area of service whether by type of project or otherwise.
- I think we need to expand the demographic footprint of the group to really get a better sense of which communications channels people prefer and why, how they might be enticed to engage more deeply and more often, how they feel about hospitality and representation within the city, and how we can do better. It's a good start, but our committee is lacking in some areas.
 - Again, this sentiment is at the core of the CEC goals established by the City Council. Staff is happy to take recommendations on how to achieve this.