

Communications Committee Meeting Minutes November 19, 2012

A meeting of the Communications Committee of the City of Rehoboth Beach was called to order at 1:03 p.m. by Chair Commissioner Stan Mills on Monday, November 19, 2012, in the Commissioners Room in City Hall, 229 Rehoboth Avenue, Rehoboth Beach, DE.

ROLL CALL.

Present: Commissioner Stan Mills, Chair
Commissioner Lorraine Zellers
Hoyte Decker
Toni Sharp

Absent: Janet Anderson

Members of the public present for part of the meeting were Tom McGlone (resident) and Jon Bleiweis (Coast Press)

Chair Mills welcomed Toni Sharp as the committee's newest member.

Chair Mills reiterated to the public that current committee policy is to allow for public comment throughout the meeting. Chair Mills indicated he intends to amend the agenda format to reflect this practice.

Chair Mills reiterated that the committee operates by consensus and if a member desires a formal vote they ask for same.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved noting some items may be taken out of sequence.

CORRESPONDENCE

Internal committee correspondence included a memo from Chair Mills to committee members dated October 11, 2012 and of September 22, 2012 referencing Sussex County Council's use of supporting documents.

There was no correspondence from the public received by the committee.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes of the committee meeting held on July 9, 2012 were distributed prior to the meeting; the minutes were approved.

OLD BUSINESS

6A. Review of web designer's approach to city website overhaul and report on status.

The web site is undergoing a facelift/overhaul using many recommendations generated by the Communications Committee.

A video of approximately 10 minutes duration was played. The video was made by Delaware.net, the company which hosts and is performing the web facelift. The purpose of the video is to articulate Delaware.net's approach to a redesign of the city website. A copy of the video on CD is attached.

Notes on video. The web program is making it easy to edit many web pages (e.g. convention center pages) by using a "content manager" that allows for city personnel to edit content rather than having to go back to Delaware.net each time changes are desired.

Video mentions starting project – well started.

55 page document –mentioned – really 92 page document - it articulates desired concepts for changes allowing for artistic license by Delaware.net.

Video sent last week made specifically for the Communications Committee.

Mentioned changes to email timing. This references how E-News emails are distributed. Whereas in the past hundreds of the E-News emails took up to an hour to deliver – not good for emergency notices - changes being implemented will allow for mass emails to be delivered in minutes from the start time.

Anticipated next steps, timeframe.

First introduction to IT Department to look at direction of changes.

Effect any changes and take to completion.

Review by Chair Mills, IT Department, the mayor and city manager.

Effect any changes and presentation to the Communications Committee to critique.

Presentation to the Board of Commissioners

January public launch if everything goes on schedule.

Dave Henderson, former IT Department director has resigned. Chair Mills intends to meet with [new IT Director] Max Hamby to review the proposed web facelift project scope.

Toni questioned if user testing is going to be used. Chair Mills will check with the IT Department to see if the user testing will rest on the Communications Committee or if any other testing is envisioned.

Tom McGlone questioned if the new web site will have the capability of conducting surveys and referenced surveys conducted by the Cape Gazette. Chair Mills indicated there was no specific directive to provide surveys, although there are outside survey programs, such as Survey Monkey, that could be used. It was suggested to Tom to provide web sites that utilize surveys to illustrate the concept.

6B(a). Discussion on accessibility of Commissioners' agenda related documents via printed materials or the city web site. Policy which provides that available supporting documents relevant to agenda items are available to City officials and the public in advance of a meeting. (Decker)

A supporting document of November 18, 2012, maybe a fourth iteration of the original, was the basis for discussion. In summary it is a voluntary policy to be used by Board of Commissioners in which any non-confidential documents that are available to the BOC could be made available to the public in a timely fashion, and optimally at the same time a meeting agenda is made available to the public.

Supporting document is incomplete – still recommend addition of an actual recent Rehoboth Beach Board of Commissioners’ agenda to highlight agenda topics that may utilize documents can be used as support documents and made available in advance of the meeting.

New to this version is illustration of how Sussex County Council uses support documents. To give further clarity, Chair Mills referenced a memo of September 22, 2012 which outlined the methodology used by the council in providing support documents compiled as a packet of information.

The following Rehoboth Beach Board of Commissioners’ meeting documents were pointed as to be considered to be potential supporting documents: Building & Licensing Reports, Police Reports and Planning Commission Reports.

Chair Mills suggested revising and reformatting into a draft document as it would be provided to the Board of Commissioners.

Comments and edits were discussed including that references to correspondence in this current version should be omitted per consensus of the committee at the previous meeting and noted in the minutes of the July 9, 2012 minutes. But it was noted that the broader topic of handling of correspondence could be considered in the future as a separate entity ripe for development of a written policy.

Of the two methods for presenting supporting documents as used by Bethany Beach and by Sussex County Council, it was agreed to not make a recommendation to use one method over another, but instead to present both methods and let it evolve.

Member Sharp shared two observations from attending Commissioners’ meeting: she would wonder what the commissioners have in their hands [that the public does not have or see], and she would hear comments from the commissioners that they only received the documents a short period ahead of the meeting. She thought that best practices would provide that if Rehoboth Beach used a supporting documents model similar to other governments that this would be an upgrade to the experience of both the public and the commissioners. Her observations highlighted the benefits of a supporting document program including public access and including emphasis on the timeliness of access to the supporting documents by both the public and the commissioners.

Chair Mills has used both methods for distributing support documents to the Communications Committee members in advance of a meeting. He shared his perspective of using one support document program (Bethany Beach; Sussex County Council) over the other with respect to the time commitment required. Receiving and disseminating individual documents is easy. Compiling those individual documents into a (long) single document is an extra step. Having individual documents might be easier to select individual documents to print than using a compilation. Maintenance of “Ongoing Business” utilizes individual documents again making compilation as a single support document an extra step.

Chair Mills reiterated the past use of supporting documents for the Communications Committee agendas being available online but that at one time by including copies of correspondence deemed politically charged by the city manager, the city manager halted the inclusion of all supporting documents being put online. This was deemed a lesson learned and has been addressed by the committee.

A desired outcome of presenting this to the Commissioners is to have the Commissioners buy into the program and direct that the city manager to work with chair and city clerk to facilitate and test a voluntary support documents program with an awareness of :

Simplicity

Minimal burden on staff

Benefit to commissioner and the public

Chair Mills' expectation is to put this on a Commissioner workshop meeting in the near future to be introduced.

Member Decker will revise support document based on today's discussion and any additional comments he receives from the members. The revised version will be formatted as a memo from the committee to the Board.

6B(b). Discussion on accessibility of Commissioners' agenda related documents via printed materials or the city web site. Better utilization of the city web site including promoting the use of "Ongoing Business and Studies." (Mills)

Chair Mills wants to make a presentation to the Commissioners as a reminder to the Commissioners and the public of this voluntary program which provides access to an archive of documents related to selected Commissioner agenda topics. The committee endorses and promotes the routine use of Ongoing Business noting it is an underutilized benefit to public and to Commissioners. The committee recognizes administering the program is a time commitment and that city staff should monitor the program and provide feedback. Emphasize that this program already exists but is underutilized.

Member Decker believes this program is of great importance especially for future of the town as the town is getting bigger and more involved in issues.

Member Sharp questioned if there was a way to assess the value of this program by looking at its use. Chair Mills will check into this.

NEW BUSINESS.

7A. Discussion about communications plan and steps to advance individual concepts including outline of content and how and when to make presentations to the Commissioners. (Mills)

Chair Mills initiated a discussion of a timeline for getting individual communications projects in front of the Commissioners while noting that some projects are completed and some are still in the works. Projects were cited and member Sharp classified them as follows:

RECAPS (already facilitated or recommendations already passed on)

1. Reiterate Audio Recommendations (enhance sound system in Commissioners' Room including better microphones, etc)
2. Document Formatting Policy (templates for organizing and identifying documents) (Reminder to the Commissioners)

RECAP/WEBSITE

3. Ongoing Business & Studies (explain, promote existing program)
4. E-News (promote existing program)
5. Web Facelift (Introduce, update)
6. Web Facelift (Present new site in entirety before launching publicly)

NEW INITIATIVES OR AMENDMENTS

7. Support Documents Policy (new)
8. Audio Policy - extend retention timeline (amendment)
9. Optimize Audience Experience (new)
10. Agenda- Clarify when the public can speak (new)
11. Agendas – Clear language; use of synopses (new)
12. Website – Home Page News (new, part of web facelift)
13. Template form for submittal of Commissioner agenda items (new)
14. Timeline policy for acting on agenda topics (new)

FUTURE, NOT YET ADDRESSED

15. Welcome letter to new property owners
16. Communications model for orientation of new officials

Topics were prioritized for presentation to the Board of Commissioners based on topics being ready or anticipated to be ready.

For presentation at the Board of Commissioners Workshop of December 10, 2012: **#1, 2, 3, 4**

For presentation at the Commissioners' Regular Meeting of December 21, 2012: **#5**

Other presentation dates and topics to be determined.

7B. Discussion of facilitating the use of a “news” section on the city web site. (Mills)

The reference support document was discussed. Home Page News serves as a bulletin board and offers benefit over having to store or print out E-News or official notices. This topic will be considered at the next meeting.

7C. Review of current audio policy adopted by the Commissioners with respect to retention times for online accessibility. (Mills)

The reference support document was discussed. An extension seems reasonable. There was no additional cost to extend retention time on the web site. This topic will be considered at the next meeting.

7D. Discussion of Commissioner agenda content including but not limited to clarity and sufficiency of language and clarifying when the public is allowed to speak. (Mills)

This topic was deferred until a future meeting.

7E. Discuss a standardized form for submittal of agenda items for Commissioners' meetings. (Anderson)

This topic was deferred until a future meeting.

8. Discuss and prioritize items for future agendas.

Items # 7—14 as identified above

9. Set next meeting.

The next meeting dates were scheduled for December 10, 2012 at 1:30 p.m. and January 7, 2013 at 1:30 p.m. in the Commissioners' Room

10. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

11. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Approved December 10, 2012

Stan Mills, Chair, Communications Committee