

## Communications Committee Meeting Minutes December 10, 2012

A meeting of the Communications Committee of the City of Rehoboth Beach was called to order at 1:32 p.m. by Committee Chair Commissioner Stan Mills on Monday, December 10, 2012, in the Commissioners' Room in City Hall, 229 Rehoboth Avenue, Rehoboth Beach, DE.

### **ROLL CALL.**

Present: Commissioner Stan Mills, Chair  
Janet Anderson  
Hoyte Decker (Arrived at 1:44 p.m.)  
Toni Sharp  
Commissioner Lorraine Zellers

Members of the public present: Walter Brittingham (resident) for the entirety of the meeting and Al Lister, webmaster for a Broadkill Beach organization, for part of the meeting.

Chair Mills reiterated to the public that current committee policy is to allow for public comment throughout the meeting. Chair Mills made note that the agenda format was changed 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**

Follow up from Tom McGlone to a comment made at previous meeting providing a link to illustrate a web site survey: "Tripadvisor.com has surveys. Good feedback from tourists. Our town is a tourist town." Sent from Tom on November 20, 2012.

Support documents for each agenda item were distributed internally.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Minutes of the committee meeting held on November 19, 2012 were distributed prior to the meeting; the minutes were approved.

### **6. Old Business**

- A. **Report on status of city website facelift.** Chair Mills reported: Facelift transformed into a major overhaul. Overhaul addresses list of web improvement recommendations generated from committee plus changes recommended by the IT Department (e.g. standardizing department pages, etc). Being so comprehensive caused a delay in getting write up to Delaware.net – package of changes submitted only 2-3 months ago to Delaware.net. In the meantime IT Director Dave Henderson has resigned. Third member of the IT Department, Max Hamby was promoted to the position of IT Director. Max was not involved in the web facelift project and so he wants to update himself on web change content. Stan thought the facelift was well underway but found it has not yet been started. Consequently, Max put a hold on the entire project until such time as he can review scope of web facelift project including web change recommendations put forward, and review contract with Delaware.net. before moving ahead/restarting project. Chair Mills

believed this is best as Max, as new IT Director and the person in charge of the web site, is right to want to review all aspects of the project before again moving forward. Chair Mills is disappointed for the committee, but cannot disagree with Max wanting to review the project scope and editing to his standards. Chair Mills reiterated that Max heads a department where the web site is only a small fraction of the IT Department duties and that maintaining the police and other department servers, etc was currently the priority over the web site. Chair Mills said he expects to meet again with Max at some point in the future to discuss the next steps. Chair Mills reiterated that this committee advocated for a third person in the IT Department and believes the web site is important and should carry a lot of weight and its updating and maintenance should carry some priority status. Chair Mills said that Max is also a web designer and thus the keen interest in the city website and its facelift. Part of Max's review would likely include review of what can be done in-house vs. outside, how can it be done easier to maintain it and providing his input on any ideas the committee put forward. The delay in realizing an updated website impacts the committee agenda item of presenting the web facelift approach video to the Board of Commissioners as well as pushing back the presentation of the finished product before going "live."

**B. Follow up on committee report to the Board of Commissioners at their December 10 workshop.**

During the Board of Commissioners' meeting held earlier this same day, Chair Mills presented a report developed by the committee but changed in format to a PowerPoint presentation. The report covered four topics:

1. Reiterate audio recommendations for BOC room (Ceiling mikes to capture public, etc
2. Recap BOC formatting policy already in place to organize and identify documents.

Chair Mills said he mentioned to the Commissioners his personal desire for an officials' manual as a good repository for policies to get into Commissioners' hands, and also noted that the Communications Committee's desire for a communications model for Board of Commissioners.

Commissioner Zellers said she is working on a template to be sent to the Commissioners so it is "ready to go."

3. Recap and promote use of and timely maintenance of "Ongoing Business & Studies" on the city website.
4. Promoting E-News.

We started with 200 and have approx. 3,500 recipients now.

Chair Mills said it is hard to gauge but he believed the presentation to be well received.

Commissioner Zellers indicated that Commissioner Hunker at the morning Commissioners' meeting suggested looking into an automatic text program especially for use for emergency notices. That can be put on a list of potential agenda items.

**C. Discussion on accessibility of Commissioners' agenda related documents via printed materials or the city web site.**

- (a) **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)**

This version of the support document for “Supporting Documents” includes new edits and is reformatted into a draft support document memo to the Board of Commissioners. A draft PowerPoint presentation was also developed for discussion.

General: attachment numbering needs review and correction.

RE: Line 72 “Correspondence is not considered as support documents” -- delete this statement and respond if it comes up (e.g. clarify that some correspondence related to agenda items may not be considered as supporting documents, e.g. letters which take a position on an ordinance amendment; while other correspondence may be suitable as a supporting document, e.g. correspondence which gives “thanks” or correspondence which brings forth an agenda item (e.g. a request for action). Can also say the Communications Committee is going to study the issue of general correspondence.

Re: Line 120 Wordsmith “sensitive.”

Re: Line 122. Wordsmith “could” to can or might.

Re: Line 127. Bulleted list suggested.

Re: Lines 167 (page 6 list of potential supporting documents):

Draft minutes. According to Dave Henderson, former IT Director, and Ann Womack, City Clerk, it is city practice to not put draft minutes online citing that people can and have referred to the actions noted in the minutes before the minutes are approved.

Chair Mills noted that the City of Milford gives the impression that they include minutes in their support documents, but it appears they are not included when the support documents are originally compiled, but instead the approved minutes are added at a later date to the compilation of support documents in order to complete the package/record.

The committee recognized that putting draft minutes online presents the potential to cause problems and should not be included as support document.

Re: Lines 204-205 “The Communications Committee recommends that this process be voluntary, but encourages the Commissioners and other participants to adopt this concept whenever possible.” (Underlining added.) Three comments were noted:

1) Rather than present this as a voluntary effort, be more positive: “The Communications Committee has assessed current practice and studied a method for utilizing Support Documents in advance of meetings. The committee presents this as a recommended policy/practice. We’d like to work with you on implementing such a practice.” Can use “voluntary” verbally at presentation to Commissioners if questioned.

2) Wording “other participants” need not be changed but we can verbally clarify that this policy would work equally well with other committees and also with third party presenters.

3) Broad note that practice (unwritten policy) should be translated into (written) policy.

The memo to the Board of Commissioners will be revised per committee discussion points. The PowerPoint presentation will be revised accordingly. Before scheduling the presentation to the Commissioners, the committee will once again review the memo and presentation and perform a dress rehearsal at the next Communications Committee meeting.

Chair Mills reiterated that the City of Milford utilizes supporting documents and asked the committee to note the disclaimer: "Supporting documents must be submitted to the city clerk in electronic format no later than one week prior to meeting. No paper documents will be accepted or distributed after packet has been posted on the City of Milford website." Chair Mills suggested this site as another illustration of use of supporting documents. See sample City of Milford agendas attached.

**C. Discussion on accessibility of Commissioners' agenda related documents via printed materials or the city web site.**

**(b) Better utilization of the city web site including promoting the use of "Ongoing Business and Studies (Mills)**

Chair Mills met with Ann Womack, city clerk, to discuss management of Ongoing Business & Studies (also home page news and expansion of audio policy). Ms. Womack was amenable to managing or assisting in managing these programs provided they are simple and very organized. She indicated that entering information/managing the program of Ongoing Business is not that time consuming provided they are organized (e.g. emphasizing use of formatting templates to properly identify documents) and process is simple. Chair Mills reiterated that the documents that would go into Ongoing Business & Studies are not items to be created for Ongoing Business online but are items already produced (usually by the agenda sponsor) and which the city clerk she should be acquiring anyhow for the meeting minutes. Ms. Womack is willing to provide feedback on management of these programs.

**D. Review of current audio policy adopted by the Commissioners and consideration of endorsement of extending the retention time for online accessibility for certain public bodies. (Mills)**

A proposal was to consider extending the time of retention of audio recordings for committees, boards and commissions (other than Board of Commissioners, Planning Commission and Board of Adjustment) to the time of inserting the audio of the subsequent meeting. Chair Mills talked with Ms. Womack, city clerk, and she had no problems with the retention schedule being changed – she maintains a log of meetings and times audios are inserted, when they need to be removed and a record of its removal from online.

It was suggested within the committee that the length of retention would not negatively impact the web site. Questions posed included "Can audio files be kept online indefinitely?" and "Does the state have retention guidelines with respect to audio recordings?"

It was decided to hold on further consideration to answer the above questions and until the new IT Director, Max Hamby, can provide input on any impacts of the desired change to current policy.

**E. Discussion of facilitating the use of a "news" section on the city web site and consideration of endorsement. (Mills)**

Support document distributed prior to meeting.

Current website already setup for news bulletins. Updated website will include provision for news and calendar bulletin items utilizing a nicer format than what current website allows. Template/form for submission already designed. Samples already provided.

Recognize that the key to making this work is in the hands of the city manager, that the city manager should be the gatekeeper. Partners in making this work are the city clerk and/or the IT Department. It was thought that much of this could be put in the hands of the city clerk but details would come out of a future conversation between the chair of the Communications Committee, the city manager, the city clerk and the IT Director.

Home page news is generally not causing anyone to create a new message, but rather condensing an already authored notice or press release.

Next steps in advancing this topic:

- 1) Reformat the current support document into a PowerPoint presentation.
- 2) Schedule presentation at the Commissioners; workshop meeting of January 7, 2013.
- 3) Investigate how other towns manage similar content on their websites.

Chair Mills provided a follow up to a question at an earlier meeting on can we use numbers of hits to justify web content. He indicated that numbers are so low he believes they would not justify the expense of maintaining some content of the web. Chair Mills will retrieve more data and come back to this topic in the future.

**F. 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 referenced notes on a bulletin board and identified individual committee projects. See photo of bulletin board worksheet attached.

Projects completed.

- Reiterate audio recommendations generated by the committee relative to audio enhancements in the Commissioners' room.
- Recap current Board of Commissioners' policy on formatting documents and encouragement to utilize the format template.
- Recap to Board of Commissioners the availability of "Ongoing Business & Studies" on the website and desire to maintain the content timely.
- Recap availability and "success" of city E-News, the city's email bulletin program.

To be postponed until timely.

- Introductory video presentation on Delaware.net's approach to our web facelift.
- Final presentation of web facelift project being going live.

Presentation to Board of Commissioners at the January 7 workshop meeting.

- Current web capacity (and updated website) to utilize home page News.

Ongoing.

- Support document policy.

- Template form for submittal of agenda items.
- Optimize audience experience
- Agendas: clear language, use of synopses, clarify when the public can speak.
- Timeline for acting on issues.
- Committee handbook. [Tabled later in mmeeting.]

Not yet considered:

- Policy recommendations for the handling of general correspondence received by the City.
- Welcome letter to new property owners.
- Communications' model for orientation of new officials.

## 7. New Business

### **A. Presentation of Communications Committee member handbook and discussion. (Mills)**

Chair Mills suggested he wanted to practice what he preaches and develop a handbook for members of the Communications Committee. It was thought it could save time introducing how the committee operates to new committee members and serve to archive committee policies or procedures, committee recommendations, etc.

Individual members indicated they would provide a critique. Otherwise the committee did not want to devote time to this at this time.

### **B. Discussion of Commissioner agenda format and content including but not limited to clarity and sufficiency of language, clarifying when the public is allowed to speak and sequencing of agenda items including executive sessions. (Mills)**

No discussion.

### **C. Discuss a standardized form for submittal of agenda items for Commissioners' meetings. (Anderson)**

This topic involves utilizing a form to gather information for person who creates the agenda to use and also to give commissioners background information to go take a look. Member Anderson's assigned task was to come up with a simple, easy to understand generic form that could be filled in by the user and available online as an editable pdf. The content of the form was to be based upon our discussion and the documents (e.g. one from Bethany Beach) that were presented at the previous meeting. The intent of the form was to create a generic way to submit a topic for the inclusion on the agenda of any commission or committee. See form attached. Her desire was to keep it to one page with instruction integral but out of the way.

Document could not be identified with a "Draft" watermark because it affected the fillable form.

Stems from desire for clarity

Member Decker reiterated that he started this line of thinking and had presented a form six months ago.

Form intended as an internal document for use by commissioners.

Member Decker believes this form should be attached to each agenda item and that the public should see this. In absence of a supporting document this form can serve as the supporting document. Sees this form as an aid to the mayor as he develops the meeting agenda.

Notes made included:

- Consider inclusion of
  - Suggested language for the agenda
  - Synopsis
  - Space for contact phone number
  - Checkbox to identify type of action/objective/goals intended: Introduction/discussion; vote; presentation, etc.
- Maybe form never gets used as process for submittal is more informal?
- If the current process is haphazard or does not exist then an objective of this exercise might be to introduce a form to introduce a more uniform process.
- Should we consider developing a checklist in lieu of this submittal form with such boxes as What are budget impacts? What departments does it involve? Etc.

Nothing was concluded. To be tabled for future discussion. Next steps:

Investigate submittal form used by Bethany Beach and Takoma Park and look again at original topic submittal by Member Decker.

Further consideration to be given including of the two ways identified that this form can be used: for informing the mayor; to serve as a supporting document.

D. Discuss how to optimize communications from the perspective of the public in attendance at a meeting. (Mills)

Not addressed.

E. Discuss timelines and related programs for presenting, discussing and acting on agenda items. (Zellers)

A support document was distributed prior to the meeting. Commissioner Zellers New Castle, DE and Newark, DE use first reading/second reading programs.

Consider establishing that something cannot be voted on in a meeting unless (establish criteria.) Consider this (simple) concept for a first step rather than seeking a first reading/second reading program which is more complicated.

Purpose: To allow for people to react to it or investigate it.

More discussion warranted.

8. Discuss and prioritize items for future agendas.

IT Director Max asked if we were investigating Twitter? Facebook?  
Commissioner Hunker at a Commissioners' meeting mentioned text messaging as another avenue for communication especially for use to alert of emergency situations.

9. Schedule next meeting. January 7, 2013 at 1:30 p.m. in the Commissioners' Room.

10. Committee Member Comment

11. Public Comment

12. Adjournment at 4:02 p.m.

- Stan Mills, Chair, Communications Committee

Approved January 7, 2013