

## Communications Committee Meeting Minutes February 1, 2013

A meeting of the Communications Committee of the City of Rehoboth Beach was called to order at 1:37 p.m. by Committee Chair Commissioner Stan Mills on Friday, February 1, 2013, in the Commissioners' Room in City Hall, 229 Rehoboth Avenue, Rehoboth Beach, DE.

Chair Mills advised that current committee policy is to allow for public comment throughout the meeting.

### **ROLL CALL.**

Present: Commissioner Stan Mills, Chair  
Janet Anderson  
Toni Sharp  
Commissioner Lorraine Zellers

Members of the public present: None.

### **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

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

### **CORRESPONDENCE**

There was no external correspondence. Internal correspondence included a memo of January 26, 2013 from the committee chair referencing comments made by the chair at the Commissioners' Budget meeting relative to budget needs for the IT Department. The memo also noted that Max Hamby, our IT Director, would be attending the February 4 Commissioners' Workshop meeting to give a report on his department. Other internal correspondence included distribution of supporting documents relative to agenda topics.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Minutes of the committee meeting held on January 7, 2013 were distributed prior to the meeting. Commissioner Zellers motioned for approval of the minutes; seconded by Janet Anderson. The minutes were approved unanimously

### **OLD BUSINESS**

**Discussion on accessibility of Commissioners' agenda related documents via printed materials or the City website. Consider finalizing a recommended practice which provides that all available supporting documents relevant to agenda items are available to City officials and the public in advance of a meeting.**

The latest revised version of the support document for "Supporting Documents" in the form of a memo to the Board of Commissioners was discussed. The revisions were derived from comments of the previous Communications Committee meeting.

Check tense of "support."

Additional notes relative to final formatting and wordsmithing of the memo:

- Don't let the length/complexity of the memo be scary. For presentation, need to convey that this is an easy process, not a lot of work.
- Convey this is not intended to be a burden.
- Emphasize that they are not being asked to do anything new, although they are being encouraged to develop support document whenever possible.
- Otherwise not asking you to do anything different.
- What is being recommended is that whenever you do have a supporting document that you share that document with Commissioners and the public in a timely fashion.
- Recommend saying the above as a preface to the memo/presentation up front to thwart feelings that this is complex and a burden.
- Emphasize "Why is this valuable?" Use bulleted points as a lead in – give people a reason to listen. This is valuable because...
- This is something that will benefit our committee, our commission, our relationship with the public.
- It will help us, it will help the community.
- Benefits are transparency.
- Take some benefits from support document on committee "Timelines:"
  - More efficient meeting.
  - Time for more research, reflection and engagement.
  - Opportunity to inform the public.
  - More opportunity for public involvement in discussion.

Overarching theme

Enhances communications with the public, essentially strengthens public outreach.

If you want more transparent and stronger outreach these are the things you have to do.

Do this for memo and in PowerPoint.

This is really an easy and straightforward process with flexibility.

Three steps.

If you are going to do develop a supporting document, do so sooner than later.

Distribute it timely.

Insert policy items that note **Recommended Policy for Implementation in Rehoboth Beach.**

Providing support documents will not apply to all agenda items; Commissioners are encouraged to develop and provide relevant support documents whenever possible.

Some agenda sponsors or presenters may desire to have a "first shot" at making the presentation before disseminating their presentation to the public. Introductory documents may or may not be provided in advance as support documents at the discretion of the presenter.

Some supporting documents may not be ready in advance of a meeting in which case the documents would be posted as available or not at the discretion of the submitter.

After a trial period, written policy for this practice would be developed.

**Committee steps forward.**

Follow our philosophy and distribute final recommendations as a support document through the city clerk or designated gatekeeper to Commissioners a week ahead of the meeting.

Revise PowerPoint to reflect finalized version of Supporting Documents memo to the Commissioners.

Utilize PowerPoint presentation for presentation to the BOC.

Stan will finalize the memo and PowerPoint. Toni will assist with review.

Aim for presentation at the March Commissioners' Workshop meeting. Distribute by February 25<sup>th</sup>.

Prior to workshop meeting, review notes of first presentation to Commissioners to prepare to respond to similar queries.

Review end goals: to minimally to give the city manager direction to implement this program for those commissions, boards and committees that choose to use it.

Reiterate: distribute **through the city clerk or designated gatekeeper** to Commissioners a week ahead of the meeting

If needed post-presentation, we can come back to the March regular meeting and do a live demonstration using Bethany Beach and Sussex County supporting document programs.

**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.**

Comments were addressed on each of four segments within this broad topic.

**1) Noticing opportunities for citizen comment during workshop and regular meetings, specifically citizen comment during agenda items.**

Chair Mills reiterated his insertion of a notice near the beginning of the Communications Committee agenda to alert the public of the opportunity to speak during the meeting.

The consensus is that there should be a declaratory statement at the beginning of all city agendas to clarify whether or not public comment is welcome while noting that it would be understood that the chair of the meeting would control the flow of public comment.

**2) Providing for Citizen Comment "off topic" at Commissioner Workshop meetings.**

The consensus is agreement with recommendations..

**3) Reminder of need for language sufficient to describe the intent of an agenda item including the use of “pre-prepared” synopses as needed for clarity of an agenda topic.**

The consensus is agreement with the recommendations.

Lines 251-257 - good example.

Benefits.

- Language provides a good clue to the public and also to news organizations about the nature and extent of the topic.
- Clarity to public – public can choose whether or not to attend a meeting and/or to voice comment or send in-communicate an opinion.

**4) Optimizing sequencing of agenda items to better suit the public in attendance at a meeting.**

Chair Mills said to note that the Bethany Beach agenda sequencing is interesting where reports of committees come early in the agenda.

Two types of reports were identified:

- Standard reporting follows a pattern
- Topical reports

**Committee recommendation #1:**

Group “standard” reports up front

Benefits

- Clarity
- Predictability
- Convenience of the public to hear without having to stay the duration of the meeting.
- More public friendly

Specific action: Move the City Manager’s and City Solicitor’s Reports be positioned earlier in the agenda to be grouped with other reports:

Report of Police Department

Report of Rehoboth Beach Volunteer Fire Company

Report of Building and Licensing Department

Report of Planning Commission

(ADD) Report of the City Manager

(ADD) Report of the City Solicitor (unless it is a substantial topic which then should be under old or new business).

**Committee recommendation #2:**

Executive sessions are to be planned to be at the beginning or end of the meeting.

Concerns.

- The public should have the opportunity to hear anything that happens at the meeting but asking the public to wait out an executive session is a turn off, a disservice.
- Should give consideration to the convenience of the public to hear all agenda items without having to stay the duration of the meeting.
- Members of the public that want to hear the outcome of an executive session can choose to wait out the session regardless of where the executive session comes in the meeting. But having an executive session mid-meeting forces those of the public to hang around for an undetermined amount of time in order to hear business conducted after the executive session regardless of whether or not they want to know the outcome of an executive session.

The committee considered moving committee reports up if no action or leave near end if topical. No recommendation at this time.

**Discussion about communications plan and steps to advance individual concepts including outline of content and how and when to make presentations to the Commissioners.**

“Timeline” recommendations already scheduled for presentation at February Commissioners’ Workshop meeting.

“Support Document” recommendations and “Agenda format/clarity” recommendations both for presentation at the March 4 Commissioners’ Workshop meeting.

Still on the table:

- Optimize Audience Experience
- Audio policy extension
- Welcome letter to new property owners
- Correspondence – policy
- Template for submittal of agenda items
- Communication model for orientation of new officials

Discussion included reiteration of the need for adequate oversight of the website in light of the IT Director speaking in front of the Commissioners February 4.

The web overhaul shouldn’t be viewed as a one shot update, but as a continual process and so should be funded adequately with enough ongoing support of money and time.

If you leave the web site to the mercy of priorities within the IT Department it is oftentimes a *fait accompli* that it will always come to the bottom of the pile. For such a small IT Department, it may be optimal to contract with an outside vendor to work with the City on an annual contract to continually update the web site as needed. The web will otherwise get pushed back again and again as it will never become a priority. But when you pay for that service it gets the attention it deserves and is timely.

However, additionally our city web site deserves having somebody trained and on staff right here with certain number of hours and commitment to do the fine tweaking that makes the web site valuable. If only taken care of by an outside group they may only do the big items, need sufficient personnel in-house to take care of the little things that need attention and need changing almost on a daily basis.

Chair Mills conveyed he had a brief meeting with Max and suggested that there were some changes that could be made to the existing website rather than having to wait. Mills further expressed his desire to get on the IT calendar; fear that if we wait until April and then resume we will have lost 6 months.

The committee consensus is to get the web overhaul started and completed as soon as possible especially as it has value to the public and yet is missing many desired elements.

**Schedule next meeting.**

March 8, 2013 at 1:30 p.m. in the Commissioners' Room.

**Committee Member Comment.**

Call to fill vacancy on committee.

**Public Comment.**

None.

**Adjournment.**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:08 p.m.

- Stan Mills, Chair, Communications Committee