City Council Study Session Agenda
June 12, 2023 - 5:45 PM
City Council Chambers, City Hall, 3rd Floor,
1528 Third Avenue, Rock Island, IL

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1. **Call to Order**

2. **Roll Call**

3. **Public Comment**

4. **Presentations**

   a.   City of Rock Island Communications & Community Engagement Plan

5. **Adjourn**

   a.   Motion to Adjourn.

        Motion: Motion whether or not to adjourn.
        RC   Roll Call vote is needed.

This agenda may be obtained in accessible formats by qualified persons with a disability by making appropriate arrangements from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday, by contacting the City Clerk's Office at (309) 732-2010 or visiting in person at: 1528 Third Avenue, Rock Island, IL 61201.

City of Rock Island Communications and Community Engagement Plan

DRAFT

rigov.org

"Communication with citizens is a basic obligation of government – an essential component of the democratic process. Good, effective public communication should be an integral part of achieving success in almost every city project."
– The International City & County Management Association

Background

The City of Rock Island is situated on the western border of Illinois on the Mississippi River. With a population of nearly 37,000, the City is known for its vibrant community, historic neighborhoods, beautiful parks and diverse population.

Rock Island's unique geographic location offers exceptional development opportunities to new and expanding businesses, a top-rated school district and higher educational institutions, a wealth of community activities, and a lively arts and music scene.

Overview

The City of Rock Island's Communications and Community Engagement Department strives to be the best source of information about city government while providing creative communications solutions and sharing effective, compelling messages and stories that foster positive community engagement and meaningful connections with our stakeholders.

The City of Rock Island will maintain transparency while respecting open lines of communication, responsiveness and timely disclosure. The City will manage its own story and take every opportunity to tell it enthusiastically without relying on others.

The City recognizes the role effective communication plays in building community pride and satisfaction. The more citizens know about city services and how their tax dollars are spent, the more they appreciate and take pride in their community.

Purpose

The Communications & Community Engagement Plan is designed to support the City's strategic goals, enhance the image and reputation of Rock Island, maintain access to timely and helpful information while contributing to the growth of the City through positive and responsive messaging.

Additionally, as stated in City Council Goal No. 2, Objective No. 2:

Engage in public engagement and outreach strategies that enhance Rock Island's image, internally and externally, and effectively promote city assets, projects, programs and services to residents, businesses and visitors.

The Communications & Community Engagement Department will have the primary responsibility of implementing, maintaining and updating this plan. The Community Engagement Department supports the city council and city departments through media outreach and responses, marketing, social media, website management, print production, graphic design, event planning, photography and evolving video production.

The City hired a full-time community engagement manager in 2022 in an effort to improve external and internal communications by following a defined set of goals and metrics.

Goals

With a commitment to advance the strategic vision to help position Rock Island as a growing and sustainable community, the purpose of this plan is to:

1. Provide clear and useful information while maintaining transparency.
2. Increase local and regional awareness of the benefits of living, working, visiting and investing in Rock Island. The Communications Department will:
   a. Attend and promote ribbon cuttings, city-sponsored events and occasional independent business events on the City's website when necessary and publish photos, videos and postings on the City's social media sites with the goal of promoting the City and the benefits of visiting, living and working in Rock Island.

     b. Regularly work with members of the media to encourage positive and informative stories on Rock Island.

     c. Foster and maintain relationships with community partners in an effort to expand outreach and grow the City's reputation.

     d. Continue to build partnerships with local governmental entities.

3. Provide easily accessible communication with Rock Island residents, business owners, stakeholders and visitors about city issues, projects and services.

     a. The Communications Department will make every effort to convey information from city departments regarding current issues, projects or services that impact the public and actively respond to inquiries.

     b. The Communications Department will hold regular "Rock Island Unplugged" events in an effort to make department directors and elected officials available to residents and stakeholders through an in-person question and answer event.

4. Develop stronger community connections built on trust and credibility.

     a. The Communications Department plays a key role in responding to resident questions, complaints and concerns. Providing timely responses and accurate information to residents is a component in building trust and credibility.

     b. Part of building community connections comes from ward meetings or events held by city council members. The community engagement manager will make every effort to promote the events or meetings of elected officials.

5. Maintain positive and productive relationships with members of the media.

     a. The Communications Department will make every effort to respond to media inquiries in a timely, accurate and professional manner;

     b. Facilitate print, radio and TV interviews or responses between media and city officials;

     c. Ensure media access to department directors and elected officials;

     d. Publish press releases alerting media about upcoming events or other city-related information;

     e. Maintain a reputation as a media friendly city of accessible elected officials and experts;

     f. Ensure the media is treated with courtesy and respect.

6. Enhance internal communication with departments and city employees.

a. The number of weekly positive media mentions are provided to department directors, the mayor and city council members at the end of every week. This report helps inform city leaders on how often the City is receiving positive news coverage as a result of press releases, social media and promotion to media outlets.

b. Highlight employee accomplishments when possible through press releases when necessary, social media or internal newsletter with the goal of improving morale and pride in working for Rock Island.

7. Enhance internal communication between city departments and elected officials.

a. In an effort to improve communications between department directors and elected officials, the Communications Department will provide a bi-weekly report to the mayor and city council members summarizing department directors' activities and updates.

8. Enhance the City's image and reputation.

a. By improving the City's image and reputation, the City can attract more residents, businesses, visitors and stakeholders. Promotion of our diverse community will also attract capable employees who will help strengthen services and programs offered by the City.

b. Active and positive storytelling and media coverage will contribute to the City's image and instill pride in residents and the community.

9. Keep the City's website updated with current information.

a. It will be the responsibility of the Communications Department to post the current video clip and text of the Mayor's Update Rock Island segment to the City's website following each city council meeting;

b. Regularly post information on current programs or events;

c. Maintain current information on boards and commissions and their members.

10. Update the City's website.

a. Updating the City's website will offer a simpler, more user-friendly experience for the public in navigating services, finding information and staying connected with city-related business and events.

11. Expand community engagement and partnerships through regular presence at events, business openings, celebrations and city functions.

a. The Communications Department will make every effort to attend ribbon cutting ceremonies, business celebrations, events and programs; and promote those businesses and events in press releases, social media postings, or on the City's website.

b. The presence at ceremonies, events and programs also serves to raise the profile and voice of Rock Island and its image.

12. Provide timely and accurate communication with residents, business owners and stakeholders.

13. Provide support and promotion to local businesses and the school district when appropriate.

14. Produce an annual report summarizing city-wide accomplishments.

a. At the beginning of each calendar year, the Communications Department will provide a report detailing the number of new hires, awards won by various departments, overall number of positive media mentions or stories generated by the press, number of street projects completed, parks or other types of projects completed, number of new business openings, and so on.

b. This report will provide an overall assessment of the City's progress, growth and communications efforts.

15. Conduct a citizen survey.

a. Generate feedback from residents and stakeholders through targeted surveys that identify strengths and weaknesses in the City.

b. Implement necessary and realistic changes as suggested by the survey.

16. Identify methods to connect with residents through non-traditional means of communication.

a. The Communications Department recognizes that certain populations in the City may not have access to the internet or digital forms of communication.

b. Alternative means of connecting with these residents will be developed and implemented.

17. Produce a monthly internal employee newsletter.

a. Enhance internal communications through an internal newsletter by highlighting different employees; historical facts about Rock Island; recently hired employees; soon-to-retire employees; and additional information that may be useful or fun for employees to know.

      b. Producing an employee newsletter can improve morale and instill a sense of pride in working for the City.

18. Provide monthly reporting on communications activities through the City's Operations Report.

      a. The monthly Operations Report is a summary of the Communications Department's activities, including number of media mentions, ribbon cuttings, increase in social media users, interviews that were coordinated with media, TV appearances, and more.

19. Expand the City's YouTube channel.

      a. The Communications Department will develop and produce expanded media content on the City's YouTube channel that offers entertaining and informative videos beyond the current selection of city council meetings.

      b. Short but informative videos can be produced highlighting the City's fire, police, public works, parks & recreation, MLK Center, library and other departments.

      c. Videos can be produced and posted highlighting elected officials and happenings in their wards or the City as a whole.

Target Audience

A component of this plan is to identify the audience who will benefit from a proactive and strategic communications plan. As a result of effective, credible communications, Rock Island's residents and stakeholders will become more engaged with the City and aware of opportunities, programs, operations and goals.

With a commitment to telling Rock Island's story, the City has identified the following key stakeholders:

- Residents
- Visitors
- Business owners and leaders
- Community organizations and partners
- Schools
- Media
- Mayor and City Council members

- Past, current and potential employees

Tools of Communication

The Communications & Community Engagement Department utilizes many tools to reach residents and stakeholders with the City's messages and brand:

Digital Communication

Most of Rock Island's communication tools are digital:

- City website – rigov.org; which includes the City's calendar
- Facebook – city, police, fire, library, parks & recreation
- Twitter – city, police, fire, library
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- YouTube
- Simplicity App
- Electronic reporting (such as annual reports and recreation programs)

The Communications Department utilizes an active social media program on Facebook and Twitter that focuses on generating engaging content that encourages users to like, comment on, share or retweet, which helps to advance and disseminate information about Rock Island.

Media Relations

Many residents and stakeholders receive information about Rock Island from local media. It is important for the City to maintain positive relationships with media partners and work to keep the community informed through news releases; television appearances of City employees and elected officials regarding current events; and press conferences when necessary.

The overall goal is to enhance the dissemination of timely and accurate information to the public.

Public Opinion Surveys

It is a goal of the Communications Department to design and conduct public opinion surveys with city residents as well as with stakeholders outside of the

City. The responses will be used to measure awareness of city programs, attractions and events as well as obtain feedback to improve communications.

City Logo

Use of the City logo by outside groups, boards and commissions is not allowed unless approved by the City Manager.

Addendum

Social Media Policy

In order to better serve its residents, the City of Rock Island uses social media platforms as a means of communication and way of providing information through additional channels.

The City's social media sites are considered a limited public forum in that the public is allowed to post comments, but not allowed to post content.

In order to inform and engage residents, site administrators will create postings and content a minimum of twice per week; monitor each site daily to answer questions and comments; and enforce social media policy rules.

Social media content is subject to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and record retention laws.

Some links on the City's social media platforms may lead to content and sites outside the control of the City and as such, the City is not responsible for the content of external sites.

Social media sites are monitored by City staff to ensure posted comments are appropriate, constructive and adhere to guidelines. If abuse is found, site administrators reserve the right to hide comments including:

- Violent, profane, obscene or pornographic content and/or language or content that incites violence
- Comments that are libelous, threaten or defame any person or organization

- Personal attacks, threats or hate speech, including comments that promote discrimination on the basis of race, color, age, religion, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, national origin, disability, military or veteran status or political opinions
- Content that includes or divulges personal identifiable information or protected health information
- Solicitations, advertising of an event, service, business, or product for sale
- Conduct in violation of any federal, state or local law or the encouragement of any illegal activity
- Information that may compromise the safety or security of the public
- Information that directly interferes or compromises ongoing investigations, public safety tactics, or the safety of public safety officers
- Electioneering or lobbying for a candidate or cause
- Content that violates a legal ownership interest, such as a copyright, of any party

The City utilizes an automated filtering feature on the City's Facebook account which automatically hides comments with profanity. These comments, as all hidden comments, are still visible to the City's Facebook administrators.

Failure to comply with regulations or repeated violations of the City's social media policy may result in the temporary suspension or permanent blocking of user privileges. The City will not be held liable for any content deemed in violation of the City's social media policy.

City employees are not prohibited from posting on the City's social media sites during personal time or outside normal business hours.

Employee usage of personal social media

The City does not endorse, monitor, or review the content of personal, non City-related social media activity of its employees.

City employees should be mindful of social media activity and assume that a colleague, supervisor, City partner, elected official or member of the public could view personal social media posts. As public employees, social media activity should not adversely affect job performance, the performance of fellow employees or reflect poorly on the employee or City.

Employees may be subject to disciplinary action if they post social media content or comments containing:

- Violent, profane, obscene or pornographic content and/or language or content that incites violence
- Comments that are libelous, threaten or defame any person or organization
- Comments that could potentially harm the reputation of the City, its employees or partners
- Comments that promote discrimination on the basis of race, color, age, religion, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, national origin, disability, military or veteran status or political opinions
- Information that may compromise the safety or security of the public or information that directly interferes or compromises ongoing investigations, public safety tactics, or the safety of public safety officers
- Disclosure of confidential or personal information relating to the City, its elected officials, employees and/or City business partners