

City of Snohomish Open Government Committee
--Second Draft of Recommendations Intended For Committee Review and Discussion--

April 15, 2016

Introduction and Overview

In late 2015, the City of Snohomish appointed a nine-member Ad Hoc Open Government Committee. The purpose of the committee was to provide recommendations on the ways in which the City can improve its existing communication and engagement program, as well as additional strategies and techniques the City might employ to ensure that all residents and business owners within Snohomish are fully informed, and involved, in City decision-making. The Committee will make its recommendations directly to the Snohomish City Council.

Committee members included:

- Carroll Brown
- Mary Dessen
- Colleen Dunlap
- Adrian Duran
- Gary Ferguson
- Meagan Gray
- Tom Merrill
- Paulette Norman
- Braden Sigua

In conducting its work, the group reviewed existing communication procedures in place at the city, examined public engagement techniques used elsewhere, and discussed the issues likely to be of most importance to Snohomish citizens. Committee members also benefited from the results of a research effort designed to measure citizen knowledge of, and interest in, Snohomish City Government.

Public Communication and Engagement Goals

As a first order of business, the committee developed and endorsed a series of eight goals. The goals were meant to serve as guiding parameters for the group's recommendations. All of the recommendations can be directly linked back to one or more of the goals. The goals include:

1) Open and Welcoming.

The city welcomes public input. City leaders actively seek the involvement of citizens and invite public participation in city decision-making. The city has a well-defined decision making process and clearly identified stages where the public can participate and provide feedback.

2) Free of Barriers

The program includes a strong education component that informs the public about the most effective ways to engage in decision-making, the types of issues, projects, and programs most likely to include public engagement, a menu of public involvement techniques, and ideas for

how citizens can best avail themselves of those techniques. Every effort is made to reduce intimidation and ease the way for citizen participation.

3) Proactive

Notification about upcoming issues and projects is provided in a manner that allows ample time for citizens to a) learn about the project; b) understand how they can be involved in decision-making; c) participate in forums designed to gather their feedback and advice; d) create opportunities for dialogue to encourage creative solutions and avoid misunderstandings.

4) Accessible to the Broadest Possible Audience

Public information and engagement techniques are made available to the broadest possible spectrum of Snohomish citizens and include “reach out” methods that put information in clear view where people frequent, allowing them to decide whether or not they are interested, and “reach in” methods that put information in places for individuals to seek out and access additional or more in-depth information. One size does not fit all for our community. A variety of technologies, messages, and media are used. The public engagement program creates a bridge between the social, ethnic, and age differences of all Snohomish citizens.

5) Consistent

Public information and engagement is consistently applied across all city departments. Techniques depend on the type of project under consideration, Citizens know what to expect in terms of their involvement. Likewise, the citizens of Snohomish have an obligation to actively learn about, and participate in, the civic engagement program.

6) Responsive

The city will provide feedback to citizens describing the way in which their ideas and comments have been used in decision making. Citizen influence in decisions will be clearly delineated.

7) Actively Monitored and Continually Improved

The city will actively monitor and measure its communication techniques to determine their effectiveness. Only those techniques that are accessed and utilized most frequently are retained. The *quality* of the technique and the degree to which it is effective in informing and engaging citizen interests has precedence over the *quantity* of techniques employed by the city.

8) Focused on Building Trust and Civic Engagement

The bottom line success measure for the city’s communication and involvement program is the degree to which the program achieves citizen engagement and builds citizen trust in the city’s elected and appointed leadership.

Committee Recommendations

The Ad Hoc Citizens Open Government Citizens Advisory Committee offers the following recommendations to the Snohomish City Council. **These recommendations include both “Reach In” and “Reach Out” programs to foster greater trust and participation on the part of residents, and to develop a true partnership with Snohomish Government. Reach In communication requires users to find information where provided, such as the website, social media, and phone apps. Reach Out communication puts information boldly in plain sight, where people frequent, and it requires no effort on their part. Examples of this include signs and kiosks.**

1) Establish Consistent Visions and Missions for All Advisory Groups

The City should compile all of the vision statements for every citizen advisory committee and commission into a single document. Review these documents and determine the consistencies and/or differences among them. It is important that the City have a well stated Vision Plan that serves as a guiding philosophy for daily operations and planning for the future. All citizen committees and City governing bodies should work in harmony under these guiding principles. Operating decisions should reflect adherence to the Vision.

Link to Committee Goals: This recommendation is linked to goals 5, 7, and 8.

Implementation Steps

- 1) The City Council will develop a vision statement. This vision statement will be submitted for general public review, and then adopted by the Council. ***(News has it that the City Council does have a vision statement, which was developed as part of the strategic plan. Let’s take a look at that first and then determine what may or may not be lacking.)***
- 2) Each City committee or commission will develop (or submit if already developed) an operating vision statement for their group. ***Estimated date for completion: Ongoing in accordance with existing committee and commission timeframes.***
- 3) The vision statements will be reviewed for consistency and congruency with that established and adopted by the Council. ***(Who does this? – perhaps a small citizen panel?) Estimated date for completion:***
- 4) The vision statements of each committee or commission will be approved, after review, by the Council. ***Estimated date for completion: Ongoing in accordance with existing committee and commission timeframes.***

Measures of Success

- The City Manager and the Council will, on an annual basis, review actions taken and assess compliance with the approved Vision statement.

2) Clearly Identify and Address Hot Button Issues

The City should give special attention to items that are likely to be hot button issues for the citizens of Snohomish. Examples of hot button issues include significant changes in zoning, conditional use permits, proposals that are not typically found in the surrounding neighborhoods, **and others as established by a citizen advisory team.** The City should create a system to implement a wide-ranging public engagement program for proposals that are expected to be of strong interest to the public. Such a program will reduce frustration, increase trust and provide even greater opportunities for citizens to engage.

Link to Committee Goals: This recommendation is linked to goals 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Implementation Steps

- 1) The City will form a citizen advisory team to assist the city in identifying types of hot button issues. *Estimated date for completion:*
- 2) Develop measures to enhance outreach and engagement technics. *(Would the citizen advisory team also do this?) Estimated date for completion:*
- 3) A team of five *(Who is on this team – staff or citizen volunteers?)* will be charged with gathering citizen opinion and feedback. The team will utilize the Transparency Procedure outlined in Recommendation #5. The City Council will also use the Transparency Procedures. *Estimated date for completion:*
- 4) Citizen responses will be periodically gathered by the Team and presented to the City Council. *Estimated date for completion: Ongoing depending on the issue/project under consideration.*

Measures of Success

- Citizen complaints about “not being informed” are reduced.
- City officials receive reports of increasing trust in city leadership.
- Citizen engagement is increased.
- *(Add in some specific percentages for these measures?)*

3) Implement Consistent and Standard Protocols

The City of Snohomish should develop consistent and standard protocols and communication/engagement techniques for each type of project or issue under consideration by the city. In addition to communication and engagement techniques, the city should create a feedback mechanism that informs the public about the way in which their comments have influenced city decision-making.

(Note that there are a number of linkages between this recommendation and #5, and #7 – links are actually popping up in numerous places. Let’s discuss doing some combining or cross-referencing as we continue to refine the document.)

Link to Committee Goals: This recommendation is linked to goals 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8.

Implementation Steps

- 1) The city will develop a list of the types of actions and decisions with corresponding rules for the public input and decision-making process. *Estimated date for completion:*
- 2) The city will distribute information to the public through all forms of communications on issues and decisions making. *Estimated date for completion: Ongoing as potential issues and projects arise.*

(I think this section could benefit from more detail – maybe the city should first review existing procedures and determine where they are deficient? Do you want a panel of citizens to review and comment on the revisions from the City? Should the rules and procedures be regularly reviewed and revised once they are put in place? Who will develop the feedback mechanism to help people be reassured that they have been heard and have had an influence?)

Measures of Success

- Citizens engagement increases. *(A percentage?)*
- Citizen satisfaction increases relative to their contributions to their role and level of influence in decision-making. *(A percentage?)*

4) Broaden Notification Procedures

Explore the potential to broaden the city’s notification procedures for issues and projects of interest for a larger number of Citizens of Snohomish. Examples may include a wider geographic base for mailings and a longer time period for public review and comment. These strategies would be employed, as needed depending on the issue under consideration and the likely level of public interest. *(This recommendation is so closely linked to “hot button issues” – do you want to consider melding the two into one recommendation?)*

Link to Committee Goals: This recommendation is linked to goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 8.

Implementation Steps

- 1) Incorporate the proposals and decision-making processes that are identified in the “Hot Button” recommendation. *Estimated date for completion:*
- 2) Develop criteria for determining sections within the city or the entire City where notifications of issues and decision-making should be provided. *Estimated date for completion:*

Measures of Success

- Citizen engagement increases.
- Increases citizen satisfaction in their contribution to the process and their part in decision-making.
- *(Add in some specific percentages for these measures?)*

5) Enhance Transparency in City Decision-Making

For every project or action the city undertakes or considers, there should be a code established known as the *Transparency Procedure*. This procedure will be a verbal checklist used at all City Council meetings. Every agenda topic project would have to pass the transparency procedure before determining the agenda items done or passed over *(what does this mean?)*. Projects that would fall under these procedures would include but not be limited to: zoning changes, ordinance changes, changes to the municipal code, condition use permits or situations.

The lack of open communication, and perceived lack of transparency in Snohomish City government has created a high level of distrust in our community. Residents have uncovered mistakes on the part of the city. These are often perceived to be intentional.

The only way that trust issues between Snohomish City Hall and our residents can be solved is for the City to go far beyond what the law requires, and established a new Standard of Excellence in transparent accessibility to information and communication.

Enforcing this proposed Transparency Procedure for every agenda item and making it immediately available to all residents is crucial to maintaining trust and transparency.

Transparency Procedure

- Do the citizens know about this topic/agenda item?
- Have all sides of said topic been represented?
- Are Snohomish traditions/codes/principles being threatened?
- Will this benefit our city?
- Will this action gain or lose trust from citizens?
- What are the sources for the city's research on this topic?
- Will the financial impact of this topic/agenda item be necessary and/or viable?

(Note: I know that you decided not to include the possibility of broadcasting City Council meetings because the City is working on the Channel 21 project. However, I think you should make some reference to that here – something along the lines that you hope to see the broadcast of meetings included in the new project – this was a good idea as part of our committee discussion, and I hate to see it dropped completely.)

Link to Committee Goals: This recommendation is linked to goals 2, 4, 7, and 8.

Implementation Steps

- 1) Begin use of the Transparency Procedure as soon as possible. *Estimated date for completion:*
- 2) Integrate the use of the Hot Button Committee to use Transparency Procedure when issues are first before the City, regardless of how they enter into City Council deliberations; for example, do they come from public works, planning, etc. *Estimated date for completion: Ongoing depending on the issue/project under consideration. (Do you want to recommend something more concrete – e.g. at least a two weeks' notice?)*
- 3) Post upcoming projects/agenda items that are covered by the Transparency Procedure in newspaper, City website, and the city manager's Friday newsletter. *Estimated date for completion: Ongoing depending on the issue/project under consideration.*
- 4) During City Council meetings, have the Transparency Procedure verbalized by the Council for each pertinent agenda item prior to a decision being made. *Estimated date for completion: Ongoing.*

Measures of Success

- The City receives reports indicating that citizens believe the City Council has acted in their best interest.
- Citizen engagement prior to City Council decisions is increased.

- The Hot Button Team is able to deliver positive reports on citizen opinions and feedback.
- *(Add in some specific percentages for these measures?)*

6) Expand the Use of Volunteers

The City of Snohomish should develop an extensive volunteer program that makes use of residents' talents and experience in a meaningful way. Fully developing this program will be an ongoing process. The first milestone will be reached when the city is actively recruiting and using volunteers. Some Snohomish citizens have the perception that decision-making processes are hidden. Some residents feel excluded from the inner-workings of city hall. City programs are limited by budget. City staff is already spread thin and will need manpower to accomplish the many recommendations of the open government committee. Lack of time to adequately research contributes to mistakes.

More details about this recommendation are provided in the appendix to this document.

Link to Committee Goals: This recommendation relates to goals 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8.

Implementation Steps

1) Evaluate. *Estimated date for completion:*

- Each City department will compile a list of meaningful volunteer positions that would save the city money, improve efficiency, reduce mistakes, and enable new programs or events.
- Do not give volunteers all of the grunt work; give them meaningful work.
- Anticipate capable volunteers with skills and experience appropriate to the job.
- Estimate time commitment for each position and volunteer skill required.

2) Organize. *Estimated date for completion:*

- Hire a Volunteer Program Organizer, professional preferred.
- Work with HR to create a volunteer application form.
- Add the volunteer program to the website
- Set up a permanent Snohomish City Hall column in the newspaper, list new volunteer positions and appreciation for last month's volunteers every month.

3) Recruit. *Estimated date for completion:*

- Advertise on all available reach out and reach in media per OGC
- Tell volunteers why their contribution is needed and appreciated.
- Hire volunteers according to their abilities, interests and time availability.

4) Enable continuing success. *Estimated date for completion: Ongoing.*

- Read your volunteers' application and assign work accordingly, learn and use their names.
- Volunteering needs to be enjoyable and rewarding. Include volunteers in job team and project discussion.
- Include volunteers in the workplace culture, they are your co-workers.

- Create an on-the-job reward program volunteers.
- Regularly hold volunteer appreciation events and published thank you list in newspapers, electronic media, website, kiosk and city hall. Other residents are more likely to volunteer when they see familiar names on the list.

Measures of Success

- New volunteer positions have been filled in at least three new departments.
- The City is benefiting from completed projects made possible by additional volunteer.
- Volunteers are fulfilling their commitments.
- The number of volunteers continues to increase.

7) Offer New Venues and Formats That Actively Encourage Greater Citizen Participation

The City should initiate a tradition of community building based on outreach, community gatherings and a more natural interaction between the city and the its residents. Remove the barriers of formality when seeking public input. When possible, conduct meetings in comfortable and familiar locations. Conduct meetings with the least formal procedure possible. Schedule meetings at a wide variety of times to accommodate different lifestyles.

Individual residents in Snohomish are drawn to the warm, small town, community atmosphere, yet some of them do not see their own responsibility in maintaining that community. Many feel like observers or on the fringe. Some residents do not see the point of engaging, because they have not seen any response to their suggestions. Others are intimidated by government processes.

Informal gatherings that include residents, City Council members, city officials and staff, will create common experiences, humanize government, and build community. Reach Out education and conversation in casual settings create opportunities to educate, hear residents' opinions and increase approachability. For example, a conversation in a café with neighbors and the Mayor or a Council member is more enjoyable, open and welcoming than on meeting on folding chairs led by a city representative.

Link to Committee Goals: This recommendation is linked to goals 1, 2, 3, and 8.

Examples of New Formats and Venues (see appendix for additional information)

Conversation Cafés: Monthly or weekly conversational gatherings which are held in a popular public setting like a bakery, restaurant, coffee shop or bookstore, where anyone is welcome to join. A simple format helps people feel at ease and gives everyone who wants to a chance to speak.

Neighbor Hosting Neighbor: A small neighborhood meeting, hosted by a resident in their home.

Community Forums: Specific Subject: Specific subject semi-informal gatherings could be co-hosted by community leaders from diverse backgrounds. The use of local experts whenever possible when presenting complex, specialized information may be helpful to gain credibility and show transparency. This would also build a closer community. Single subject focus allows time for education before QA.

Town Hall Meetings: Open Subject: Open subject semi-formal community meetings could be hosted by the City and volunteers. Open subject, dialogue sessions allow residents to introduce anything on their minds and get answers rather than stew and imagine the worst.

Pre-Council Forums: Begin a recurring, informal, public fact exchange and forum to precede Council Meetings. These forums should address the items on the Council's agenda for the evening. Council and Staff will answer questions and discuss issues and alternative solutions.

Printed *Impact Comparison Handouts*: These should be available for complex issues. Provide scratch paper and pencils to help people order their thoughts for public record comments.

Transparency Table: An across the table question, answer, dialog between City department and protest leaders. After receiving the *Impact Comparison Handout* and links to the *Information File* in advance, the protest group leaders submit additional information requests and questions in writing. Times for Transparency Tables are flexible and can be set for the convenience of the protest leaders and the City.

Study Circle: When a decision will affect one demographic group more than another or may cause conflict between groups, citizen stakeholders and a City representative gather in a City hosted study group to discuss the topic and learn about their different perspectives.

Community Picnic: *Looking backward to move forward: Based on Snohomish History:* Traditional public celebrations embrace all residents by offering activities for everyone. Education and dialog enable many unheard residents to be heard and build trust.

Multi-type Question Survey: Use open questions which allow public opinion to be expressed freely as well as closed questions like multiple choice or Y/N which are easy to tabulate; never use leading questions.

Implementation Steps

(It seems that this recommendation could benefit from a citizen Task Force – Perhaps a “Task Force for Trying New Things?” The Task Force would work with City staff to develop a schedule to try out these different venues and formats, timing, publicity, etc.)

Measure of Success

- Attendance at these new opportunities is substantial, and increases over time once people understand how fun, relaxing, and beneficial they are.
- Citizen misunderstandings and complaints are reduced.
- Trust in City government increases because there are new and more interesting ways to communicate.

8) Communicate the Key Issues and Why People Should Care About Them

(This recommendation is closely related to #4, “Broaden Notification,” and #10, “Create a Signage Program.” Should we consider combining the three into one?)

Information needs to be put in convenient and public places; where people go and where they are regularly viewing information. Get residents' attention by good marketing practices, use hooks to grab them. Motivate residents to participate by telling them how they will be personally effected. Provide a list of potential impacts and provide complete project information, conception to completion. Follow up with public gatherings for education and discussion. People have to know before they go. Balanced pro/con information enables residents to make sound judgements and engage in calm reasoned discussion.

Link to Committee Goals: These types of “Reach Out” announcements are related to Goal #8 – building trust.

Implementation Steps:

1) Announce actions in places people frequent.

- Display boldly on kiosks, signs, bulletin boards and other media.
- Maintain a permanent City column in the Tribune listing new actions of public interest.
- Use social media and apps for the web and portable devices.

2) Market project information to create response

- Use hooks and language that arouse interest, acknowledges problems and solicit input. For example: "Electronic Sign Next Door? Opinion? New Sign Code Public Meeting".

3) Schedule public gatherings for further discussion.

- Small gathering at different times are better than one big one unless there is a large outcry. This also serves as a test market for time and place convenience.

4) Create a potential pro and con impact Comparison Handout use it for the introducing projects and to start public discussions.

- What is the need for this action?
- How will this proposal fulfill the need?
- Financial impact, both personal and civic
- Positive and negative impacts on the Community, neighborhood, and individuals
- Alternatives being considered

5) Create an Information File containing all related information and make it available on the web. Keep files in the City archive to reopen if the proposal is reintroduced or information is needed in the future.

- Pre application meetings and discussions
- Annotated calendar of all meetings, discussions, communications
- Documents historical and current
- Maps, diagrams and images
- Code
- City research and sources
- Legal constraints

6) Conduct Public gatherings to educate, listen and discuss the issue.

(This is another one that seems like it could benefit from the participation of a small committee or task force that would work with the City to implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of, these new techniques.)

Measures of Success

- Increase in the number of better educated public comments concerning posted proposals
- Increased attendance at community opinion gatherings.
- Increased use of online discussion boards.
- Response from a broader cross section of the community
- Greater trust

9) Improve the City's Website

The City of Snohomish should improve its website to ensure that the site:

- Incorporates a design philosophy that puts the user first. A design that prioritizes accessibility (for all users and abilities) and mobility. A design that provides an easily followed path to the intended information while avoiding the users' feelings of being overwhelmed by returning more information than is wanted.
- Incorporates an overall design guide for presentation, navigation, relevance, and currency that produces and maintains consistency of user experience across all city departments.
- Features a prominent and maintained area for posting announcements and alerts when actions of interest are under consideration. Schedules, progress, and times for citizen input on initiatives are posted and maintained.
- Uses analytics and monitoring to identify areas of current interest, and addresses those interests with an area for 'trending topics'.
- Provides for an online discussion technology as a means for citizen review, comment, discussion, and input on various issues.

An inviting, easy to use, informative, and maintained website invites citizen usage and engagement. Thoughtfulness in design and usability projects caring, responsiveness to needs, and trustworthiness. Consistency across departments shows a city pulling together as a team. Discussion boards encourage engagement in review and comment. Reminders of comment periods, design reviews, upcoming events, initiatives project openness and, again, encourages engagement.

More information about this recommendation is included in the appendix to this document.

Link to Committee Goals: This recommendation is linked to goals 1, 3, 4, 5, and 8.

Implementation Steps

A project team should be responsible for developing the new website. The City should designate a project manager to coordinate and drive development. A first step for the project manager is the design of a project team, including role identification, selecting representatives, development of task and responsibility matrix, and staffing. The planning will require input and review by CitiVPlus and community volunteers.

Estimated date for completion: With a 2016 rework of the website already planned for, the team should be appointed immediately and their work completed before the web update project begins.

Once it is in place, the team will:

- 1) Develop a strategic plan for website development. The plan will include:
 - Funding for the short, medium, and long term development and rollout.
 - Technical architecture that is reusable, easy to maintain, in common use, and platform agnostic.
 - Staffing and education requirements
- 2) Recruit volunteers to guide website design and testing.
- 3) Study and adopt 'best practices' for civic websites.

4) The project team will also be responsible for a rollout plan. The plan will include a change-management strategy that addresses changes to the city business, budget, and staffing model required in order to manage social media and communications as central to City government. The rollout strategy will also include:

- Collection and application of usage data to maintain site relevance and usefulness. Keep it fresh!
- Develop a marketing and education plan for important new updates to the website capabilities.
- Changes required to support intra and inter departmental changes required for maintaining consistency and currency for the online presence.

Measures of Success

- 80% adherence to a selected web design standard, such as Powermapper (<http://try.powermapper.com/demo/ViewScan/28bf3c1a-7fd9-49ca-880f-11e7b6739e86>)
- Pass complete evaluation by W3C site accessibility checker. (<http://try.powermapper.com/demo/ViewScan/28bf3c1a-7fd9-49ca-880f-11e7b6739e86>)
- 30% increase in counted visits to linked pages from the home page.
- Increase in the time spent on linked pages.
- Increase in the number of volunteers.
- Active use of discussion boards for comment and review
- A decrease in citizen formal and informal requests for information.
- A decrease in citizen complaints in transparency issues.
- Citizen response to meaningful volunteer positions relating to specific issues.
- Increase in informed public participation and attendance at City meetings.
- World peace.

10) Incorporate Social Media into City Communications

The City of Snohomish should consider giving the “Experience Snohomish” app more attention. This app could be improved if it included City Council meetings **and invitations to citizen discussions**, as well as the meeting schedules for various city committees. This will allow citizens to see when and where the meetings will take place. The app should also include a discussion forum and comment section where citizens can provide their input on the respective meetings. The app should also update City Council member information; these have not been updated since the last election. The name should also be reconsidered; “Experience Snohomish” is good, but can be improved to be great **(What would a “great” name be?) name that will stress and invite community participation**. The current app does not have many downloads, but that could be because it has a different name than the social media account; this can be confusing to citizens. The current app also lacks consistency and accuracy on current issues in Snohomish.

Link to Committee Goals: This recommendation is linked to all of the committee’s goals.

Implementation Steps

- 1) The city should widely advertise its need for app renovations and allow citizens time to provide their feedback on what they would like to see with the mobile app, and its relationship/influence with the use of the existing app and existing social media accounts. This way the city can reflect on what is needed and what isn't. *(This could benefit from a little more detail. For example, it seems like advertising targeted to those who are most likely to use the app would be more beneficial than just blanket advertising?)* A multi-target campaign could tell us who the users are. Estimated date for completion:
- 2) After careful considerations on the renovation of the app according to citizen input, the app should be relaunched. Estimated date for completion: No later than January 2017.
- 3) The city should consistently maintain and manage the mobile app while advertising it on existing media outlets. This will drive more downloads. Estimated date of completion: Ongoing.

(Note: If the website volunteer panel remains on board in some fashion, perhaps this group could also serve in a watchdog advisory capacity to the ongoing implementation of the mobile app?)

Measures of Success

- By January 2018, one year after its relaunch, the app should have a significant number of downloads, perhaps even more than a third of the population of Snohomish. With this number of downloads there should be plenty of reviews in the app store that will allow the city to assess the success of the app along with needed repairs. This will also demonstrate the satisfaction among citizens.

11) Create a Signage Program

The City has in place the elements needed for an effective signage program to insure citizens are informed. It is recommended that an employee be assigned the responsibility of being that signs are put up for public viewing when development or redevelopment is planned.

The City has recently been making adequate use of signage. Examples are the sign in place announcing planning for renovation of the former Hal Moe Pool, construction of the round-about on Avenue D, Maple Street Construction projects, the City wide cleanup day, etc. The signage in these examples is good and should be continued. Signage became an issue when lack of signage on some sensitive redevelopment projects (the apartments and cell tower) were not prominent at the proposed site or were put in place after the projects were rapidly moving forward in the planning stages. *These projects were of concern to a much broader segment of the population than frequented the immediate area of the postings.*

Signs, kiosks, banners, posters and handouts placed where people frequent should be used to support the Reach Out method of communication with the public. Some, but not all, ideal locations include the library entrance, Aquatic Center, Centennial Trail, outside City Hall, by agreement with local retailers, existing First Street kiosks, the Farmers' Market, Klá Ha Ya Park on the trail, City meetings, public celebrations, and events.

Link to Committee Goals: This recommendation is linked to goals 3, 4, and 8.

Implementation Steps

- 1) Appoint a City staff member to monitor the posting of signage. *Estimated date for completion:*
- 2) Develop procedures requiring all departments to coordinate projects with the staff member in charge of monitoring appropriate signage. *Estimated date for completion: (It seems like this could benefit from some discussion with a small group of citizens – perhaps a draft of the procedures that is then more widely shared before it is implemented?)*
- 3) *Include something along the lines of implementing the new procedures?*

Measures of Success

- Maintain a log of signage used.
- Monitor the signage log against projects undertaken to ensure compliance. (*Percentage here – 100% compliance?*)

12) “De-Fog” City Communications

The City should issue written publications in simple, reader-friendly language. All written materials should be measured against a ‘readability test’ prior to publication, targeting a score of 60 to 70 (higher is better) on Flesch-Kincaid (or equivalent) reading scale. This is about the level of the average newspaper. Jargon should be eliminated. Summaries should be written for long and/or complex documents.

Clear, easily understood writing is more likely to get read and understood. It encourages citizens to become more engaged. It lowers the level of intimidation, and it is more likely to get responses that lead to increased levels of citizen participation. People who can easily understand a document are more likely to trust it and perceive the author as open and transparent.

A random sampling of current City communications pulled from the website reveals the following:

- The 2016 City budget rated a 24 on the Flesch-Kincaid scale - a post-graduate level.
- The weekly newsletter is rates a 42.
- The Business License web instruction rates a 27.
- The web page for ‘Pay your Utility Bill Online’ rates a 58.

Link to Committee Goals: This recommendation is linked to goals 1,2,4,7, and 8.

Implementation Steps

1) All communications intended for general public information, direction, advice, signage, etc., should be tested by the author for reading level and complexity before final release. This can begin immediately.

2) Legal, technically complex, and regulatory documents generally include a review by city government members and often undergo a public review period. Incorporate into this review: a complexity and reading review (by the author), an added step to the review instructions to comment on understandability, and a request for opinion on whether to include a summary.

3) Clear communications are the responsibility of everyone issuing to the public. The best implementation plan is for city leadership to include clarity as core value to manage to. Talk about it, review communications with an eye to it, demand it, add it as a performance review item. Take ownership of it. Conduct writing classes if necessary.

4) Complexity review software comes with most word processing packages. Use the most available option. For instance, the Flesch-Kincaid test is built into Microsoft Word. Use that if the city uses Microsoft Word.

Measures of Success

- The average document or webpage issued by the city is easily read and comprehended at a 9th grade reading level (60 to 70) on the Flesch-Kincaid rating scale.