

MINUTES

THURSDAY, AUGUST 31, 2015 SARATOGA CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING COMMUNICATION ASSESSMENT STUDY SESSION

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Miller called the meeting to order at 6:24 p.m. in the Administrative Conference Room at 13777 Fruitvale Avenue in Saratoga, CA.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT Mayor Howard Miller, Vice Mayor Manny Cappello, Council Members Emily Lo, Mary-Lynne Bernald, Rishi Kumar

Ryder Smith, President of Tripepi Smith & Associates
Shannon O'Hare, Business Analyst, Tripepi Smith & Associates

ABSENT: None

ALSO PRESENT: James Lindsay, City Manager
Crystal Bothelio, City Clerk
Debbie Bretschneider, Deputy City Clerk
John Cherbone, Public Works Director
Michael Taylor, Recreation and Facilities Director
Mary Furey, Finance and Administrative Services Director
Brian Babcock, Administrative Analyst
Mainini Cabute, Management Analyst II

I. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS ON NON-AGENDIZED ITEMS

None

II. COMMUNICATION ASSESSMENT PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION

Ryder Smith, President of Tripepi Smith & Associates, presented their report on Saratoga's current communications plan, including key observations and recommendations. Tripepi Smith conducted interviews with 29 people, including Council members, City staff, representatives of partner agencies, and involved citizens to determine how the City could improve and expand its current communication methods.

The key observations were:

1. Reaching Saratoga residents is challenging –they are very busy with the schools and jobs.
2. The City has a strong foundation for Communications –already has quality communications with content produced regularly.
3. Communication is not Reaching Full Potential – *The Saratogan* and social media are only reaching a small portion of the audience.

Communications Platforms (that City is already using):

Website, Median Banners, Photography, *The Saratogan*, local media, Radio 1610 AM, Recreation activity Guide, KSAR Cable Access, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Nextdoor, LinkedIn

Recommendations:

1. Continue Centralized Communications Approach
2. Start a 12 month Communications Content Calendar
3. Ensure Communications Reach Residents
4. Change Distribution Method of *The Saratogan*
5. Focus on Physical Assets –Media Banner Program very effective. Storypoles and signage at construction are effective.
6. Expand Direct Electronic Communications --encourage metrics
7. Promote City Communication Platforms
8. Routinely Collect and Report Metrics
9. Revisit Website Redesign and SEO Functionality
10. Create Media Outreach Strategy
11. Marketing Plan for Recreation Programming
12. Improve KSAR's Strategic Role
13. Crisis Communications Plan

Mayor Miller invited public comment on the communications assessment. There was no public comment.

Ryder Smith asked the Council if any communications platforms were missing from the list. Vice Mayor Cappello asked if Tripepi Smith had interviewed Destination Saratoga, since that organization was trying to get more press coverage of Saratoga as a tourist destination. Ryder Smith said they had not.

Michael Taylor, Recreation Director, said that the Recreation Department reaches out to the schools by attending PTA meetings and back-to-school nights to talk about the recreation department's programs.

Council Member Kumar asked about a City app to be used to communicate with the public.

Council Member Lo suggested that the website and City news be searchable on Google search.

Ryder Smith responded that although they work with lots of Cities, they have yet to see one with an outstanding app and suggested it is better to have a website that has a mobile-friendly design. Also, the website redesign would include giving the website increased search engine optimization (SEO) which would solve the Google search problem.

Council Member Bernald agreed that a better search engine would be a great place to start. Current website is confusing to navigate.

Brian Babcock, Administrative Analyst, presented his staff report on implementing the recommendations in Tripepi Smith's report. There are recommendations that can be incorporated into the City's daily operations. There are a few items that staff is seeking input from the City Council. These projects are considered high impact projects that could possibly have the most powerful results.

1. Crowdsourcing –receiving resident input is critical to open communications. In order to reach residents where they are, the City plans on using a crowdsourcing platform like Open Town Hall of My Sidewalk to ask specific questions and gather community feedback.
2. Change the Distribution Method of *The Saratogan* – there are several ways the City could change the distribution and need the Council's direction on which to use.
3. Website Redesign –The City Council has earmarked \$75,000 for Fiscal Year 2015/16 to complete a redesign of the website. The Staff will analyze data through Google Analytics and Civica (current website host) to guide the end product, as well as input from others.

Mayor Miller asked what are the City's goals. Is it to want residents to contact us? Or is it to find out what residents want by creating quick surveys on interesting topics. If the goal is getting information to the public then the website redesign and getting the website mobile ready is good. But how do we get the engagement piece?

Ryder Smith responded that getting the residents interested in Facebook, by asking highlighted questions and getting them to respond. But you need a larger baseline of Facebook users to create more interest. Perhaps start with core groups in the City and demo ideas at the Chamber, schools, or Rotary. Also Facebook messages can receive a "boost" in readership by paying to "boost the message." Brian Babcock confirmed that the City has done this occasionally and paying for the boost has raised the views of the messages. Vice Mayor Cappello suggested that the City create a message on the grand opening of the Quarry Park and target specific groups on Facebook by paying for the boost. Mayor Miller endorsed that idea.

City Manager Lindsay said that city staff was asking the Council for guidance on 3 main projects. Much of the Tripepi Smith report has recommendations that staff can implement internally and they have already started. Would Council like to make this Communications Assessment an annual discussion at the Council Retreat or during budget discussions? The Crisis Communications plan is a project that is starting soon.

COUNCIL CONSENSUS:

The City Council asked that at the September 16, 2015 City Council meeting, that staff bring back the discussion of how to distribute *The Saratogan*. The City Council agreed to have City staff bring back a staff report on Crowdsourcing before the 2016 Council Retreat meeting. The City Council also agreed with bringing back a communications plan to the 2016 Council Retreat with a check- list from the Tripepi Smith report with what has or has not been implemented yet. The City Council asked that a Facebook message on the Quarry Park grand opening be used as a test of the Facebook boost system and to create analytics and a report on who the City reached with the message.

Mayor Miller adjourned the meeting at 8:18 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'DB', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Debbie Bretschneider, Acting City Clerk
City of Saratoga