



CITY OF CONCORD

New Hampshire's Main Street™

REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Carlos P. Baía, Deputy City Manager-Development

DATE: August 25, 2017

SUBJECT: City Communications Team

Recommendation

Amend Schedule D to Create the Position Classification of Public Information Officer as part of the City Administrative Department and change the labor grade and FLSA status for the existing Communications Coordinator position. Accept this report and set the attached amendments for public hearing in October.

Background

One of Council's priorities is the effective use of communications to convey information to our residents. The creation of a Communications Coordinator position in the General Services Department (GSD) several years ago was a first step in meeting this goal. That position has allowed GSD to reach people via the City's website, email, Facebook, and YouTube. By all accounts, it has been successful but limited to one department.

The remaining City departments have each made independent attempts to enhance the way they communicate with the public. Efforts range from electronic newsletters, Facebook pages, printed brochures, etc. While laudable individually, these efforts fail to send a coherent message concerning the City.

Discussion

Managing the Message

With the prevalence of a variety of popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, etc. the public's expectation today is that information will be disseminated instantaneously. Combined with this is the anticipation that the public will be able to respond to information via a post and, in turn, get a response back in short order. Gone are the days when people would wait to "read about it in the paper."

In addition, with the decline of traditional media, coverage of local governments is even more scant. This creates a vacuum where the City's message is no longer in the hands of professionals who would take the time to analyze an issue but instead, could be controlled by anyone with a smartphone. As many communities are realizing, this creates a significant challenge. With the incredible reliance on internet

search engines to learn about communities, if a City's message is being controlled by individuals with limited or incorrect information, the image conveyed to the mass public may be distorted. This is particularly important for the City's economic development initiatives. When site selectors or business executives search Concord, New Hampshire it is hoped that they would be directed to information that illustrates the many positive projects and initiatives in our community. To achieve that goal, however, the City would require an individual who could dedicate the totality of their time to ensuring that the City's communication initiatives are strategic, coherent, and timely.

A growing number of local governments are demonstrating that one way to achieve this type of effective communication is to have a communications team. For a community our size, the suggested staffing is a 2-3 person team that would have good writers, executive level strategic vision, be able to actively monitor the City organization across all departments, have the ability to post and respond quickly, and be able to produce video content. Key to this team is the lead position which is proposed to be the City's Public Information Officer.

Public Information Officer

At its August 21, 2017 meeting, FPAC unanimously recommended the creation of a "City Information Officer" position. Subsequent to that meeting, a review of human resource and employment websites determined that "Information Officer" is many times associated with directors of Information Technology Departments (IT). To avoid confusion, City Administration is now proposing that this title be "Public Information Officer (PIO)." The individual selected for this position would oversee the totality of the City's external communications. This would be accomplished through daily meetings with key departments such as Police, Fire, General Services and others to follow new and emergent issues. While this person would not supplant the officer or firefighter in the role of a spokesperson for the Police Department or Fire Department at times of an active, critical incident, the PIO would follow the evolution of that incident and report out to the community. The PIO would also strategically plan for timed releases of information concerning projects and initiatives. Today, the City accomplishes many great projects but typically the messaging concerning those endeavors is an afterthought and released in no uniform fashion. With the addition of this position, the PIO would be able to map out over a period of weeks or months a strategy and a cohesive communications package for each project.

In order to ensure that the PIO has Executive level access, influence, and vision, the position would report directly to the City Manager.

The Communications Team

Although the PIO is critical, for the effort to truly flourish it is recommended that he/she be part of a team. It is proposed that the existing Communications Coordinator position in GSD be incorporated into this citywide effort reporting to the PIO. This would expand the position's scope and effect as well as eliminate some of the current administrative duties within GSD and thus makes elevating the labor grade from 16 to 17 appropriate. A third element of this team would be a video specialist. City Administration is exploring the feasibility of obtaining these video services through a collaborative partnership with Concord TV. In today's social media world, video is considered an indispensable pre-requisite for any communication plan. The public—in general—no longer responds consistently to text-based information on the web. Video content is what drives home messaging.

Responsiveness

With a communications team, the expectation would be that information concerning the City such as departmental notices, projects, initiatives, investigations, studies, committee work, breaking news, etc.

would be posted throughout the day in “real time.” Even more importantly, the communications team would be expected to respond to posts from the public quickly and effectively. One community surveyed has a comparable communications team and they respond to 98% of the public posts within 24 hours and 72% within an impressive 60 minutes. This requires a team that is willing to monitor all social media platforms seemingly around the clock and is savvy enough to have or find the requisite information for coherent responses quickly.

Target Audiences/Return on Investment

The experienced use of social media also allows the City to effectively gauge the return on investment of our communications efforts. Today, it is unclear how much of an impact our limited efforts such as the City Manager newsletter or our printed materials truly have. However, by using social media, an experienced PIO can precisely determine who the end users are and what their preferences might be. In one case, a community found that their target audience for social media marketing were women, aged 25-45 who typically were online after 9pm on Saturdays. In that case, the community could tailor their ad placement to hit that target audience; a much more effective use of public dollars.

Budgetary Details

The PIO position is proposed to be a labor grade 19 with a salary range of \$51,064-\$73,965. If Council approves of this position at the October meeting, it is anticipated that the position would be filled by January 2. This would correlate to an FY 18 total budget impact (salary, benefits, operating expenses) of between \$44,000-\$51,000 (depending on initial step offered). There is no tax impact from this expense in FY 18 as it is proposed to be funded from the Economic Development Reserve (EDR). Going forward, in FY 19, the annual total budget for this position is estimated to be between \$88,000 and \$101,000.

The changing of the existing Communications Coordinator position from labor grade 16 to a labor grade 17 will have less than a \$1,000 impact in FY 18.

Timing

In order to begin recruitment as soon as possible, the proposed ordinance creating the Public Information Officer position will take effect upon passage. The Communications Coordinator change, however, will only take effect on January 15, 2018 to coincide with the expected on-boarding of the PIO.