

From: [D. Muirhead](#)
To: [Angie Gonzalez](#); [Michelle Wilson](#)
Subject: Morgan Hill City Council Meeting January 25, 2017 Item #6: Communications assessment
Date: Monday, January 23, 2017 10:48:59 AM

Dear Morgan Hill City Council,

Comments for the Public Record submitted by
Doug Muirhead, a resident of Morgan Hill, for:
Morgan Hill City Council
Meeting January 25, 2017
Item #6: Communications assessment

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This is a useful report which identifies capabilities and opportunities for City communications efforts. Before offering some make-it-better comments, I want to thank Maureen Tobin, Communications and Engagement Manager, for the work she has done in the last three years and for sponsoring this review.

The City does not have a culture of communications and engagement. For reasons mentioned in the consultant assessment and staff report, Ms. Tobin has carried much of this load herself. Much as I appreciate the Mayor Coffees, it grates on me when the Mayor responds to complaints about lack of communication with the statement "But we have a Communications and Engagement Manager".

Ms. Tobin recently announced that major reports and plans would be available ten days in advance of a meeting to discuss them, rather than the previous minimum Brown Act requirement of 72 hours. Good! Yet as of Monday January 23, there is no pre-reading for the Council workshop with VTA on January 25 nor for the Council Goals workshop on January 27.

The Assessment Executive Summary identified why communications and engagement are important:

- City communications and citizen engagement are critical aspects of a City's day-to-day operations. Maintaining open lines of communication with residents can
- enhance the community's understanding and awareness of City services and policy making,
 - avoid conflict,
 - empower citizens to help improve their community, and
 - deliver on the myriad benefits of transparency.

I want more residents to understand not just the "what" but also the "how" and "why" of local government operations and decision making. And I remain committed to a belief that more informed residents will lead to more people working on improving our community and the operation of its government.

To that end, I want to start with two general observations. Neither of my primary objectives for communications are in the assessment recommendations.

First, just as early settlers who encountered the mighty Nebraska Platte River described it as "an inch deep and a mile wide", you appear to be focused on more "contact" rather than more "understanding". This is a

choice you get to make. At your August 2016 Goals Workshop, Ms. Tobin stated that our community is tech savvy and they just want quick sound bytes [her sentiment if not her exact words]. And at a recent Mayor Coffee, responding to my fond memories of Budget and Utility Department open houses, she observed that those were high cost to reach very few people. Currently, with the exception of your excellent Budget document, the City outsources the "understanding" work to the Leadership Morgan Hill Foundation which educates about 20 residents each year.

Second, the recommendation to Empower Staff and Council as Information Ambassadors. It was informative to hear that the City Manager holds a weekly Leadership Huddle. Unfortunately, we do not know what staff-to-staff meetings happen within the City or with partner agencies. And Council members have generally chosen not to use their Other Council Reports segment of Council meetings to provide a "Pulse of the Community" based on their emails, calls, and meetings with residents, nor to discuss their outside committee assignments where they represent the City and South County to other agencies in the region.

I don't know what Staff and Council see on your Internal web. The public only can access the External web. I think you should all "eat your own dog food". Former Council member Librers stated that she had attended Corporation Yard Commission meetings even as I was seeing no Commission agendas, minutes, nor documents used to justify budget carry-overs. And at the Mayor Coffee which focused on High Speed Rail, encouraging those present to contact the City with their concerns, the Mayor and Member Carr appeared unaware that Mr. Lang had previously added an email subscription box and a comment form to the City HSR web page.

Before going into my "yes but" responses to specific items in the assessment, I want to make you aware of an opinion piece by Mr. Chris Monack on his <https://mhresidentsopinion.wordpress.com/> which he posted on November 21, 2016 regarding the Communications Survey. He too is differentiating between a deep dive and a "more casual contact of reading occasional posts on a social media site or calling to report a pothole". Please keep this distinction in mind when you read the staff report statement that while not statically valid or scientific, the Communications Survey indicated that 61% of respondents agreed that the City is doing a good job of communicating important information.

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Comments for Staff

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- Spectrum of Public Participation
All too often, Council staff reports use "Community Engagement: Inform" when the only communication is the current item on a Council agenda. Necessary but not sufficient.

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Let people know how they can get their own information.
We have ReportAConcern on the City web site.
We have specific contact numbers which appear on the City Channel 17 Bulletin Board (and where else?).

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Summarized Observations
- The City is doing relatively well with its transparency efforts
It freely offers video recordings of important meetings via Granicus.

There were no recordings of General Plan GPAC meetings.
There were no recordings of Planning Commission Workshops on revising the RDCS scoring and Competition Manual.
"relatively well" is relative.

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Summarized Recommendations

- Continue to Grow & Celebrate Transparency Efforts

I strongly favor "open data".

For example, post the PCI of each road segment in the City.

- Overall, the City website does a great job of helping users find popular content, with its prominent Search function
- There are no meta Descriptions or Keywords for site pages yet

Unfortunately the search results are often opaque. Search for Llagas Creek Trail to get all the contract awards to determine cost. Get back dozens of items, mostly the title is some agenda number. If an item has a date, it may be when it was last moved on the web site and not when it was created.

There is a dearth of historical documents. As a beginning, make sure any document referred to in a new report or staff item is also on the web. For example, in the Assessment, under Department Communication Activities, Administrative Services, Information Services (IS), we are told that the City has a "Technology Policy" (last revised in February 2010). A web search for "Technology Policy" returns 676 results, with no "Technology Policy" in the first 30.

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Recommendations

- Communications Metrics: Measure What Matters

Most Morgan Hill staff do not regularly report on available metrics for a number of the City's Communications platforms, such as data on website activity, then translate those into actionable steps for management.

This is something I have wanted for years. For example the Top Ten Most Visited Webpages do not contain ReportConcern or Agenda/Calendar. And does anyone besides me actually watch the Channel 17 Bulletin Board.

- Between March 1, 2016 and September 1, 2016, there were 58 Public Record Requests and 122 Public Comments on Agenda Items. Regarding Public Comments, on several recent agenda items with significant community interest, Council members have noted many personal communications. Are these in fact treated as Public Comments on Agenda Items? They are discoverable through a Public Record Request. I want a complete picture, directly accessible through the web, without adding to staff workload. Regarding Public Record Requests, Gilroy has an Open Government Ordinance and Open Government Commission. One quarterly report lists all Record Requests received and their disposition.

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- SiteImprove [multiple references]

What is it and how will it be used?

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Observations

- Morgan Hill has two local newspapers that cover City and community news. Both newspapers are open to receiving and printing content from the City, including local events.

My experience is that the papers' calendars are quite limited. And meetings which affect Morgan Hill residents but which are sponsored by regional

organizations have even lower priority. VTA and SCVWD announce meetings with ads, which I assume they pay for.

The other challenge is getting meeting notices distributed electronically and entered on the City web calendar. Notices for the joint Morgan Hill City and School Liaison Committee are maintained by MHUSD. A paper copy is posted at City Hall. Notices for the joint Morgan Hill and Gilroy Wastewater Plant Board are maintained by Gilroy. A paper copy is posted outside the Council Chambers. Ms. Tobin says she would need to find a responsible party to reliably provide notices such as these.

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- Water, Sewer, and Wastewater Systems Master Plans
and the Recycled Water Master Plan

All of these documents required public meetings and public hearings.
There were public meetings for the Recycled Water Master Plan.

While not required, there was a community meeting for the Urban Water Management Plan (UWMP) [thank you Karl, Dan, and Jay].

There have been no public meetings for the Water, Sewer, and Wastewater Systems Master Plans; those documents are overdue based on 2035 General Plan timelines. Based on the August Goals Workshop, they should have been available for review in October or November.

For the Public Safety Master Plan, a completion date of October was stated at the August Goals Workshop. The Fire Service held a community meeting; the Police Service did not. The plan has not been announced to the community nor presented to the Council.

This is an ongoing problem. There is no status page for target completion dates for key documents. And dates come and go with no notice by the City or revision in availability.

Other policy documents are developed without community input or notice of completion. A guess and a PRR yielded Police policies for Automated License Plate Readers (ALPR) and Body Cameras which were not on the web. ALPR did later appear on the web due to a change in State law, but no announcement to the community was made.

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- Per City Manager Steve Rymer, the goal is for all Departments to embrace their own proactive and strategic Communications efforts as a fundamental part of their work.
- Tripepi Smith's recommendations generally center on addressing the federated nature of Communications and attempting to better coordinate and plan communication activities.

Love the choice of the word "federated".

One last issue is who the City decides will be "stakeholders" on a particular issue. When the City says that someone else is speaking for me, I want to know who those people are and what they are saying.

The City needs to be far more aggressive in pushing information out to potential interested parties. Last year, in VTA agendas, I saw that VTA was selling its Transit Center lot at Main and Hale. While zoning did not change and the School District was the eventual beneficiary, this happened during the General Plan Update and GPAC and the Planning Commission should have heard about this land use change. Responding to my questions about who knew what when, VTA said that they had been

corresponding with City staff over a period of time.

More recently, again in a VTA Board agenda, was a Closed Session Conference with Real Property Negotiators for the Morgan Hill Caltrain Park and Ride Lot. Under negotiation was the Exercise of VTA Right of Refusal to Purchase Portion of Morgan Hill Caltrain Park and Ride Lot. The City has a project to develop a second PDA called the Station Area Master Plan. Other than a few sentences at the August Goals Workshop, saying that the plan would be complete in Spring 2017, and a few more sentences at the Oversight Board, we have heard nothing about this. And yet it appears to already be subject to negotiation with VTA.

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All things considered, the Assessment is skewed toward the view that the City doing a good job.

Thank you for your consideration, Doug Muirhead, Morgan Hill