

# **Report of President's Work Group to Review Council Communication Tools & Processes**

## **Work Group Members:**

Alders Grant Foster, Patrick Heck, Arvina Martin, Donna Moreland, Max Prestigiacomio

## **Former Work Group Members:**

Alders Keith Furman, Lindsay Lemmer, Barbara Harrington-McKinney

The Work Group would like to thank the many staff members who organized our meetings, provided valuable presentations and information, and helped us formulate solutions to the concerns we identified. Their expertise and patience are deeply appreciated.

## **City Staff:**

Common Council Office: Lisa Veldran, Kwasi Obeng, Karen Kapusta-Pofahl, Debbie Fields

Information Technology: Eric Olson, Sarah Edgerton

Mayor's Office: Katie Crowley, Tariq????

Civil Rights: Jason Glozier

Public Health Madison & Dane County: Allison Dungan

Engineering: Hannah Mohelnitzky

Water Utility: Amy Barrilleaux

Other PIOs?

City Attorney's Office: Roger Allen, Lara Mainella

## **Introduction**

On July 16, 2019, Common Council adopted a resolution creating the President's Work Group to Review Council Communication Tools & Processes. Per the resolution in Appendix A, the Work Group's charge was to address:

"... the Common Council desires to improve communication to city residents and to further the goals and mission of the Common Council by incorporating the core value of Civic Engagement - commitment to transparency, openness and inclusivity..."

and to

"... review the City's current offering of existing communication tools and processes and investigate options and alternatives to improve those tools and processes;"

with tasks to include

- Alder Blog & email subscriptions
- Alder Home Page
- How Alders share content via social media

- Use of calendars for meetings and events
- Templated/prepared content
- Sharing of updates generated by city agencies “

and

“... along with other communication tools and processes as identified by the work group:”.

This report summarizes the Group’s work on those and other issues identified as the work proceeded. Some issues were simply identified, while others were resolved or partially resolved. Regardless, this report also provides a set of recommendations for future work on the issues for which there was not sufficient time for the Work Group to address and/or solve due to the Group’s limited longevity and scope. Another consideration that led to recommendations for the future was that some issues and resolutions have the potential to include both fiscal impacts and larger impacts on staff work plans that were judged to be more appropriate for longer term efforts by alders, city staff and/or additional Common Council actions.

Note that the Work Group held twenty-two meetings starting on 8/12/2019 with the last meeting on 9/17/2020.

### **General Findings:**

A few general overarching findings, link to TFOGS, some items we didn’t explore because more TFOGS, etc.

Some random stuff from elsewhere, some to be adapted

Alder training for communication/use of tools

CC Staff point person for communications?

3. Create requirements for Legistar upgrade/replacement

a. Legistar update/replacement

i. Put all meetings (workgroups/subcommittees) in legistar in a generic form

ii. Legistar meetings for associated bodies (MPO, MMSD, CARPC, City-Village Association)

iii. Calendar subscription for legistar

4. Resident engagement/survey/RESJI

i. 311 system

ii. Ability to check in on status of requests (traffic related, building inspection, etc.)

### **List of Work Group Foci**

1. Alder Blog Tool and Email Subscriptions
2. Input for Alder Blogs
3. Incoming Email Adjustments
4. Broadening the Audience for Alder Communications
5. Registration for and Input at Public Meetings
6. Alders Calendaring Tools

7. Council Social Media Policy and Social Media Platforms
8. Replacing Postcard Notification with Digital Advertising
9. Legistar Improvements and Meetings

Is the list of 9 okay? Only #1 is mostly complete report-wise. I've just pasted stuff from notes and emails into others foci so I can adapt later, so most of that text will be thrown out or adapted.

## **Work Group Focus #1**

### **Alder Blog Tool and Email Subscriptions**

#### **Identified Concerns:**

- The current alder blogging tool is unfriendly by today's standards and is difficult for many alders to use. The blogging tool is the primary method that many alders use to communicate with constituents, so modernizing it could decrease the amount of time alders spend writing blog posts and could make the information easier for constituents to digest.
- The blogging tool's associated email subscription management system has limited capabilities, e.g., alders cannot email their subscribers without making a blog post.
- Content provided by others for inclusion in an Alder Blog/Update is the subject of Work Group Focus #4.

#### **Findings:**

Some alders utilize the existing blogging tool at least weekly, some only occasionally, and some not at all. A few alders have found ways to exploit the tool and its relatively primitive formatting capabilities in order to make posts more readable, but most alders do not have the time, skillset, and/or desire to delve very far into stretching the tool's limits. The Working Group believes that if the tool was modernized, more alders would use it, and would use it more frequently, to communicate with constituents.

Note that some alders communicate with constituents exclusively by utilizing non-city email listservs, including those of Neighborhood Associations within their District. Additionally, some are using some combination of alder blogs, listservs, and social media. The Work Group believes that if the blog tool was updated, more alders would use it, but other methods of communication will continue to be used. Social media, in particular, seems to

The email subscription system which allows subscribers to receive all posts that an alder makes is also somewhat primitive. The ability to email subscribers in addition to their receiving an automated email that contains a heading image and the first few lines of the post would open up the possibilities of more communication channels.

Alder blogs, aka updates, are currently one-way communications. Alders post, but there is no commenting feature. Subscribers can respond to the email notification that a new blog entry has been entered, but

#### **Solutions:**

### *Implemented*

None

### *Ongoing Implementation*

IT is in the process of replacing the current alder blogging tool with a tool that is already being widely used by various departments. This improved tool will have no increased costs associated with expanding its utilization to alders.

The tool is more intuitive, WYSIWYG, and allows many more formatting and embedding options. The latter will allow easier importation of information from other sources. More practical matters include more contemporary and intuitive menus, options for saving drafts, and activating posts, etc.

### **Recommendations:**

- As web-based blogging tools evolve, IT generally is evolving along with them. IT should have ongoing discussions with Council Staff so that new tools and capabilities for use by alders can be kept up to date.
- CCEC should periodically be informed by Council Staff about new capabilities that alders may want to consider adding to their blogging tool.

### **Responsibility:**

Common Council Staff

IT

CCEC

### **Work Group Focus #2**

### **Input for Alder Blogs**

#### **Identified Concerns:**

Some pasted text to be adapted, maybe

- All alder emails - public comments
  - Include Kwasi
- Registration for public meetings
  - Sorting for alders
  -

Reduce duplicative efforts to create content (multiple alders preparing similar content)

Make sure content delivery is timely (not too late, not too early)

- Make sure content is relevant to its audience
- Make sure content is accessible to non-English speakers/VI audience
- Make sure content has the appropriate level of detail

Look to reduce duplicative/irrelevant emails to all.alders from staff

What about a weekly summary that goes out on Friday?

vi. CC Staff point person for communications

**Findings:**

Development of Weekly Summary Content for Alders to Share (

Donna: we need to know the options of what info is available. I want district-specific information and development-specific info in my district.

Grant: I think we were planning on just city-wide info for the weekly summary going to all alders. Maybe key things coming up in city meetings.

Donna: I like the city meeting schedule.

Kwasi: who's the audience? Is it alders or is it their residents? Alders are interested in a lot of items happening at meetings they're unable to come to. If it's for residents the info may not need to be as detailed.

We want someone from the Council office reviewing what's going on and staying on top of it to share out via this weekly summary.

Grant: Would it be feasible to just have someone go through Legistar agendas and pull what's going to be of interest to all of most of the city.

Barbara: Actually staff should be doing that instead. Really looking at that kind of material. If alders don't ask for that info they don't get it, but staff should be providing that info.

Grant: I agree there are opportunities to improve that with city agencies, but there's also broader topics that aren't district-specific that could be the main focus of for these weekly summaries to start. Not everyone has time to review all the agendas.

Barbara: some alders want district-specific info and some don't. There needs to be consistent information sharing. Example: major construction notification.

Katie: Maybe alders could give Kwasi a heads up when city-wide big things happening.

Jason: It's hard to track what's happening at each meeting. This would be very difficult.

Grant does this every week and it takes about an hour. Can one staff member stay on top of big city issues every week. Grant will walk through how he does it with Kwasi, and include Patrick and Marsha since they do this every week too.

**City meetings**

Kwasi: Controversial things like AirBnB, Edgewood, Straws

Agenda items

Decisions/Actions

Big items

**News releases and other important announcements**

Other agency emails

**Events**

Library updates

Events

Parks

Library

**Solutions:**

*Implemented*

*Ongoing Implementation*

**Recommendations:**

- .

**Responsibility:**

Common Council Staff

PIOs

**Work Group Focus #3**

**Incoming Email Adjustments**

**Identified Concerns:**

- Emails sent via webform to Alders' [DistrictXX@cityofmadison.com](mailto:DistrictXX@cityofmadison.com) accounts should be easier to scan to determine if the sender lives in your district, if they want a reply, subject matter, etc.

**Findings:**

**Solutions:**

*Implemented*

Yep

*Ongoing Implementation*

N/A

**Recommendations:**

- N/A

**Responsibility:**

N/A

**Work Group Focus #4**

**Broadening the Audience for Alder Communications**

**Identified Concerns:**

**Findings:**

Some pasted text to be adapted, maybe

A lot of it is related to the surveys, much adaptation needed.

- Outreach
  - How we put info out
  - How we gather opinions
    - Polco
    - Nextdoor
  - Crossover with TFOGS recommendation for Resident Engagement

Lisa can send out links and surveys in English and Spanish, blurbs are translated.

News release can go out in English and Spanish - one PR with both English and Spanish

Lindsay will follow up with Tariq on whether NRTs can be lead people through the survey and collect their responses

Barbara will lead the survey discussion with the NRT Park Edge/Park Ridge. She can talk with them for input

Lindsay will create an intake form online for Barbara to use.

SO Jason and I are willing to put in our social capital to ask people to answer these surveys and to get the questions translated. We just want to be clear that we don't have the capacity to be tracking responses, following up, or creating the mechanism for people to respond (survey monkey).

Here is our suggested list. Bold questions would go into a survey, the non bolded would be questions that if alders were asking stakeholders in person they could use to prompt deeper responses. Bold questions will be sent for translation into Spanish and Hmong **once you ok them**. Turn around time on this is likely 3 days. If you all oked them on the 23<sup>rd</sup> you would likely have them back on about the 29<sup>th</sup> to put into a survey monkey. You could start building the English one and then copy the format for the other two languages.

1. **Where do you get news or information? Survey would have the following choices with prompt to select as many as apply [TV news national, TV news local, print newspaper, blogs or rss feeds, social media, mail, email, radio, word of mouth or conversation, your faith community, interest groups and hobby groups, other?]**
2. **Tell us a bit about why you get news from this source?**
3. **Are there ways of getting news or information that don't work for you?** (example prompt if in person: I don't have reliable internet, I don't have cable or TV, English is not my primary language so blogs in English don't work for me, etc)?
4. **Do you currently get news or information from your Alder** (link map to find your alder)?  
[yes, no]
5. **If yes, how?** [blogs, email, social media, in person, mail]
6. **If yes, do any of these communications not work for you [blogs, email, social media, in person, mail] add text box after asking respondent to please tell us more about their answer**
7. **What kinds of information would you like to get from your Alderperson or from the City Council?** [Do you want to give choices or open ended? If choices we will leave that to you to generate]
8. **What is the easiest way for you to communicate with your Alder?** [Social media, text, phone call, mail, email, a web form (report a problem), blog comments, other.
9. **What would not work for you [Social media, text, phone call, mail, email, a web form (report a problem), blog comments] and why?**

Allison and Jason

Tariq (and Mari) – This email is going to come a bit out of the blue (and will likely be too long) because we talked about this a while back and I am now wanting to get more details in writing. I am hoping you are still on board with asking Allied drive NRT (and maybe others that have resident attendance – you would know best which teams fall into that group) for feedback and recommendations for improving Alder/Council communications with residents. My hope is that you (Tariq) and Mari would be willing to use some time on an agenda for the Allied drive NRT to ask the team the questions below. I can also pitch this to other teams at the NRT leader meeting next Monday, 1-13 and/or invite Ald. Foster to attend.

The workgroup is still working out how to actually capture and code the feedback. Mari – I think your experience might be very helpful here. There is a thought that in addition to an Allied drive and other NRT ask, that the workgroup would ask all Alders to go into their districts to libraries, churches, and other places where people gather in order to ask these questions as well. Or maybe even to ask Library or community center staff to try and gather this feedback. If that happens there will need to be a way for the feedback to be easily captured as well as a potential need to provide some training/framing for alders or other conversation facilitators.

There is a recognition that the City as a whole needs a more robust look at a communication and public engagement strategy and that while Ald. Communications are a part of this, the work group is not going to come up with a comprehensive plan to address this for the whole city. The focus here is to look at council communications with a limited ability to gather data as well as a likely limited ability to do a drastic or comprehensive QI process. The whole city look needs to happen but this is not that. It certainly may be a place where this group continues to raise awareness about that other need as we all work to do continuous improvement towards the service promise.

How am I involved you may be wondering? This is part of an ask that came to RESJI tools and training to provide feedback to bring an equity lens to the recommendations. My suggestion/contribution is to encourage that the group get feedback from those who likely are not currently being reached with existing communication options. Maybe this is part of the elusive “equity in community”. I recommended not running an analysis tool because it seems like there is not adequate data to do so. Happy to talk to either of you more about that or hear feedback on that recommendation.

**ASK:**

- Can you confirm that you would be willing to put these questions to the Allied NRT and to communicate the feedback to the workgroup?
- Are these other NRT’s or groups that are already meeting where these questions can be asked?
- Are you willing to thought partner with Ald. Foster about how to capture the feedback and if there might be a partner survey that could be shared electronically?
- Would you be willing to review the questions below and give feedback on them?
- Would you be willing (I can support this) to do learning development with any alders who were willing to go out and ask these questions around how to facilitate these questions and to capture the feedback? – this was a direct ask for support from Ald. Moreland who is up for going out and soliciting feedback but would like training on how to do so.

Context script that conversation facilitator would communicate:

“As a resident of the city of Madison, the Common Council and Alderpersons realize that their communication with City residents is not consistent across districts and that the current system could potentially be improved to get residents the information that they most want and need in the way that is most accessible for them. The goal of today’s conversation is to get feedback on where you currently get information generally and as it relates to City news and information, to understand the format in which you like to get news and information, to hear feedback on what information you want to be getting from

your alder, and to learn more about how you would like to give feedback or information to your alder so that they can best represent you in government.

I am going to ask a couple of questions around this topic, person X here will be taking notes that will be shared with the workgroup generally and not with your name attached unless you want us to share your information. Once all the feedback is put together we will share it back with this group as well as including it in the recommendations made to the Common Council. One point to note, this work relates just to the communication that is coming from your Alderperson or the City Council and the group knows that there is a need for a more complete ask and recommendations for all City of Madison communications and community engagement.”

1. Where do you get news or information generally? Is this from TV news, print, blogs, social media, mail, email, radio, word of mouth or conversation, your faith community, interest groups and hobby groups, other? Can you tell me a little about this and why you get news from this source? Are there ways of getting news or information that don't appeal or work for you (example: I don't have reliable internet, I don't have cable or TV, English is not my primary language so blogs in English don't work for me, etc)?
2. Do you currently get news or information from your Alderperson? If yes, how do you currently get information from them?
3. If yes, what about that system (of getting information from your Alder) works well for you and what does not?
4. What kinds of information would you like to get from your Alderperson or from the City Council? Is there information that you get that is not interesting or relevant to you? Are there things you can remember learning about from your Alder that were useful? (example: flooding information, council or hearing dates, election information, closures and construction, safety information, updates on legislation and policy, etc)
5. How would it be most easy for you to communicate with your Alder person and council and to give them feedback? Social media, text, phone call, email, a web form (report a problem), other. What would not work for you and why?

“Thanks for giving that feedback. If you think of anything else that you would like to share later please feel free to give XXX a call or email XXXX and we can certainly add in your thoughts”

Still need to review results?

Opt out vs in for new content types

**Solutions:**

*Implemented*  
Survey was conducted

Did we do a PIO survey?

*Ongoing Implementation*  
Work with TFOGS Office of Resident Engagement

**Recommendations:**

- Work with TFOGS

-

**Responsibility:**

Common Council Staff  
TFOGS  
CCEC

**Work Group Focus #5**

**Registration for and Input at Public Meetings**

**Identified Concerns:**

Some pasted text to be adapted, maybe

- 1. Make it easy for public to comment on any legislative item - special attention for people that have not been represented in the process historically
- 2. Maintain/strengthen impact of large public input/voice
- 3. Allow public comment to travel with legislative items across BCCs/council
- 4. Make sure those comments are easily viewed by BCC members
- 5. Make it easy for BCC support & other city staff to support this process
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**Findings:**

**Solutions:**

*Implemented*

*Ongoing Implementation*

Work with TFOGS

**Recommendations:**

- Work with TFOGS
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**Responsibility:**

Common Council Staff  
IT  
TFOGS  
CCEC

**Work Group Focus #6**

**Alders Calendaring Tools**

Stuff from elsewhere

- Calendaring
  - Weekly meeting schedule
  - Use of calendaring for alders
  - For public
  - Outlook/Google/Other Integration

how to communicate out events

**Identified Concerns:**

**Findings:**

**Solutions:**

*Implemented*

*Ongoing Implementation*

**Recommendations:**

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**Responsibility:**

Common Council Staff  
TFOGS  
CCEC

**Work Group Focus #7**

**Council Social Media Policy and Social Media Platforms**

**Identified Concerns:**

- Some alders want city social media accounts so that they can post information there. Research shows that young people, in particular, use social media and access information via social media much more than email and oftentimes do not read email or subscribe to blogs.

**Findings:**

Some pasted text to be adapted, maybe so that needs to be looked at. Goal of group is going to be reducing the policy, we need from IT what is important to be included in the future policy. APMs don't apply to Council but they're often used as a starting point, so let's get help identifying what the critical pieces are in 3-16/social media policy so we can use those to move forward.

Eric recommends limiting the specificity, keep it high level. For example: What's considered acceptable, who approves, etc. When it comes to things that aren't regulated, that can go into the best practices information instead of the policy

Existing social media APM is going to be heavily revised because there's a lot of unnecessary content

Where is this effort? Draft Social Media Policy

**Solutions:**

*Implemented*

*Ongoing Implementation*

**Recommendations:**

**Responsibility:**

Common Council Staff  
IT  
City Attorney's Office  
CCEC

**Work Group Focus #8**

**Replacing Notifications With Digital Advertising**

Identified Concerns:

**Findings:**

Use of alder budget for outreach?

**Solutions:**

*Implemented*

*Ongoing Implementation*

Work with TFOGS

**Recommendations:**

- Work with TFOGS
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**Responsibility:**

Common Council Staff  
TFOGS

## **Work Group Focus #9**

### **Legistar Improvements and Meetings**

Stuff from elsewhere

- Digital Ads Legistar
  - Legislative information processes
  - Recommendations on improving transparency
  - Hybrid/Virtual Meetings
  - Equity for virtual meetings - CCEC or TFOGS

### **Identified Concerns:**

Legistar meetings for associated bodies (MPO, MMSD, CARPC, City-Village Association

Members of the public should be able to send in comments on any legistar item easily.

Potential channels of submission include:

- Email
- Online form
- Telephone?
- Text?
- Polling?
- Other?
- Comments should be organized and available online for review by BCC/Council members
  - Members of BCC have access to them and they are updated (semi) real time (up to meeting start time?)
- Possible info to collect
  - Name
  - Address
  - District/Alder
  - For/Against/Neither
  - Lobbyist?
  - Comment
  - Email or phone (for responses)
- Tabulate counts (for/against)
- If this were in place, could we get CC office admin support to triage all.alders messages from public?
- What level of active notification do we want? (notifications when individual comments received or batched for larger volume)
- Make sure to not lose the impact of receiving thousands of emails in a few days
- Allow alders to not miss other important emails
- Ensure alders know where the comments are coming from and give them easy opportunity to respond to their constituents
- Send a response to folks so they know their feedback was received

- Standardize how comments are attached in legistar (individual attachments vs. bulk)
- Issue of people wanting to comment on items that were on agenda for introduction (not allowed to register since there's no public comment on these items)

**Findings:**

**Solutions:**

*Implemented*

*Ongoing Implementation*

Work with TFOGS

**Recommendations:**

- Work with TFOGS
- .

**Responsibility:**

Common Council Staff  
TFOGS  
CCEC

DRAFT

TFOGS Recommendations:

29	Allow public comments to be made and considered prior to a meeting, such as through a system that notifies residents of decisions to be made, asks for their input, and then relays that input to decisionmakers
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32	Make written comments available to the public and Council members at the time of the meeting
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36	Create a way for people to provide input in Legistar or some other appropriate platform
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DRAFT

## APPENDIX A

### Enabling Resolution adopted by Common Council on 7/16/2019

[Legistar Item #56505](#)

Establishing a President's Work Group to Review Council Communication Tools & Processes.

#### **Fiscal Note**

No appropriation required.

#### **Title**

Establishing a President's Work Group to Review Council Communication Tools & Processes.

#### **Body**

WHEREAS, the City of Madison Common Council values the ability to communicate city information and their work in a variety of formats with the residents of the City; and,

WHEREAS, the Common Council desires to improve communication to city residents and to further the goals and mission of the Common Council by incorporating the core value of Civic Engagement - commitment to transparency, openness and inclusivity; and,

WHEREAS, the Common Council wishes to review the City's current offering of existing communication tools and processes and investigate options and alternatives to improve those tools and processes;

NOW THEREFORE IT BE RESOLVED, that the Common Council of the City of Madison establishes a President's Work Group to Review Council Communication Tools & Processes; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the work group review will include the following along with other communication tools and processes as identified by the work group:

- Alder Blog & email subscriptions
- Alder Home Page
- How Alders share content via social media
- Use of calendars for meetings and events
- Templated/prepared content
- Sharing of updates generated by city agencies

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the following Common Council member are appointed to the President's Work Group to Review Council Communication Tools & Processes:

Ald. Grant Foster, District 15 (Chair)

Ald. Barbara Harrington-McKinney, Council Vice-President

Ald. Lindsay Lemmer, District 3

Ald. Donna Moreland, District 7  
Ald. Keith Furman, District 19

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the work group will be staffed by the Common Council office, with input from the city's Information Technology Department and other city departments as needed; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the work group will use a racial equity and social justice lens throughout its work and may access training to apply the City of Madison Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Tool; and,

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Work Group will begin work upon adoption of this resolution with a goal of completing the review and report by the November 5, 2019 Common Council Executive Committee meeting.

### **Extensions to Work Group Deadline**

Resolution adopted by Common Council on 10/15/2019 to Extend Work Group Deadline

[Legistar Item #57510](#)

Extending the deadline for the report and recommendations from the President's Work Group to Review Council Communication Tools & Processes to March 31, 2020.

Resolution adopted by Common Council on 6/2/2020 to Extend Work Group Deadline

[Legistar Item #60615](#)

Extending the deadline for the report and recommendations from the President's Work Group to Review Council Communication Tools & Processes to September 30, 2020.