

REPORT OF PRESIDENT'S WORK GROUP TO REVIEW COUNCIL COMMUNICATION TOOLS & PROCESSES

OCTOBER 20, 2020

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Introduction

In the spring of 2019, the Common Council Executive Committee (CCEC) conducted a [survey of alders](#) soliciting input from all twenty alders about their current usage of communication tools, their level of satisfaction with the Alder Blog Tool, and their desire for improved and new tools. The results of the survey and subsequent CCEC discussions made it apparent that improvements in alder communication tools was a priority issue for alders.

On July 16, 2019, the Common Council adopted a resolution creating the *President's Work Group to Review Council Communication Tools & Processes*. Per the resolution ([Appendix A](#)), the Work Group's charge was:

“... 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.”

The resolution called out specific areas of focus for the work group “... along with other communication tools and processes as identified by the work group.” The specific areas of focus included:

- 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 “

The Work Group held twenty-four meetings beginning on 8/12/2019 and ending on 10/14/2020.

This report summarizes the Group's work on these 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 due to the Group's limited longevity and scope. Another consideration that led to providing future recommendations 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. The Work Group did not thoroughly investigate the fiscal impacts of recommended future actions.

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. In particular, the following staff made key contributions to the efforts of the Work Group:

Common Council Office: Lisa Veldran, Kwasi Obeng, Karen Kapusta-Pofahl, Debbie Fields
Information Technology: Eric Olson, Sarah Edgerton
Mayor's Office: Katie Crawley
Civil Rights: Jason Glozier
Public Health Madison & Dane County: Allison Dungan
Public Information Officers: Hannah Mohelnitzky, Amy Barrilleaux, Cynthia Schuster
City Attorney's Office: Roger Allen, Lara Mainella

Process

DEFINING BASELINE/CURRENT STATE CONDITIONS

The Work Group began by reviewing its charge established in the resolution and then proceeded to define the current state conditions related to council communications. The Work Group identified the following channels of communication that alders used to communicate with constituents:

- Alder Blog Tool and its associated automatic email notification to subscribers of the Blog/Update postings;
- Email from districtXX@cityofmadison.com (no subscription component);
- Postcard notification of neighborhood meetings, etc.;
- Phone Conversations;
- Social media postings on personal pages;
- Neighborhood Association websites and meetings, and
- Regular group constituent meetings, e.g., Coffee with the Alder.

The Work Group then turned its focus to cataloging the specific types of information that constituents received or expected to receive. A matrix was developed that included over 150 different types of information connected with 18 different city agencies. This catalog highlighted the significant variability in terms of how information was shared with residents. It also reinforced an important theme for the Work Group that the overwhelming majority of content that alders wanted to share with their constituents was content that was created by other city staff and agencies. In fact, there was very little if any alder or council communications that was original to alders or the Common Council as a body. This realization led the Work Group to reach out early to city staff to better understand the standards in place for agency communications on the topics identified by the Work Group.

During this exercise, it became apparent that most of the items that alders currently send to residents via their blogs, city email, or by other methods originate with a wide variety of content and multiple styles and formats that come directly from city agencies via a Public Information Officer (PIO) or various other city staff. There are also gaps in the information, delivery methods, and processes that alders can utilize. Just as importantly, there are also shortcomings, barriers, and inconsistencies in methods for residents to give input to alders and to the city in general. These findings reinforced previously identified gaps and opportunities highlighted in work of the Task Force on the Structure of City Government (TFOGS) and in initiatives like 311 and Legistar replacement as well as the gap in citywide PIO coordination.

ESTABLISHING WORK GROUP OBJECTIVES

Based on the CCEC survey results and initial discussions concerning gaps in both outgoing and incoming communication content and methods, the Work Group established its overall objectives:

1. Reduce the administrative burden on alders that exist for both outbound and inbound constituent communications.
2. Connect constituents with content that:
 - is relevant;
 - is timely;
 - has the appropriate level of detail;
 - is delivered by appropriate methods (mail, email, blog, social media platforms, etc.);
 - is delivered with method-appropriate formatting;
 - reaches underrepresented and disenfranchised constituents;
 - accommodates constituents with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and
 - accommodates constituents with Visual Impairment (VI).

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3. Provide better access and usability for alders with varying IT backgrounds and capabilities, including
 - Make tools and processes easier to use, and
 - Make training and support available.

These goals were revisited often by the Work Group throughout the course of its work and proved to be an important centering tool to keep the work focused on improving outcomes related to council communications.

Key Themes

While examining existing communication tools and processes, discussing desired capabilities and options, and considering the Group's objectives listed above, a number of key themes emerged. We highlight these themes here with a description of our findings to help guide future work and discussion on city and Common Council communications.

1. Content and Tool Limitations

Currently, most alder blog postings and mass emails consist of little original content; they are either directly from the various agency sources or adopted from those. Some alders do send or post their own opinion pieces and other original content, as well as information from non-city sources, but the bulk of alder communications are an attempt to amplify and extend the reach of city agency communications. Several alders make a substantial investment of time curating, reformatting, distilling, and generally making content more easily digestible for residents (See Work Group Area of Focus #1). The current tools available for alders to create and publish this information are seen as burdensome and/or difficult to use and consequently not used at all by many alders. Group members agreed that the current heavy investment in this work by alders is not a particularly good use of their time and that a more coordinated approach by city staff could help reduce the duplicative efforts of alders in this regard.

Also, as social media platforms are increasingly used as methods of communication by residents (see Work Group Area of Focus #3), the current limitations to utilize these tools is a barrier and does not meet the expectations of many constituents.

2. Lack of City Communications Strategy

The apparent lack of an overall strategic communications plan for the city was identified as a major shortcoming. The Work Group surveyed and worked with PIOs from many departments as catalogued existing city communication processes, sources, and frequencies ([see spreadsheet](#)). While this cataloguing began as an attempt to find ways to streamline, organize, and better funnel information to alders, it also revealed that there is an overwhelming flood of information coming from many different agencies in a plethora of formats and via a multitude of communication channels. Given that alders are sometimes befuddled by this flood of information, residents must also suffer from both content fatigue and missing information when alders are overwhelmed.

While outgoing communications sent by PIOs and others to the public often receive wide media attention and amplification via non-alder channels, the Work Group concluded that better coordination between PIOs would be beneficial, particularly until a citywide communications strategy is designed. Some Work Group members suggested the creation of a new Communications/Resident Engagement Department that could house all PIOs and be charged with implementing a city communications strategy. PIOs, on the other hand, expressed substantial support for being embedded in their respective departments in order to maintain strong relationships with those whose work is the subject of their communications.

A communications strategy could also help to address the variability of information that is available to both alders and the public. Work Group members felt that all residents should have the same baseline of information easily and readily available to them without substantial searching and without the need for a high command of internet technology. This is further discussed in Work Group Area of Focus #4.

3. Alder Communications are City Communications

Members agreed that content currently shared by alders should be considered both city communications and alder communications. The Group recognized that most types of city and alder communications serve the same purpose and that alders are effectively acting as informal members of communications staffs and amplifiers of city communications. In short, alder communications are city communications and vice versa.

4. The Role of Common Council Staff

Throughout the Work Group discussions, there were many questions about which city staff members should be responsible for coordinating, organizing, modifying, and sending communications that flow to alders for potential amplification via their communication tools. While consensus was not attempted or reached on those matters, generally, the Group felt that Council staff should play a greater role in all those areas that relate to funneling agency and city communication items to alders. The consideration of a Council Office staff member being the point person for alder communications was also discussed, although how that staff person's responsibility would relate to that of PIOs and how they might interact was not explored. This also would be informed by a future communications strategy (see Key Theme #2 above).

Additionally, since orientation of new alders is coordinated by Council staff and partially conducted by Council staff, their full participation in training of new alders with regard to all communication tools and processes is key. When new or updated tools and processes are adopted, whether by CCEC/Common Council or by any city agencies, Council staff should coordinate any training and information that alders require to get up to speed. The Work Group also suggested that an annual survey of alders concerning communication tools and processes be conducted by CCEC to help inform Council staff and help them to assist in keeping such tools and processes up to date.

Some alders, including those that do not have strong technology skills, appear to utilize Council staff to post blog entries and/or send mass emails. While it is apparent that this is not a good use of staff's time, it is also a strong indicator that the blog tool is overly difficult to use. Whether or not alders should expect staff to devote their time to individual tasks such as blog postings, was not considered by the Group.

5. Alders Function as a 311 System

While much of the focus of the Work Group was on outbound communications, inbound communications were also discussed. In this regard the Work Group concluded that alders are currently acting as a crude form of a 311 system. The burden of answering relatively straightforward questions is particularly high for alders in districts with empowered and engaged residents and for alders with relatively strong and open communication channels. While fielding concerns and questions from residents and accepting input are key functions of being an elected representative, the volume of simple questions, requests for information, and referrals of constituents to existing city information and resources is not a best use of an alder's time. It also highlights the gaps in agency communications and reinforces Key Theme #3 - Alder Communications are City Communications. The volume of questions received by alders is directly related to how well city agencies communicate information. If a 311 system were to be established, many residents would quickly learn to use that as a source for questions such as, "Will there be garbage pickup on Presidents' Day?" or "Are we in a snow emergency?" City departments and alders currently provide that information using existing

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communication tools, but it is clear that many residents do not receive that information and, for a variety of reasons, many who do receive it do not see or appreciate its content.

6. TFOGS Overlap

The Group recognized that there was substantial overlap between its work and some of the issues researched by the Task Force on the Structure of City Government (TFOGS). Particularly pertinent to the Work Group's task were TFOGS recommendations related to improving resident engagement and access to City and Common Council information and processes that were listed in their [Final Report](#). Specifically, aspects of these TFOGS recommendations were amplified throughout the Group's consideration of communication tools and processes:

- Create an Office of Resident Engagement and Neighborhood Support ("ORENS") to support BCC system staffing, training, and resident engagement;
- Simplify city processes and procedures applicable to all BCCs, including time and location of meetings, rules of procedure, and methods for providing input.;
- Implement a robust technology plan to improve representation and engagement on BCCs, and
- Pursue concrete common sense initiatives to improve resident engagement and participation as detailed in Section F of the Final Report.

The Work Group also recognized that many of the possible initiatives proposed by TFOGS related to resident participation and engagement aligned with their work related to improving both incoming and outgoing communications with alders and with overall city communications. The most pertinent to the Group's tasks are those initiatives listed in [Appendix B](#).

While the Work Group recognized that many of these initiatives were mostly beyond the scope of the Group's charge, it was often difficult to separate a consideration of alder communications from the overall city communication processes and tools mentioned by TFOGS. As mentioned earlier, alder communications and city communications are inseparable. Of particular interest to the Work Group were those initiatives related to an overhaul or replacement of Legistar given that our legislative management system should be transparent and accessible for city staff, alders, and the public (See Work Group Area of Focus #4).

7. Underrepresented and Unengaged Communities

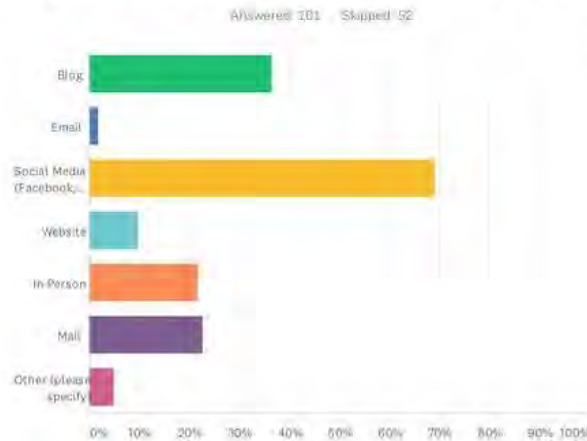
The Work Group recognized throughout discussions of most every topic considered that communities of color, lower income residents, those with Limited English Proficiency, those with Visual Impairment, renters, and young people remain mostly outside city and alder communication channels. The Work Group reiterates that these residents are impacted not just by a lack of information flowing to them from alders and the city, but that there are also structural and systemic barriers to their opportunity to provide input into city decision making. As detailed in the TFOGS report, disempowered communities deserve tools, training, and other mechanisms that will make participation in city government easier and break the cycle of disempowerment. These issues are further mentioned throughout this report, particularly in Work Group Area of Focus #3.

The preferred and/or effective sources of information for constituents is not always clear, so the Work Group conducted a survey of residents in an attempt to identify what information they want from the city and their alders, as well as preferred communication channels. Assistance was provided by city staff who have expertise in surveying and community engagement through Neighborhood Resource Teams and development and application of Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative (RESJI)

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tools. Summary survey results for each question are found [here](#) with full results, including individual comments, available [here](#). An example question and summary of answers are shown below.

Q6 If you do receive information from your alder, are there any channels that you would not use to receive information from them?



Question 6 and results from the Survey of Residents on Alder Communications.

The resident survey provided some important information, but it primarily illuminated what shouldn't have been surprising given the eventual limitations of the survey; most who responded are already engaged and are overwhelmingly White, middle-aged or older, college educated, and social media averse. Most seemed to be already invested in city government and receiving at least some alder communications.

While outreach to traditionally unempowered and unengaged residents was originally planned for the survey, including the potential application of a RESJI analysis, the Work Group and city staff struggled to conduct outreach, particularly when the arrival of COVID-19 pandemic limited the opportunities for learning from communities who are not already engaged. As the Group learned from Civil Rights and Public Health Madison & Dane County staff who shared their experiences with such outreach, it is a time- and personnel-intensive process if it is to succeed. Surveys and outreach both should include language and culturally sensitive components, as well as in-person solicitations rather than expecting a press release and calls for participation from alders to garner a response pool that is representative of all residents. The Work Group also had difficulty navigating the diffuse nature of the city's RESJI work, including identifying staff that had the ability and/or capacity to assist the Group with the survey effort.

As the Work Group's recommendations for further work are studied and implemented, it is obvious that bona fide outreach to and surveys of unengaged and unempowered communities must be conducted if communications tools and preferences from both the city and from alders are to be improved and be effective.

Work Group Area of Focus

1. Alder Blogging Tool, Content, and Subscription
 2. Alder Emails To/From Residents
 3. Broadening Communication Audiences and Social Media
 4. Adjustments to Information Available to Alders and Residents
 5. Registration for and Input at Public Meetings
-

1. Alder Blogging Tool, Content, and Subscription:

Summary of Identified Concerns:

- The current alder blogging tool is unfriendly by today's IT standards and is difficult for most alders to use.
- Content provided by city staff to alders for inclusion in their alder blogs/updates is extremely varied in format, content, specificity, and length. This adds to the difficulty and inefficiency of posting this content.
- Some alders are reformatting and repackaging input from city staff before posting. These efforts tend to be duplicative, inefficient, and time-consuming.
- The blogging tool's associated email subscription management system has limited capabilities, e.g., alders cannot email their subscribers without making a blog post.

Discussion:

Note that for the purposes of this discussion, alder blogs and alder updates are equivalent, although technically the current tool allows for two formats. Formatting capabilities, posting methods, email subscriptions, etc., are the same for both.

Blogging Tool

Based on Work Group discussions and the CCEC survey of alders concerning communications, the Group learned that 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 use 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 tool's outdated features likely contribute to some alders rarely utilizing it or even bypassing it entirely and relying on other forms of communication. The Work Group believes that if the tool was modernized, more alders would use it and would use it more frequently, to communicate with constituents.

Provided Content

Some alders spend an inordinate amount of time reformatting, synthesizing, and generally making agency-provided information that is wildly varying, more easily digestible. On the other hand, some alders do not have sufficient technology skills or time to undertake whittling down the oftentimes overwhelming volume of possible postings that come from city agencies. Their constituents are likely to get less information from them.

Some of the content provided by city agencies that is a candidate for blog posts arrives well before it would be appropriate to post so it can easily get lost in the overwhelming number of emails that alders sometimes receive. Other potential content can sometimes arrive almost at the last minute, e.g., a posting for an event on the weekend doesn't arrive until Friday afternoon, which makes it difficult for alders to share. At times, alders receive duplicative versions or notifications of the same possible content and even different versions or formats of the same information. See the [spreadsheet](#)

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[of PIO communications, formats, and frequencies](#) mentioned in Key Theme #2 for examples of the impressive, and sometimes overwhelming, range of agency communications that are generated by PIOs and other city staff.

A common request from the Work Group was for an automated method of pushing some city-provided information out via alder communication tools. That request was recognized as a challenge for both IT and for those providing content, but one that could be worthwhile to undertake. In the meantime, members felt that much of city communications that we are asked to transmit, particularly that which is meant for a city-wide audience, should be as close to final form as possible so that alders can be as uninvolved as is feasible. These communications should also meet standards for content length and formatting to most effectively reach their intended audience

The Group also discussed the feasibility of agencies/staff providing district-specific content in addition to content that is for a citywide audience. District-specific content includes project updates on road construction, Parks projects, development proposals, etc. While some project updates are sent to alders now and some agencies regularly publish project updates to the web, that varies a great deal across agencies and these updates are not brought together in one location for alders or residents to review.

Blog Email Notifications and Replies

Alder blogs are currently one-way communications. Alders can post, but there is no commenting feature. Subscribers cannot respond to the email notification they receive when a new blog entry has been posted since the email comes from noreply@cityofmadison.com. The blog post itself is not included in the email notification to subscribers. The email notification content, consisting of a small slice of an image of the City-County Building and the first several lines of the post is not always useful for readers nor does it give any idea of the content of the post if the first few lines of the post are not the primary content or if a post has more than one main message (see figure below).



Some alders send emails to neighborhood listservs indicating that a new blog post has been made and include a link to the blog post. A number of alders reformat their original blog posts to send full blog content directly to various listservs while others rarely use the blog tool and communicate with groups of constituents primarily by sending blog-like content directly to listservs. Some alders also publish links to their blog posts via social media channels in order to reach a broader audience. These social media channels are not currently supported by the city and sharing the content out is a manual and time-consuming process.

Blog Tool Email Subscriptions

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

City Email as a Mass Communication Tool

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Some alders communicate with groups of constituents by utilizing non-city email listservs, primarily those of Neighborhood Associations within their districts. Additionally, some alders are using some combination of alder blogs, listservs, and social media. Alders currently use their city Outlook email accounts to send these emails. The Work Group believes that if the blog tool were modernized, more alders would use it, but other methods of communication will likely and appropriately continue to be used.

Completed Work Group Actions:

Alder Blog Tool Improvements

1. Worked with IT staff to create a [list of desired improvements](#) to the blog tool categorized by the appropriate technical requirement.
2. Worked with IT staff to decide upon an improved blog tool solution with more design options, realistic preview view, improved analytics, email list and post scheduling capabilities. The list of desired improvements was recategorized as a function of priority and as a function of its likely availability in the improved blog tool and a general timetable for its addition or infeasibility. Those items that were not feasible in the improved tool were set aside for future consideration. The results from that exercise are [here](#).

Content Provision

1. Working with Council staff, developed a Weekly Meeting and Event Highlights for alders that can relatively easily be shared via the existing blog tool and in the future blog tool. Common Council staff is now compiling and emailing this summary to all alders each Friday. The Summary is not district-specific, but contains easily cut/pasted items with embedded links for:
 - a. Several key BCC meetings;
 - b. A listing of Events, Seminars, etc.;
 - c. Announcements, press releases, press conferences, etc., and
 - d. A Save the Date listing

An example of the Weekly Highlights is contained in [Appendix C](#) and past Highlights are available on the Council Intranet Site. Staff also prepared a short [guide for usage](#) of the Weekly Highlights and how to use them. The content of the Weekly Highlights can evolve as alders see fit and as Common Council staff continues to refine their approach.

2. The Work Group met several times with PIOs and a few PIOs participated extensively in Work Group discussions about content provision issues and concerns. While no formal agreements or changes were proposed, the discussions themselves let both the Work Group and PIOs understand their respective needs, limitations of content provision, alders being overwhelmed with information at times, and potential future improvements.

Ongoing Actions:

IT staff is expected to begin the replacement of the current alder blogging tool with a new tool that is already used by various city departments. The tool will be adapted and improved to meet alder's blogging needs, most of which come from the cataloguing exercise mentioned above. The adaptation of this tool is expected to have no increased costs associated with expanding its usage to alders. IT indicates that this project can fit into their work plans, so altering the new tool to enact the desired alder blog enhancements will begin in 2021. There may be a trial period when several alders use and test the new tool, but that process is to be determined.

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The new tool will be more intuitive, provide a preview function that accurately reflects a prospective post, aka What You See Is What You Get (WYSIWYG), and will allow more formatting and embedding options. The latter will allow easier importation of information from a variety of sources. More practical matters include more contemporary and intuitive menus and options for saving drafts.

Recommendations:

1. As web-based or application-based blogging tools evolve, City 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 proposed and considered for quicker implementation.
2. CCEC should periodically be informed by Council Staff about new capabilities that alders may want to consider adding to their blogging tool.
3. While this relates to several other Work Group topics, the ability for residents to self-manage their communications from both alders and the city should become more intuitive. Opt-in and Opt-out features should be reviewed, streamlined, and should include content-based opt-in and opt-out features for alder-provided content.
4. Content provided by all city staff for potential inclusion in alder communications and for their city communications in general, should be timely and should be standardized. The standards should be developed with an eye towards portability to multiple platforms (when possible) with both summary versions and detailed versions available so alders can post quick summaries or more detailed, dedicated posts, if they desire.
5. PIOs, CCEC, Common Council staff, and the Mayor's Office should further explore the development of a citywide communications strategy and potentially the establishment of a Communications Department. This effort would need to include:
 - a. Developing coordination, processes and standards;
 - b. A strategic communications plan at agency level that is shared with alders, and
 - c. Increasing the participation of PIOs in Council communications processes and planning.

Partner Agencies:

CCEC
Common Council Staff
IT
PIOs
ORENS, should it be created.

2. Alder Emails To/From Residents:

Summary of Identified Concerns:

- Emails sent via webform to Alders should be easier to scan to determine if the sender lives in your district, if they want a reply, the subject matter, etc.
- When an email is sent directly to allalders@cityofmadison.com (not via webform) and the sender includes her street address, it is time consuming for the alder to look up the address to determine if it is from a constituent. When the email content does not include the sender's street address, it increases the chances that an alder will not reply.
- The quantity of emails sent to allalders@cityofmadison.com via webform are often overwhelming and it is not possible to ascertain if the sender lives in an alder's district

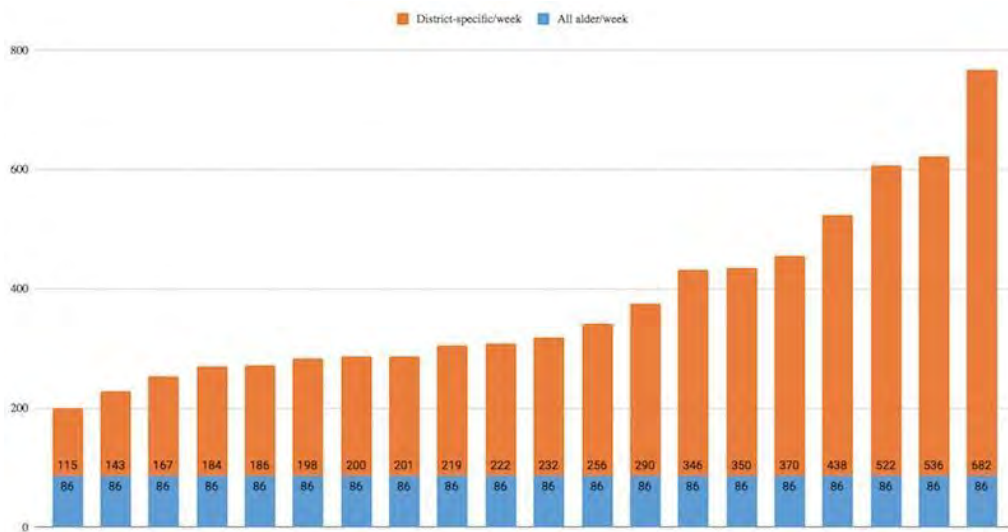
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- unless an alder manually looks up any provided address. It is also time-consuming for an alder to determine if a sender lives in an alder's district.
- Residents are increasingly using the allalders@cityofmadison.com email address directly from their own email tools rather than using the city's webform. These emails have no standardization of format, so it is especially difficult to ascertain if the sender lives in an alder's district.
- As mentioned in Work Group Area of Focus #1, alders cannot send an email to their blog subscribers without making a blog post.

Discussion:

The content and format of emails sent via webform to either individual alders or to all alders should have upfront information that will allow an alder to quickly scan the email and determine the appropriate course of action. For instance, whether the email is addressed to an individual alder or to all alders should be the first item of information in the emails to alders that is generated by the webform. The Work Group also felt that the readability of those webform-generated emails could be improved.

The high volume of emails that are sent to all alders has increased dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic when in-person meetings, whether hosted by the city, neighborhoods, or an organization, have become unreliable or impossible. Advocacy groups have also discovered the ease of emailing all alders and have been encouraging residents to use that email address to weigh in on various matters. Even prior to the pandemic, the Work Group recognized that the number of emails was overwhelming at times. The average number of emails received per week by each alder in June of 2019 is shown in the figure below:



The y-axis is the average number of emails received per week from districtXX@cityofmadison.com (orange) and from the allalders@cityofmadison.com (blue). The x-axis is each aldermanic district sorted by frequency, not by district number. So, the leftmost bar is not District 1 and the rightmost bar is not District 20; instead the districts are sorted by the fewest to most total number of emails received. It is clear from the figure that some alders receive almost four times as many emails as those receiving the least, so there is a large range. In either case, a majority of alders are receiving over 300 emails per week. This does not include the thousands of emails that alders often receive in the course of several days on controversial topics.

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The Group did not evaluate options for reducing or managing the allalders@cityofmadison.com volume, but better filtering those emails was an expressed desire. Automated functions and/or utilizing Council staff to triage the flow of those emails was discussed.

Completed Work Group Actions:

1. Improved contact email webform for contacting either a particular alder or all of Common Council.
2. Revised the order and information that displays in the email triggered by the contact webform in order to make them more easily scannable by alders.

Ongoing Actions:

None

Recommendations:

1. Common Council Staff and IT, with the cooperation of CCEC, should continue to explore options for collating emails sent to allalders@cityofmadison.com, particularly when form emails are used.
2. Develop an online comment system that residents could use in lieu of email.
3. IT staff should explore giving alders the ability to send emails to their blog subscribers without making a blog post.

Partner Agencies:

Common Council Staff
IT
CCEC

3. Broadening Communication Audiences and Social Media:

Summary of Identified Concerns:

- Alder Communications generally are seen by those already engaged in city processes. Those residents who are unfamiliar with how to access and communicate with their alders or how to receive communications from the city or alders are at a severe disadvantage.
- Communications from alders are generally not designed or delivered in forms that reach underrepresented and disenfranchised constituents nor accommodate constituents with LEP or VI.
- Communications from some city agencies and sources share many of the same deficiencies as alder communications.
- City agencies often rely on postcard notifications for pending projects, public meetings, neighborhood meetings (often hosted by an alder), and various other notifications, some of which are required by ordinance. While postcards are sufficient for some residents, many residents may miss such communications. Those with LEP or VI are at a particular disadvantage.
- Large swaths of the community use social media as their primary and/or secondary methods of obtaining information.

Discussion:

As mentioned above in Key Theme #7, residents with LEP or VI are often unable to receive or send communications to their alder or the city in general. These communication constraints must be overcome if all of Madison is to be a part of city decision-making processes. Like other topics explored by the Work Group, this also intersects with TFOGS recommendations.

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In the course of discussing this topic, it became clear that there are many communities beyond those who are disengaged at least partially due to access constraints due to LEP, VI, or being members of historically disenfranchised communities. For example, anecdotal evidence implies that younger residents who use social media, e.g., Twitter, Instagram, and/or Facebook, for much of their communicating needs, receive little from alders via those channels and little from the city. PIOs and agencies are increasingly using social media, but the Work Group suspects that unengaged residents generally are not subscribers to their channels.

The tools used most often for city and alder communications, namely email and postcard notifications, accentuate the gaps between the disenfranchised and the engaged because those means of communication generally imply that the recipient/sender has a home computer of some sort and has sufficient time and an at least partially structured schedule that enables focused email communication via computer or phone. Generational gaps in communication preferences include a waning focus on written communication delivered via the USPS.

With assistance from the City Attorney's Office, IT, and Common Council staff, the Work Group reviewed the current Common Council Social Media Policies and drafted a new [pilot policy](#) that reflects more contemporary communication preferences of residents and some alders. This new policy will allow for limited social media usage by alders on city-managed social media accounts.

Completed Work Group Actions:

1. Developed and conducted a [Survey of Residents on Alder Communications](#) (see Key Theme #7).
2. Engaged Neighborhood Resource Teams to gain qualitative data on the communications preferences and habits of underserved Madison populations.
3. Drafted a [Common Council Social Media Pilot Policy](#) to allow limited usage of some social media platforms.
4. Established a Phase I protocol for a trial of alder usage of Facebook and Twitter using city-owned accounts.

Ongoing Actions:

1. The Phase I trial of social media accounts is in the process of being set up. After the draft revised Council Social Media Policies are finalized and approved, the trial is expected to proceed with coordination by IT and Council staff.

Recommendations:

1. Council should explore if alder expense annual budget, when appropriate, could be used to pay for advertising on social media. These ads would be for city events or city- or alder-organized district events or meetings such as a neighborhood meeting related to a development proposal or a city project.
2. Council Staff and CCEC should continue to work with alders to promote the usage of translation services, and other accommodations for residents with LEP and VI, for all written communications and as many alder-sponsored meetings as is possible. Standards or policies should be developed.
3. After one year, a report of the pilot social media account usage should be prepared for CCEC by Council Staff with the assistance of IT and the City Attorney's Office.

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4. CCEC should make any necessary alterations to the policies and, if appropriate, the trial should be converted to ongoing communication channels for all alders who want to use them and expanded to additional social media platforms.
5. CCEC and Council Staff should work closely with the proposed ORENS to further broaden all efforts to increase communication efficiency and reach to all city residents.

Partner Agencies:

Common Council Staff
IT
CCEC
City Attorney's Office
Civil Rights
ORENS, should it be created.

4. Adjustments to Information Available to Alders and Residents

Summary of Identified Concerns:

- Residents seem to be either overwhelmed with information from the city and alders or almost entirely cut out of the communication chain. It is difficult for them to pick and choose what they want to receive.
- As noted earlier, opportunities for residents to obtain information about Common Council proceedings and actions is mostly limited to what can be obtained through Legistar or from their alders. Legistar is difficult to use for most people, including many alders.
- Details on Council actions, whether recent or past, are difficult to obtain via Legistar. Minutes are not posted until after approval, which hinders finding information about recent actions. Votes are often not recorded until well after action.
- Legistar is likely to be either revamped or replaced in the not too distant future. The city staff team that is preparing to conduct an RFP process to solicit for an upgraded or new legislative management system does not appear to have much alder input.
- Agency webpage formats and content seem quite variable, hence difficult to navigate.
- Some agencies do not have readily available information about their work and/or projects for residents or even alders to obtain, while others do.
- District-specific information on agency projects, proposals, applications, etc., is often difficult for alders and residents to obtain.
- When alders or residents make requests of city staff, the lack of a tracking system often allows requests to fall through the cracks.
- Residents who contact alders or the city may not receive a confirmation or response.
- Since the COVID-19 pandemic pushed all city meetings onto Zoom, the Work Group became concerned about the accessibility issues that accompany all-virtual meetings.

Discussion:

This topic covered a wide range of matters, focusing on making information about city services and actions more readily available to both alders and residents and on increasing the ability of residents to give more input to alders and the city. Like TFOGS, there was a particular focus on Legistar, its foibles, and where it can be improved.

Generally, the Work Group felt that some agencies provide easily accessible information for alders and the public while others range from having some types of information available to almost none at all.

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The overall city email subscription management system that residents use to control what emails and text message notifications they receive, of which the Blog Tool Email Subscription is a part, is somewhat overwhelming and difficult to use. This increases the amount of time that alders spend communicating with residents because some city information is not otherwise easy to obtain. The number of categories and types of emails is logical from an organizational point of view, but residents are likely not to know which category or menu of notifications they should choose when looking for a particular notification. Some content on the many agency menus appears to be out-of-date. When new subscription options appear, there appears to be no way for residents to know that other than learning about the notification capability from some other form of communication.

Residents also should be able to better manage content subscriptions for alders' communications so that they can better curate what they receive. New subscription management and new content selection for residents to choose with regard to alder communications could be explored. Alders currently do all the curating of information that goes *en masse* to residents via their blogs and email accounts, but residents should have capability to self-curate so that alders do not have to guess as often as to what residents may want to see.

The Work Group also discussed the possibility of using various polling tools to obtain input from residents on city matters, e.g., Polco or polling functions from social media platforms. While this could help to synthesize resident input to make it more digestible for alders, the same concerns about underrepresented and disenfranchised communities would hold.

As the amount of public input increases, alders and members of BCCs have a difficult time managing input on agenda items at Council or at BCCs. For virtual meetings and in-person meetings, it is unproductive for a member to read through potentially hundreds of commenters looking for those who might be constituents. If possible, public comments for City of Madison residents should identify the aldermanic district based on the street address. This will allow alders to easily locate public comments from their constituents.

The accessibility of city meeting agendas, agenda content, attachments, and the general lack of transparency of Legistar and its contents were identified as concerns that the Work Group shares with TFOGS and its recommendations. The TFOGS proposed initiatives include several related to Legistar and its reputation for being difficult for residents to access and understand. The Work Group appreciates that city staff has been working to address these limits and replace or overhaul Legistar, but the Work Group wants to reiterate that Legistar currently is not just a barrier to accessing information about Common Council actions, but also a barrier to communications both to and from residents.

Completed Work Group Actions:

1. Conducted discussion with Planning staff that led to improvements in email content and frequency from UDC and Planning staff that now list upcoming agenda items by alder district for UDC and Plan Commission meetings.

Ongoing Actions:

None

Recommendations:

1. City agencies should send alders district-specific updates on projects, proposals, and other agency activities on a periodic and as-needed basis.
2. More tools should be developed or more information added to existing tools and webpages so that alders can use them to obtain detailed information or updates about projects, proposals, and applications in their district, e.g., liquor license applications and other pending matters.

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3. City agencies should explore a common tracking system for all requests that come from alders and residents. This system could return information to the requesters and be publicly available.
4. Agency webpages should strive for some forms of standardization, particularly with regard to the needs of alders and residents to obtain information about individual projects, proposals, and applications.
5. Alders and CCEC should be represented as discussions about a new legislative management system proceed.
6. As is possible, Council actions, minutes and all associated information should be posted in Legistar as soon as possible.
7. If possible, a software tool that can sort street addresses by aldermanic district should be developed and applied to all emails from residents. IT staff indicates that this capability would be very difficult to develop due to the inconsistencies in resident-supplied information, e.g., format of street addresses.
8. In line with TFOGS, the accessibility of city meetings should always be increased, including offering both virtual and in-person options for attendees once the pandemic subsides.
9. Also in line with TFOGS, all subcommittees, work groups, and associated bodies (such as MPO, CARPC, MMSD, City-Village Association, etc.), and their agendas and materials should also be in Legistar to increase the amount of information readily available to residents and alders.
10. All public comments should travel with Legistar items across BCCs and to Common Council.
11. Working with the ORENS, Council Staff and CCEC should explore options for using polling tools and techniques to gain more insight into public opinion on city or district matters, but with special attention to minimizing the possibility of accentuating disenfranchisement.
12. When residents contact the city or an alder, they should receive a response, even if auto-generated.

Partner Agencies:

Common Council Staff
IT
ORENS
CCEC

5. Registration for and Input at Public Meetings

Summary of Identified Concerns:

- Public comments do not travel with legislative items across BCCs and Common Council, so they are often not seen by residents, alders, or BCCs when considered in downstream processes.
- Summaries of public comment meeting registrants are now available mostly real-time for some bodies, but residents, members of BCCs, and some alders are not aware or do not have the capabilities of accessing this information.
- Members of the public should be able to send in comments on any Legistar item or public matter easily.
- The need to register for public comment is confusing for residents as is the process for doing so. The fields that are on the registration forms and webforms seem to confuse many who want to give public comment/input.
- Even prior to virtual meetings becoming commonplace, city staff had to help meeting registrants fill out their forms in person, although many registration forms were still completed incorrectly.

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- The cutoff times for registering for public comment seems to vary from body to body, particularly in virtual meetings, and is not easy for residents to ascertain.
- Some BCCs and Common Council seem not to limit public comment to the appropriate length of time and some BCC Chairs do not seem to be aware of such limits. This unpredictability impacts both residents and the entities receiving comment.
- Similarly, when agenda items are considered together, speakers who are registered on more than one of the items are often given what seems to be excessive time for public comment.
- As mentioned in Work Group Area of Focus #2, alders are often overwhelmed by individuals and organizations directly emailing members or using the allalders email address on a particular agenda item. This also applies to BCCs and who are directly emailed via their personal email addresses or committee email addresses. It is difficult for alders and BCC members to properly weigh and/or judge this input in comparison to those who register and give public comment at meetings and those who register, but do not wish to speak.

Discussion:

Like other topics considered by the Work Group, there was overlap with TFOGS when focusing on increasing resident input and facilitating residents' ability to do so, particularly at public meetings. If more members of the public could easily provide comment and input on legislative items more often, the Work Group believes that emails to allalders@cityofmadison.com or to individual alders, for instance, could decrease.

Making it easier to follow public meetings and give input would also likely facilitate methods for combining disparate input sources into a more usable format and/or summary. The various methods of providing input can prove to be overwhelming at times and difficult to digest when coming from multiple channels of communication. It would be helpful if some method of combining all the input, or at least some of the different input methods, could be developed.

The Group discussed the possibility of using polling tools on particular agenda items (see discussion of polling in Work Group Area of Focus #4) for collecting input from residents that would be easier for policymakers to digest. This too could funnel input away from input in the form of inefficient emails.

The Group developed a [Draft Electronic Public Comment Improvement Proposal](#) to address many of these concerns. Proposed is a standard online form for public input via webform that would be easy to use and find. Other channels of input would still be enabled, but a goal of creating such a standard form would be to redirect residents to the form from those channels when possible. Council staff and other agency staff could help residents when needed and they could fill out forms on behalf of a telephone caller. Ideally, the same form would be used for input from residents on any matter and could be used for those registering to give public comment at meetings.

Initial research into alternatives to accomplish this proposal indicate that this functionality may be available through our existing Legistar product. The Work Group strongly recommends that this functionality be investigated and implemented if possible.

Completed Work Group Actions:

1. Working with IT staff, developed a Draft Electronic Public Comment Improvement Proposal(see [Appendix E](#)).

WORK GROUP AREA OF FOCUS

Recommendations:

1. If possible, public comments for City of Madison residents should identify the aldermanic district based on the street address. This will allow alders to easily locate public comments from their constituents.
2. All public comment should travel with Legistar items across BCCs and to Common Council.
3. As with Work Group Area of Focus #4 and working with ORENS, Council Staff and CCEC should explore options for using polling tools and techniques to gain more insight into public opinion on particular agenda items for Council and BCCs, but with special attention to minimizing the possibility of accentuating disenfranchisement.
4. Common Council staff, in conjunction with IT staff, should pursue the requests and deliverables as detailed in the [Draft Electronic Public Comment Improvement Proposal](#).
5. In order to strengthen expectations of the public, BCC and Common Council policies concerning the length of time allowed for public comment should be reiterated and enforced evenly unless there is a suspension of the rules.

Partner Agencies:

- Common Council Staff
- IT
- ORENS
- CCEC

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority Recommendations

While the report identifies a number of recommendations for future work efforts, the Work Group has identified the following priority recommendations for immediate action:

1. Implement new blog tool for use by alders as recommended and approved by CCEC - *Common Council Staff, IT Staff*
 - a. Regular updates on progress should be shared with CCEC
2. Adopt the draft social media policy and proceed with social media pilot - *CCEC, Common Council Staff, IT Staff, City Attorney's Office*
3. Define Common Council staff role in regards to communications and expand common council communication support for alders - *CCEC, Common Council Staff, IT Staff*
 - a. As part of the chief of staff role review, CCEC should review all Common Council staff position descriptions and clearly identify responsibility to support communication related needs for alders
 - b. Common Council staff should continue to produce and distribute the weekly summary content to alders and should work with alders and city staff to improve the content and format going forward
 - c. Common Council staff should work with CCEC to create and issue an annual survey of alders regarding barriers and opportunities for improvement related to communication tools and processes
 - d. Develop training to introduce online tools that support alders work – Common Council & IT Staff
4. Implement communication related TFOGS recommendations - *Ad Hoc Task Force On The Structure Of City Government (TFOGS) Final Report Implementation Work Group, BCC Administrative Support Team, Common Council Staff, IT Staff*
 - a. Proceed with identifying and implementing a legislative management system replacement product that addresses the needs and recommendations found in the TFOGS and the report. Alders and residents should be included as key stakeholders in this initiative along with BCC support staff.
 - b. Prioritize the implementation of a 311 system to reduce the burden on alders that currently shoulder the much of the burden created by this gap.
 - c. Create organizational capacity and structure to improve outbound and inbound city communications (communications and resident engagement) with a focus on improving access for underrepresented residents (ORENS). This structure should be able to address and improve:
 - i. Standards and coordination of city communications across agencies
 - ii. Reducing barriers for residents that are currently not connected to city information
 - d. Support and strengthen the work of the BCC Administrative Support team with particular focus on:
 - i. Establishing standards for publishing agendas/attachments/minutes in a timely and accessible format

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

- ii. Establishing standards for managing public input on legislative items including implementation of a system to efficiently manage electronic public comment as identified in the *Electronic Public Comment Improvement Proposal*.

APPENDICES

Appendices

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.

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,

APPENDICES

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.

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APPENDIX B

Subset of the Recommendations on Resident Participation and Engagement from the TFOGS Final Report

Most pertinent to the Work Group's tasks was this subset of the Recommendations on Resident Participation and Engagement from the Task Force on the Structure of City Government (TFOGS) Final Report (from pages 34-35 of that report):

- Allow video testimony or live electronic participation such as through the internet, from remote centers of the City, or other electronic means;
- 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;
- Separate public testimony from legislative debate and action by allowing individuals to provide input at the beginning of Council meetings regardless of when the item on which they wish to speak is considered;
- Vary meeting locations throughout the City;
- Make written comments available to the public and Council members at the time of the meeting;
- Improve accessibility and functionality of Legistar;
- Create a way for people to provide input in Legistar or some other appropriate platform;
- Provide classes for the public to learn how to use Legistar;
- On the city website, allow option for having a chat with a city employee who can direct a resident in the right direction should they have an issue or question about government services;
- Continue working towards having 311 number for city services; Maintain subscription lists for Council and BCC items so that residents can be made aware of issues coming before a body through an email blast or text message and report back promptly when a decision has been made;
- Review customer relation software options that may create better processes for residents to navigate city services, such as through ticketing system where issues are ticketed, followed up on my staff, and then the results reported back to the person requesting the service; and
- Add more than just the name of meetings to the city calendar so that more information can be obtained with one (1) click, instead of requiring multiple clicks to get relevant and substantive information about a meeting.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX C

Meeting and Event Highlights for the Week of September 14, 2020

Public Market Updates

The Public Market Development Committee will be discussing the progress of the Public Market project.

- [View the agenda here](#)
- [Register to speak or observe the meeting here](#)

Stakeholder Organizations Providing Input on the Police Chief Appointment Process

Several organizations are providing input into the search for the next MPD Chief of Police at the Police and Fire Commission meeting, including the Madison Professional Police Officers Association (MPPOA), Meadowood Neighborhood Association, the Community Response Team (CRT), and the Madison Professional and Supervisory Employee Association (MPSEA).

- [View the agenda here](#)

Discussions on Equitable Downtown Recovery

The Economic Development Committee will be discussing equity and downtown recovery.

- [View the agenda here](#)
- [Register to speak or observe the meeting here](#)

MPD Policy Discussions

The Public Safety Review Committee will be discussing several ordinances related to MPD procedures, including tear gas, acquisitions from the Defense Logistics Program, and the 8 Can't Wait platform.

- [View the agenda here](#)

Evictions and COVID-19 Pandemic

The Landlord and Tenant Issues Committee will be discussing the effects of COVID-19 on evictions.

- [View the agenda here](#)
- [Register to speak or observe the meeting here](#)

Downtown Recovery

The Downtown Coordinating Committee will be discussing downtown recovery in the context of equity and COVID-19.

- [View the agenda here](#)
- [Register to speak or observe the meeting here](#)

Events, seminars, etc.

- **Sustainable Transportation**, a virtual educational series for fleet and transportation professionals and anyone interested in these rapidly advancing industries.
September 10 – October 15
Every Thursday at 1pm
Information and free registration [here](#)
- **Madison Police and Fire Commission Virtual Listening Session**, the first of two sessions to gather input on the hiring of a new Chief of Police
Session 1: Saturday, September 12, 1pm
Streaming link [here](#)
Online meeting [here](#)

APPENDICES

Meeting phone number: (877) 853-5257

Webinar ID: 936 7755 8494

- [Madison Bike Week, September 12 – 20](#)
[Calendar of events here](#)
- **Black Women’s Wellness Day** (GA ticket sales end September 16)
September 18-19
Information and registration [here](#)
(The Foundation for Black Women’s Wellness is offering a special promotion for a discounted price of \$50 for the 2 day summit for City employees. Promo code to obtain the discount: **2020SPECGROUP**.)

Announcements, press releases, press conferences, etc.

- Call for Nominations for At-Large Seats on the Police Civilian Oversight Board, September 2 – read [here](#)
- The Center for Disease Control and Prevention released an emergency order to stop residential evictions from September 4 to December 31, 2020.
 - » [Fact sheet](#) to learn more and see if you qualify
 - » [Declaration form](#) to get this protection
 - » If you are being evicted, help may be available from [Legal Action](#), (855) 947-2529
- Madison Metropolitan School District: [2020 Referenda – Future Ready](#)
Referenda information sessions:
 - » [September 16: East HS, 5:00-6:30pm](#)
 - » [September 17: Who is Capital High? Informational Session, 6:00 - 7:00pm](#)
 - » [September 22: Capital High, 5:00-6:30pm](#)
 - » [September 23: Memorial HS, 5:00-6:30pm](#)
 - » [September 29: La Follette HS, 5:00-6:30pm](#)
 - » [October 1: West HS, 5:00-6:30pm](#)
 - » [October 6: Spanish session, 6:30-8pm](#)
 - » [October 7: Teletown hall meeting, 6-7pm](#)

Save the Date

- **Virtual Racial Justice Summit** (registration closes on Monday, September 14)
September 29 – October 1
Information and registration [here](#)
- Metro Transit and the City of Madison Transportation Commission will hold a [virtual public hearing](#) at 6 p.m. on October 14 to review and discuss [service updates](#) put into place on August 23.

* Previous editions of Meeting and Event Highlights can be found on the Common Council Intranet at <https://www.cityofmadison.com/employeeenet/council/internal/>.