



TOWN OF EXETER, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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TO: Russ Dean, Town Manager

FROM: Bob Glowacky, Media Communications Coordinator

DATE: April 1st, 2024

RE: Town Communications Progress to Date

In June of 2023, the Communications Advisory Committee (CAC) made five recommendations to the Select Board. The following is a brief update with progress on these items to date.

Recommendation #1 - Ongoing

“Give the Communications Coordinator better, faster, and more direct access to what’s going on in town government so that the information that needs to be shared with the public be packaged and distributed on the appropriate town platforms.”

In July of 2023 the Communications Coordinator role was reclassified into the Media Communications Coordinator (MCC) and now reported directly to the Assistant Town Manager/HR Director. The Assistant Town Manager and the I started meeting weekly to discuss upcoming projects and communications efforts. I had greater access and knowledge about large projects such as the Police Station and Fire Substation and the Sewer Siphons construction which helped the Town plan how to go about communicating about these topics.

Recommendation #2 - Incomplete/In Progress

“Establish a routine practice of sharing all communications content created by Town staff or outside contractors with the Communications Coordinator in advance of publication so that the content may be included on the Town website, disseminated on other platforms, and integrated with other town messaging, as appropriate.”

Starting in the fall of 2023, I began working more closely with the Police and FD’s communications contractor Jason Schreiber to repost social media content to the Town website and email newsletter campaigns.

There is currently no formal checklist or workflow established but there is a good working relationship to keep information flowing between departments. The Town Manager has also started weekly operational meetings with Town departments on Zoom so that departments can share information and allow other departments to ask questions. In these meetings, I often find projects or services that we can highlight with short videos, social media posts, or in our email newsletter.

I also reach out to department heads and communication staff twice a month via email to ask if there are any items that they want to include in the upcoming editions of the Town newsletter. Usually this gets some interest but in other weeks, the newsletters are pretty slim with information compared to what projects are currently going on in town.

One possible solution would be to hold biweekly meetings with staff in each department that are responsible for communication to coordinate posts, resharing, and scheduling to avoid conflicts. I would be interested in if the CAC had ideas for doing something more formal, or perhaps a checklist that can be incorporated into the forthcoming Communications Plan.

Recommendation #3 - Substantially Completed

“For the budget for fiscal year 2024, invest in developing up-to-date communications tools and work to enhance the communication skills of Town staff, such as townwide accounts for MailChimp and Canva, training and education budget to build the skills of internal Town staff, and Memberships in local and national government communications organizations. Internal staff capacity building should be the default solution to handling communications matters rather than spending on outside services. It’s generally better to invest rather than just spend our communications dollars. This approach will allow us to reap additional human resources benefit by making the Town of Exeter a more attractive place for prospective employees because it invests in its staff and infrastructure.”

With the Town Elections in March of 2024, voters approved the Town Operating Budget which included a newly established Media and Communications budget. In addition to housing 50% of the MCC’s salary and benefits, costs associated with Town communications were moved into this budget including the following services:

- Town MailChimp Account - email marketing service used by Parks and Rec, DPW, and MCC
- Town Canva Account - graphic design/template service used by Parks and Rec, DPW, Natural Resource Planner, Exeter TV staff, and MCC

Training for the MCC was included in the FY24 budget to allow me to take up to three courses at UNH toward a certificate in Digital Marketing. In the end of 2023, I took one course on email marketing with funds from the CATV Fund to get a head start on improving our communications in that area.

Not included in the 2024 communications budget was training for staff other than the MCC. Each department has its own training budget and the Town Manager and Finance Department

thought that if those staff want to pursue training to improve their communication skills, the costs for those trainings would need to come from their respective budgets.

Recommendation #4 - Completed

“Actively support the development and publication of a regular email townwide newsletter to serve as a single, unified, and reliable source of up-to-date topical information about the town and events of interest to residents.”

Starting in the fall of 2023, I took Exeter TV’s biweekly email newsletter and rebranded it as Town News and Updates from the Town of Exeter, NH. In addition to featuring Exeter TV’s news magazine show, *The Exeter Biweekly Report*, the email newsletter now offers three to four highlighted items from Town departments or committees and a two week preview of upcoming Town meetings and events from the Town website.

The email list is currently sitting at 1,596 subscribers with 650 subscribed to the central Town News and Updates email blasts. Generally our biweekly emails are opened by 400 to 450 people with around 150 unique clicks per open. Compared to no email newsletter, the service has certainly increased traffic to the Town website and has become a valuable tool for Town communications.

In 2024 and 2025, a possible goal could be to work with other departments to create a consistent schedule for their email lists to ensure that department specific information is getting out on a regular basis.

Recommendation #5 - Incomplete

“Adopt a strategic communications plan to provide a framework and process for the Town to assess communications needs and set its priorities in a proactive, analytical manner.”

To date, I have worked with the CAC to evaluate the communication plans in other municipalities. The plan has been discussed at several CAC meetings in 2023. After speaking with the CAC chair, I hope that we have a draft for the Select Board to look at in June or July.

Overall, the Town has made great progress with the email newsletter, the continued success of Exeter TV’s Biweekly Report, and information on the Town website has also improved. Work continues to improve the proactive nature of Town communications to anticipate and answer residents’ questions, highlight important meetings, and communicate in a timely manner. The forthcoming Communications Plan will help to establish what expectations and standards to hold Town communications to.

Regards,

Bob Glowacky
Media Communications Coordinator