

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM
CITY OF SHORELINE, WASHINGTON

AGENDA TITLE: Discussion of Council Goal No. 8 – Enhancing Public Participation in City Government
DEPARTMENT: Communications & Intergovernmental Relations
PRESENTED BY: Joyce Nichols, C/IR Director

PROBLEM/ISSUE STATEMENT:

In its 2004-2005 Work Plan, Council identified Goal No. 8 to: Develop and adopt policies to enhance public participation in City government. Many of the City's existing processes and methods of providing information about issues, encouraging public participation and public input are the result of previous Council Goals.

Earlier this year, Council sponsored three community forums to explore concerns expressed by some members of the community about the process for public input into City Council decision-making. Council discussed the public participation process at its retreat and Council Goal No. 8 was developed to address the issue.

Since the retreat, Council has discussed at two dinner meetings changes to the public participation process proposed by Councilmembers Maggie Fimia, Paul Grace and Bob Ransom. Some of those proposed changes are included on tonight's agenda in draft resolution 224 and would amend Council rules of procedure. Other proposed changes have been included in the work plan in this staff report.

Our recent Citizen Satisfaction Survey revealed the following information about residents' satisfaction with various aspects of City communication:

- 71% were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the quality of the City's *Currents* newsletter.
- 67% were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the City's efforts to keep residents informed.
- 66% were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the availability of information about City programs and services.
- 56% were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the coverage of City issues in local newspapers.
- 53% were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with public involvement in local decision-making.
- 47% were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the quality of the City's Web page.

- 44% were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the quality of programming on the City's government access channel.

When asked about the ways they get information about City issues, services and events, residents said the following: (multiple choices were possible)

- 78% *Currents* newsletter
- 57% newspaper
- 32% television news
- 14% City Channel 21
- 11% City Web site
- 7% other

Because public participation is an important component of the decision-making process, it is not something we can or should take for granted. Our goal should focus on continuous improvement of our communication tools and public participation methods to ensure accurate, timely information, available by a variety of means for residents to be able to be informed and determine how to be involved if they choose.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that Council review proposals and provide direction to staff on items it would like to see included in the work plan for Council Goal No. 8. Staff will return to Council with cost estimates and other resource needs for items selected.

Approved By: City Manager  City Attorney N/A

INTRODUCTION

Earlier this year, Council sponsored three community forums to explore concerns expressed by some members of the community about the process for public input into City Council decision-making. Council discussed the public participation process at its retreat and Council Goal No. 8 was developed to address the issue.

BACKGROUND

As early as the Council retreat in January 1997, the issues of public involvement, citizen participation and communicating with the public have been a high priority. At its 1997 retreat, City Council established an objective to “create a two-way process for public information, input, and participation that enables Council to discern the pulse of the public in Council decision-making”.

Part of the rationale for this objective was the importance and value the Council placed on citizen participation and involvement in the decision-making processes. There was also an expressed desire to maintain the enthusiasm and commitment demonstrated by so many Shoreline residents during the move to incorporate. For those reasons, Council decided to ask Shoreline residents to participate in an assessment of the City's programs in place at that time and to recommend a future course of action. Some of the questions Council sought answers to included:

- What opportunities do citizens currently have to be involved in the decisions of their City government?
- Who is currently participating in City government-related committees, meetings and groups? Who is not, and why not?
- What organizations and groups are currently involved—and how do they view their roles?
- How can a larger number of citizens become more effectively involved through outreach and communication programs?
- What communication programs can most effectively reach and encourage the broadest number of citizens to participate?
- How can the City ensure citizens through planning and coordination of meetings, programs and policy decisions that their views are fairly represented and considered as decisions are made?
- What can we learn by surveying other models for citizen involvement in successful local governments?
- What is the appropriate role for staff in supporting and communicating with stakeholder groups?

In 1997, the City contracted with Elizabeth Magoon and Associates to assist the City in providing a comprehensive review of public involvement programs and initiatives, coordinate the development of an integrated citizen involvement and communications program and assist the City with implementation strategies.

As part of this study, Council appointed 17 members to the Citizen Involvement and Communications Project Committee. This committee developed a series of recommendations for communications programs, which were the basis for many of the

communications tools that the City uses today (including *Currents*, the *City Source* column, Web site, government access channel, *Owner's Manual*, citizen survey and leadership training for neighborhood representatives).

Earlier this year, Council sponsored three community forums to explore concerns expressed by some members of the community about the process for public input into City Council decision-making. Council discussed the public participation process at its retreat and Council Goal No. 8 was developed to address the issue. Since the retreat, Council has discussed proposed changes to the public participation process proposed by Councilmembers Maggie Fimia, Paul Grace and Bob Ransom. Some of those proposed changes are included on tonight's agenda and would amend Council rules of procedure. Other proposed changes have been included in the work plan that follows.

Because public participation is an important component of the decision-making process, it is not something we can or should take for granted. Our goal should focus on continuous improvement of our communication tools and public participation methods to ensure accurate, timely information, available by a variety of means for residents to be able to be informed and determine how to be involved if they choose.

Proposed Work Plan for Council Goal No. 8:

- Finalize recommendations on proposed changes to public participation process from City Council and incorporate into work plan for Goal No. 8. These would include: holding two town hall-type meetings each year; increasing the number of issues of *Currents* newsletter from six to 10 per year; expanded and better use of City Web site and government access channel; and changing the public comment portion of City Council meetings.
- Implement community information process on City's long-range financial planning. Process would provide: a vehicle to inform and update members of the public about the City's finances and long-term financial plans; a means of getting feedback from the public on City service priorities; and identify community members willing to participate with the City in evaluating financial options. (Scheduled to begin in October.)
- Develop and implement a Public Information/Participation/ Decision-Making Matrix to define the public process appropriate for different types of decisions. (Scheduled draft in November.)
- Begin offering a "Citizen Academy" to provide more in-depth information to community members about City services, issues, and ways of becoming more involved in the City's decision-making processes. Could be developed along the lines of the successful processes used in the planning and police departments. (Implement in early 2005.)
- Develop and implement communications plans around Citizen Satisfaction Survey results to provide information to neighborhoods/areas of City about needs/ problems/issues identified in 2004 survey to facilitate resolution of problems/issues. (Underway and continuing.)

- Develop and implement City-wide neighborhood-based emergency response information and training. (Development underway, implementation planned in 2005.)

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