



City of Palo Alto

City Council Staff Report

(ID # 14102)

Meeting Date: 3/14/2022

Title: Report and Discussion on Community Engagement Activities Planned to Implement the City's Workplans for the 2022 Calendar Year

From: City Manager

Lead Department: City Manager

RECOMMENDATION

This item is a study session, and no action is requested. Staff recommends that the Council receive a staff report and discuss community engagement activities planned to implement the City's workplans for the 2022 calendar year.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a summary of community engagement activities planned and underway. Notably, the report summarizes major topics areas and initiatives that the City is actively engaging the community on to gain community feedback and inform City Council decision-making. As described in this report, the number and complexity of initiatives being pursued by the City necessitates a thoughtful review in order to ensure that limited resources are allocated to the highest priority areas, and that public engagement is clear and meaningful. To ensure awareness of the work underway and alignment on next steps, Staff is seeking City Council feedback on the engagement efforts below.

BACKGROUND

In May 2021, staff presented an update on the City's community engagement efforts at the Policy and Services Committee following a Council request to share work underway. The staff presentation and staff report (listed [here](#)) provided background on different community engagement options planned, including use of Town Halls, with an opportunity for the Policy and Services Committee to provide additional input and guidance.

Since that update, several work items have been completed such as two town hall meetings, Wellness Wednesdays, Uplift Local meetings and weekly newsletters, City Manager comments and blog series, issue specific public meetings; and other work is either planned or revised based on updated City Council priorities and direction. As an example, since the update to Policy and Services Committee, a new community engagement effort to support the Sustainability/Climate Action Plan development and the establishment of a City Council Ad Hoc on Sustainability, were added to the City's overall workplan.

DISCUSSION

As part of the 2022 City Council retreat, staff was prepared to present an update on community engagement in an effort to gain Council input on the efforts underway and refine plans as work progresses through the calendar year. This staff report is a step in the overall strategy of implementing the City's workplans. The details provided in this report relate to and connect with the City Council Priorities Workplan discussion scheduled for Council consideration on April 4, 2022. Based on the City Council's adopted priorities, the April 4 session will present the major projects involved in advancing each priority. For each priority, projects are divided into three categories: projects already underway or scheduled to begin by June 2022, projects scheduled to begin July-December 2022, and projects that have been identified as priorities but where resources are not currently available or otherwise "on hold." As priorities evolve and workplans develop, engagement and other activities to implement these workplans will also evolve.

While balancing staffing and resource limitations, the City is implementing and planning several thoughtful community engagement efforts acknowledging this as an important and stated priority. The City of Palo Alto maintains an extraordinary level of community engagement on specific topics as well as general engagement and ongoing communication on City programs, services and events. The volume of engagement outlined below, although extensive, reflects a summary of intentional strategies to inform City Council decision-making and support the implementation of the City's workplans. To ensure awareness of the work underway and alignment on next steps, Staff is seeking City Council feedback on the engagement efforts below. Council feedback during this study session will help inform the workplan conversation that will be brought to the City Council on April 4th.

The report is organized by the following sections:

1. Major City priorities and topics with community engagement resources planned
2. Other Work Plan Elements and Examples of Department-Specific Community Engagement
3. Examples of Communications and Engagement Options Used in Support of Civic Participation

Major City Priorities and Topics with Community Engagement Resources Planned

Over the next ten months, City staff is planning both general engagement and issue-specific engagement to seek feedback and input from community members.

From a general engagement standpoint, the City has used several approaches to build community awareness, enhance civic participation and gain feedback. Approaches include: town halls, community information sessions, office hours, neighborhood meetings, online surveys, polls, and digital engagement platform.

The following is a list of approaches that the City uses for engagement, with reference to the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) [Spectrum of Public Participation](#), that the City utilizes to further engagement activities as staff implements the City’s workplan. While the following list includes general approaches and actions, we tailor each opportunity to structure community participation to gain the type of input or feedback needed based on the project/issue:

- **Inform:** Fact sheets, webpages, blog posts, information sessions, open houses, frequently asked questions, website feedback forms
- **Consult & Involve:** Surveys, focus groups, questions and answer sessions, office hours, public meetings like community meetings, town halls, panel discussions, workshops, polling, community meetings
- **Collaborate & Empower:** Working groups, ad hoc groups, feedback groups, boards, commissions and committee meetings, community advisory panels, advisory groups, digital engagement platforms, and voter ballot measures.

The tables below provide a sampling of the work completed recently, work underway, and work planned throughout calendar year 2022; this is not an exhaustive list. Table A includes general community engagement methods.

TABLE A: Community Engagement Methods and Examples

Community Engagement Methods	Summary, Audience & Function	Timeframe
Weekly Newsletter	Regular outbound communication enables readers to feel informed of major issues and upcoming events. The newsletter is one of several communications methods to inform and engage the community.	Uplift Local weekly newsletter currently has over 60,000 subscribers
Community Information Podcasts	Launched during the beginning of the pandemic, a series of podcasts drew up to 300 -400 views and were an opportunity to share updates and answer community questions received before each chat with the mayor and city manager. This audience was general community and businesses. Prior series completed, and no current series planned.	Weekly series completed in March – May 2020
Town Halls	For the past several years, the City has used Town Halls to engage the community on specific priority topics like budget and rail grade separations. Calendar Year 2021 meetings: - May 2021: Budget Town Hall - Fall 2021: CommUNITY Town Hall to discuss Hate	Two town hall meetings annually, that are issue-specific - Spring 2022: TBD

	Crimes	
National Community Survey	The City has a long-standing goal of engaging the community through the National Community Survey which benchmarks the City against other community surveys, engaging the community through a random sample of community members. This was completed last in 2020	Per Council direction in the FY 2022 budget, the next survey is planned for late 2022 (FY 2023).
OpenGov Online Survey	Online survey tool that supports community engagement through a forum to share feedback on specific issues, programs, projects and initiatives. The audience is intended to be resident focused.	Ongoing
City Service Feedback	Online feedback tool and community resource to share customer service experience citywide. Intended audience is any customer at any city facility or online customer.	Ongoing, initially launched Summer 2021.
Topic-specific Community Meetings	Community meetings provide residents and other stakeholders to become informed and provide feedback on specific issues.	Neighborhood and policy-specific meetings occur throughout year
Neighborhood Town Hall Meetings	Envisioned as hosted by Councilmembers, a series of six community meetings in specific neighborhood areas are being developed in a virtual format. The audience is intended to be resident-focused.	Six meetings to be scheduled in Q2-Q4
Chat with the Mayor Series	This is envisioned as quarterly smaller group sessions on any topic areas. The audience is intended to be resident-focused.	To be scheduled
Council, Board, Commission and Committee Meetings	Ongoing meetings on specific topics for the community. The audience is generally those interested on a specific topic of discussion at the respective board, commission or committee meeting.	Ongoing
Palo Alto Digital Hub	New online engagement platform using an ESRI product to enable interaction on major initiatives like fiber and sustainability. The audience is intended to be resident and business focused.	Ongoing, initially launched Summer 2021
Ad hoc committees, focus groups, and task forces	Groups are assembled to provide focused input and collaboration on specific issues, often requiring background knowledge and agreement to act in partnership on next steps.	Multiple groups in progress for S/CAP, housing, fiber
Voter Ballot Measures	Voters are ultimately empowered to make major decisions through scheduled and special elections.	Potential ballot measures in November 2022

In applying the methods above, Table B summarizes a number of the community engagement specific to implementing the City’s workplan. This is simply a sampling, as each of the priorities listed also involve multiple City Council and committee discussions as well other steps. Nonetheless, the following table provides an illustration of the volume of communication and level of effort anticipated over the upcoming months.

TABLE B: Major City Priorities with Community Engagement Options Identified

Major City Priorities	Engagement Options Identified	Timeframe
Budget/Fiscal Sustainability-2022 Ballot Measures	Budget Town Hall	May 2021
	Community Listening Session	March 29, 2022
	Polls, Mailed Survey and Online Survey	November 2021- June 2022
	Focus Group meetings	Up to 9, February 2022-April 2022
	Community presentations	Up to 10, March 2022-May 2022
Sustainability/Climate Action Plan	Ad Hoc meetings	Summer 2021- Fall 2022
	Working Group Meetings	
	Online Surveys	Ongoing
	Community Summit and Open House	Q3
	Climate Pledge	TBD
Sustainability Hub	Spring 2022	
Fiber	Community Information Session	February 24, 2022
	Focus Groups	March/April 2022
	Feedback Community	March-June 2022
	Market Research Survey	May 2022
	Utilities Advisory Commission (UAC) Updates	April 2022

Major City Priorities	Engagement Options Identified	Timeframe
	City Council/UAC Joint Study Session	June 2022
	Palo Alto Fiber Hub	Launched Fall 2021
Public Safety	Virtual Community Conversation and Panel Discussion	July 2021
	Chief Office Hours	Ongoing
	Chief's Advisory Group	Ongoing
	Discussions with Chamber of Commerce	Ongoing
	Launched Calls for Service Interactive Map	February 2022
	Police Chief Selection Community Listening Sessions	March 10, 19, 31
	Police Chief Selection Online Feedback Form	Launched February 25, 2022
Race and Equity	Women and Girls Summit	June 2021
	CommUNITY Together Town Hall to discuss Hate Crimes	Fall 2021
	Creative Attention: Art and Community Restoration On view from January 22-May 21, 2022, this exhibition explores the power of art to promote individual and community wellbeing.	January-May 2022
	In following the City Council direction in 2021, the Palo Alto Public Art Program recently launched the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. & Coretta Scott King Artist Residency. The Public Art Commission approved Rayos Magos as the first artist for the King Artist Residency, based on recommendations by a selection panel. Rayos Magos will utilize the power of storytelling and imagery in community conversations about culture, identity, and mental health within Latinx/BIPOC communities living and/or working in Palo Alto. Community programming began in February.	February 2022

Major City Priorities	Engagement Options Identified	Timeframe
	<p>Weekly Women’s History Month Storytimes (March 2022), planning to do storytimes and other events for AAPI in May 2022 and other library events specific to race and equity.</p> <p>AAPI Heritage Month- community celebration of events hosted by the Library, Community Services Department and many community groups</p> <p>Microaggressions Training for Boards, Commission and Committee members</p>	<p>May 2021</p> <p>Spring 2022</p>
Community Health and Safety	<p>Wellness Wednesdays</p> <p>Together Again Community Week</p>	<p>Monthly in 2021/ now transitioned to every Thursday through the Art Center</p> <p>September 2021</p>
Housing	<p>Housing Element Working Group</p> <p>Housing Element Ad Hoc Committee</p> <p>Renter Protection Outreach</p> <p>Rental Protections Panel Discussion</p> <p>Safe Parking Community Meetings</p>	<p>Began June 2021- Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>December 2020</p> <p>Fall 2021</p>
Economic Recovery	<p>Uplift Local Monthly Community Meetings</p> <p>Monthly Business Meetings for the University Ave., California Avenue, and other business interests</p>	<p>Monthly through Fall 2021</p> <p>Monthly through December 2021/Now transitioning to Chamber partnership</p>
Tree Ordinance	<p>Two community meetings planned. Second meeting tentative for May 2022.</p>	<p>April 6, 2022</p>

Major City Priorities	Engagement Options Identified	Timeframe
	Parks and Recreation Commission Architectural Review Board Online Survey City Council Consideration <i>*Tentative dates</i>	April 2022* April 2022* May 2022 June 2022*
Grade Separation	Town Halls Virtual Town Hall XCAP Word on the Street Meetups (neighborhood specific open house) Virtual Panel Q&A Sessions Community & Stakeholder Outreach Through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rail Committee • Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee • City/School Traffic Liaison Committee • PAUSD • Caltrain 	2020-2021 Ongoing

Other Work Plan Elements and Examples of Department-Specific Community Engagement

In addition to the table above that summarizes work completed, underway or planned, there are regular work elements with community engagement associated, which are typically department-led efforts. From an overall standpoint, this type of outreach typically is asking for community input on specific areas of the City's work plan implementation to help further decision-making on areas such as policies and programs, service delivery, capital improvement projects, and also used to bring the community together through community events. Some examples of annual community events that the City produces and sponsors each year can be found [here](#) on page 73.

Examples of policy issues and topics that are tied to this department-specific work, and examples of community events that seek to bring the community together include:

- Planning/Objective Standards (Planning)
- Wireless Communication Facilities Ordinance and Resolution (Planning)

- Airplane Noise Ground Based Augmentation System Community Meeting (Public Works)
- Parking in Lieu Downtown Office Parking Ban (will also address Housing Work Plan Task 2.4.5) (Planning)
- Building Code Update, Reach Code Update & Ordinance RE: Substantial Remodels (Planning)
- Cubberley Masterplan (Community Services)
- Ambulance Subscription Program (Fire)
- Parking permit and programs (Transportation)
- University Avenue Streetscape (Public Works)
- Charleston/Arastradero Corridor project (Public Works)
- Churchill/Alma Safety Intersection Improvements (Section 130) (Transportation)
- Park openings and the Palo Alto Junior Museum & Zoo grand opening celebration (Community Services and Public Works)
- Summer concerts and community events such as May Fete (Community Services)
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan Update (Transportation)
- South Palo Alto Bikeways Project (Transportation)
- On-demand Transit Service (Transportation)
- Traffic Signal Modifications at San Antonio & Charleston (Transportation)
- Micro-mobility Launch (E-scooters/Bike-share) (Transportation)
- Electric Vehicles Workshops -March –October 2022 (Utilities)
- Neighborhood Traffic Safety and Bike Boulevards Project (Transportation)
- Restart Cool Block neighborhood engagement (City Manager's Office)
- Neighbors Abroad Sister City/Sibling City Cultural Day (City Manager's Office)
- Community safety trainings and Emergency Services Volunteer programming (Office of Emergency Services)
- Summer Reading Program, Remaker Faire, Palo Alto Reads (Library)

Examples of Communications and Engagement Options Used in Support of Civic Participation

The City is committed to informing and engaging the community on City programs, priorities, and services. From a communications standpoint, there are several ways that the City is supporting building awareness and informing the public about community events, City policies and programs, City events, and sharing opportunities to participate in the City's decision-making process.

With the launch of the City's new website in early 2021, the use of the new and enhanced City website calendar is one new way to inform and engage the community about upcoming ways to participate in City events and meetings. The City also uses Nextdoor and Facebook calendars, when possible. Sharing public information through digital platforms has worked well to increase community awareness of programs and services, including existing communications channels such as blog posts, websites, and social media channels including Nextdoor, Nixle and more. The City also uses its survey platform through OpenGov, called Open Town Hall to offer online

surveys and polls as an additional engagement opportunity throughout the year. During our virtual environment, the City has hosted several Zoom conversations with the community and during these sessions utilize polls, surveys and the Q and A feature to engage and gain feedback.

Informally, the City also looks to neighborhood, educational, and community organizations with existing strong community connections such as Palo Alto Neighborhoods (PAN), Stanford University, Cool Block, Emergency Service Volunteers and many more to engage and inform. These existing groups share engagement opportunities with their community networks, acting as ambassadors for increased public dialogue and engagement. We will continue to use these and other existing community groups and networks to enhance communications and engagement efforts.

TIMELINE

The recommended activities outlined above are to be pursued within the 2022 calendar year.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The staff report outlines a series of citywide and department-specific engagement efforts planned to implement the City's workplans.

RESOURCE IMPACTS

The details shared above provide activities planned using existing staff resources.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This agenda item is informational only and is not a "project" requiring review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).