



City of San Antonio

Legislation Details (With Text)

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Type: Staff Briefing - Without Ordinance

In control: Community Health and Equity Committee

On agenda: 8/7/2020

Title: A briefing with updates on efforts to enhance public participation during the COVID-19 pandemic [Carlos J. Contreras, III; Assistant City Manager, Jeff Coyle, Director, Government and Public Affairs]

Sponsors:

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Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
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DEPARTMENT: Government and Public Affairs

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Jeff Coyle, Director

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: Citywide

SUBJECT: A briefing providing updates on public engagement

SUMMARY:

The Government and Public Affairs (GPA) will provide a briefing with updates on efforts to enhance public participation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced most traditional grassroots outreach efforts to adapt to protect the health and safety of both participants and staff. As a result, the City has expedited technology solutions to provide more ways for residents to get involved.

The City’s outreach efforts are guided by the ten public participation guiding principles that Council adopted in 2019. The principles are as follows:

1. **MEANINGFUL** - Ensure that public input is appropriately considered in the decision-making process; use public participation to improve City programs, policies and ordinances.
2. **TRANSPARENT** - Be open and clear by communicating the decision-making process to the public, including the role of public in the process, what type of input is sought and how the input will be used; provide a public record of the input received and the range of views and ideas expressed.
3. **RESPECTFUL** - Consider all input received, including differing viewpoints, while balancing the interests of all stakeholders.
4. **INCLUSIVE** - Engage a broad range of stakeholders, with particular emphasis on those who do not normally take part in City public participation processes; make every effort to ensure that stakeholder groups do not feel

left out of the process.

5. **ACCESSIBLE** - Ensure that anyone who wants to participate in the process can provide input; overcome barriers to participation, whether they are geographical, physical, socioeconomic or language barriers.
6. **INFORMATIVE** - Educate through public participation; use the opportunity to help people understand how the City organization works and to enhance both the public's and the City's understanding of issues, policies and challenges; strive to ensure that opinions are informed with facts.
7. **RESPONSIVE** - Communicate outcomes to all who participated and provided input
8. **TIMELY** - Seek public input well ahead of key decisions; engage the public proactively.
9. **CONVENIENT** - Make it as easy as possible to engage with the City; provide multiple opportunities for the public to provide input; when possible, meet people where they are instead of only requiring them to show up to a public meeting; utilize the power of digital communications while being mindful of technology gaps.
10. **CONTINUOUS** - Treat every input provided by the public as another step toward a more engaged community by developing the infrastructure to foster sustained participation; residents who make the effort to participate should be continually engaged in future efforts; residents who want to share an opinion with their City organization should be able to do so at any given time.

With those principles in mind, the City has adapted its public engagement efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic to focus on providing virtual and telephonic engagement opportunities. To bridge the digital divide, the City has also deployed on the ground outreach efforts such as robocoll calls, text message campaigns and utilizing curbside service delivery or pickup locations as opportunities to provide information and encourage engagement with the City.

The City has also adapted its meeting formats throughout the pandemic, by hosting virtual meetings with convenient features such as live callback options for public comment, the ability to listen to a meeting by phone and most recently, launched its new eComment platform.

While many of the City's new outreach tactics were expedited as a response to the pandemic, the options have provided easier access to the policy-making process. GPA will continue to review and enhance these tactics through the response and recovery.

ISSUE:

GPA will brief the Community Health and Equity Committee on public engagement efforts during a pandemic.

ALTERNATIVES:

This item is for briefing purposes only.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact at this time.

RECOMMENDATION:

This item is for briefing purposes only.