

MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE WORK SESSION OF MARCH 24, 2015

Mayor Strazdas called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. The following Councilmembers were present: Councilmembers Nasim Ansari, Patricia M. Randall, Claudette Reid and Terry Urban, Mayor Pro Tem Jim Pearson and Mayor Peter Strazdas. Councilmember Richard Ford was absent with notice. Also present were City Manager Larry Shaffer, Deputy City Manager Rob Boulis, Community Marketing Director Devin Mackinder and City Clerk James Hudson.

Mayor Strazdas deferred to City Manager Shaffer, who stressed the importance of social media in government and online initiatives for 2015, and indicated it as the number one method of providing information in the future. He introduced Devin Mackinder, who provided an update for City Council using a PowerPoint Presentation which he promised would be e-mailed to each Councilmember.

Mr. Mackinder indicated that social media is the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. He explained that websites and applications dedicated to forums, microblogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation, sharing economy, crowdsourcing, crowdfunding and wikis are among the different types of social media. He stressed that this is totally different from the way the City of Portage has interacted with the public in the past and is a two-way communication tool. Discussion followed.

Mr. Mackinder explained some of the mainstream social media options, including: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, Google+, Linked-In, Survey Monkey, Real Simple Syndication (RSS), Podcasts, Blogs, Mass Notification Systems, Mobile Applications, and Dashboards. He referred to the image that depicts all of the “buckets” of social media utilized throughout the world today.

Mr. Mackinder reviewed some of the main social media channels used by Municipalities for some years and urged Council to click on any of them to learn more about them. He indicated that the social media project needs to be a collaborative effort among the Council and the Administration for it to be successful and stressed the need for all to be familiar with the various types of social media. Discussion followed.

In response to Mayor Pro Tem Pearson, Mr. Mackinder agreed to check into the Kalamazoo slogan, *Love Where You Live* to see if other municipalities are using it and whether Portage can use it. City Attorney Brown reminded Council that *Portage Alert* has been copyrighted and implied that the City of Kalamazoo could have copyrighted the *Love Where You Live* slogan. Discussion followed.

Next, Mr. Mackinder explained the uses of the following examples of municipal social media applications: MindMixer (Imagine Kalamazoo), which connects the people who love where they live with the organizations, places and projects that shape its future; Open Town Hall, which is the most widely used online public comment platform for government; Nextdoor, which is the private social network of over 54,000 U.S. neighborhoods; Waze, which is the world's largest community-based traffic and navigation application. Discussion followed regarding the use of social media to assist with traffic during the 2015 South Westnedge Avenue Road Reconstruction Project.

Mr. Mackinder then described the uses of Blackboard Connect (Portage), which is a mass notification system, and outlined Suite One as an example of an electronic agenda and citizen engagement. He again stressed the need for the Administration and City Council to build the social media platform together and to make sure that the information is accurate, timely and the same regardless of the conduit. Discussion followed.

Councilmember Randall asked how to get people to use the available information resources to assist them within the community. Mr. Mackinder explained that it is critical to find out what is important to each segment of the population in order to relay information accordingly, whether it be recreation, restaurants, etc. He said that the questions and the media utilized for the community survey as a tool helps with the proper focus on this and explained. Discussion followed.

Councilmember Ansari asked whether there is a demand for social media, or is Portage going to create a demand for it; and, is there any other community that is using it so we do not have to reinvent the wheel. Mr. Shaffer indicated that Granicus has been around for a long time, and he said it has been in New England for at least seven years by now and explained how social media can benefit the city community. Mayor Strazdas asked Mr. Mackinder to finish his presentation for discussion purposes at the end.

With that, Mr. Mackinder asked the rhetorical question, "Why use social media?" He indicated we use social media because that's where the people are with 75% of adults using social media; and, Americans now spend more time on social media than any other online activity, including email. Furthermore, he indicated we use social media to share, listen and engage. He explained "share" means to inform citizens of public services and activities; "listen" in order to understand what citizens are sharing to improve public services; and "engage" allows us to respond, collaborate and create with citizens to improve public services and promote a sense of community which is different from what was done in the past. He quoted an article regarding Gen X from *Governing Magazine* and stressed the need for "give and take." Discussion followed.

He said in order to use social media responsibly, or at least learn from the past mistakes of others, we need to utilize social media in a meaningful way, not just because it is "cool." He noted that before we really engage in social media, we have to develop goals and objectives, a communications plan if you will, and a mission statement and explained why this is important and the questions that need to be asked. He stressed the need to devise the internal process to ensure all communications are accurate, timely, responsive, coordinated and integrated with current traditional forms of communication.

Mr. Mackinder reminded Council that sometimes security, records retention, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and associated costs are sometimes forgotten, and that the law has not completely caught up with technology and explained. He indicated a need to handle negative feedback, unwarranted verbal attacks and the internal misuse of social media by city staff. He provided some examples and said that, since social media is electronic, the conversations and or issues can linger and there can be a need to avoid damaging reputations or the public trust.

He listed some of the 2014 Accomplishments as follows: Senior Center Facebook Page was launched; added extra RSS Feeds (Employment and Volunteer Opportunities); rebuilt the Media Center; upgraded the BS&A Online Property Tax Lookup; implemented the PortageAlert Mass Notification System; upgraded the MI.Portage App

(PortageAlert and K-Metro) and consulted the Youth Advisory Committee for feedback on Councilmember Randall's question regarding how do we communicate and get people involved in the community.

Next, Mr. Mackinder reviewed the current footprint and future goals (online initiatives) and online presence in Portage and reviewed the 2015 Goals: to develop a formal social media plan (usage policy already in place); live streaming of televised meetings (lost when we went with PMN); online agenda system (Granicus or Suite One); rebuild the city website to make it mobile friendly, better social media integration, and updated employment system; upgrade Report It! to the BS&A Citizen Request for Action system; upgrade online payment system with BS&A Point & Pay; RSS feeds for Planning, Zoning Board website pages; and provide Cisco WebEx video conferencing. He indicated that the 2015 Considerations that may turn into action items are: creating Parks and City Facebook Pages; replacing Media Center with Instagram/Youtube; purchasing MindMixer or Open Town Hall; using Crowdsourcing, Crowdfunding; expanding video conferencing capability (Skype, WebEx); revising Community Survey questions and transmission vehicles (MindMixer, Open Town Hall); and reconsidering "Active 365" which would provide day-to-day event offerings in the community.

He showed Council a slide that listed ten ways local government can use social media and some that the City of Portage is already using: Crime Prevention and Police Assistance; Emergency Alerts and Severe Weather Updates; Activities and Class Registration; Council Meetings; Driving Traffic to Official Website; Public Service Announcements; Construction Updates and Road Closings; Community Building; Job Applications; and Economic Development.

Mayor Pro Tem Pearson spoke in support of Mr. Mackinder and his social media efforts. He asked for assurances that he will have a "handle" on how to use it before it is fully implemented; he addressed the importance of having the *Portager* in paper form during the transition to the electronic form; and, he referred to the Community Survey as a dinosaur and the need to have it revamped. Mayor Strazdas concurred with Mayor Pro Tem Pearson and further discussed the ramifications of the use of social media in the community. Councilmember Randall also spoke in support of Mr. Mackinder and his social media efforts and expressed an interest in supplementing the limitations provided by the *Kalamazoo Gazette* and explained.

Councilmember Reid referred to the many studies regarding communication and indicated that when a topic is complex, there is a need to go to the highest form of communication, but social media is set up as small bits, sound bites or pieces, and government is not simple. So, she stressed that it is important to use social media to point people to places where they may get the best information. She said that the city website becomes important as one of the sites that has information that already exists and has the in-depth quality of information. Discussion followed. Mr. Mackinder confirmed for Councilmember Reid that Suite One can take advantage of the Public Media Network stream and is very flexible in this regard and she noted that while at the City of Novi Mayor's Exchange, they used a Cable Access show to inform citizens what stores were open for business during a road reconstruction project and stressed the importance of bringing the information forward in a variety of media forms for information saturation with regards to the South Westnedge Avenue Project.

Mayor Strazdas mentioned that the whole social media piece may be challenging good journalism since people do not go to social media for facts or third party excellent journalism, and that he is bothered by that. Mr. Mackinder concurred and discussion followed regarding the importance of government control of the message and the need for good journalism. City Attorney Brown indicated that when the City opens the gates for what people say and what people don't say, the First Amendment disallows any control over that discussion. Mayor Strazdas asked City Manager Shaffer to bring Council some recommendations for consideration at a Regular City Council Meeting.

ADJOURN: Mayor Strazdas adjourned the meeting at 7:14 p.m.

James R. Hudson, City Clerk