

## 2018 Communications Review

### Mission Statement

The mission of the department of communications, marketing and events is to support the goals of the City of Littleton by creating and maintaining a comprehensive communications program that contributes to an exceptional level of understanding and trust between the City of Littleton and the numerous constituencies it serves.

There are three significant success stories over the past 18 months that demonstrate the effectiveness of a formidable communications strategy.

### Case Study #1 – TABOR Election

On August 1, 2017 the city council voted to place two TABOR questions on the November 7, 2017 ballot. In anticipation of the formal vote, staff developed a *TABOR Communications Plan* and began implementation immediately following council placing the questions on the ballot.

**STRATEGY** - The plan described press releases, front page stories in the August and October issues of the *Littleton Report*, a social media calendar utilizing Facebook, Twitter, and Nextdoor; a dedicated TABOR page on the website, development of a fact sheet placed in all city buildings and distributed at numerous events, and videos produced for Channel 8 and YouTube. (See *TABOR Communications Plan*).

**KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR** – Voters overwhelmingly supported the two TABOR questions. Question 2C received 9,201 ‘yes’ votes versus 2,504 voting ‘no,’ a whopping 79% approval margin. This vote allowed the city to retain \$1.94 million in excess revenue for pavement improvements on residential streets and safety upgrades to the Bowles/Federal intersection. The margin of support on this question is unprecedented.

Voters also approved Question 2D which adjusted the TABOR base to the 2016 level. The ballot measure was approved with support from 66% of voters (7,583 ‘yes’ versus 3,926 ‘no’).

## Case Study #2 – Envision Littleton

Starting on May 8, 2018 with the initial press release announcing the kickoff of Envision Littleton, this effort to update the city’s comprehensive plan has resulted in a level of engagement never seen in Littleton.

**STRATEGY** - Working with the project manager and consultants, the Communications Department staff played a critical role in developing the branding and graphic design, Community Engagement Plan, Project Management Calendar, and implementation of the engagement process. This included everything from creating a half dozen videos, designing and printing bookmarks and banners that reinforce the Envision Littleton brand, maintaining a social media calendar and pushing stories out weekly on Facebook, Twitter and Nextdoor; posting questions to Open Littleton to garner input, creating an Envision Littleton button on the website homepage to direct visitors to all documents pertaining to Envision Littleton, and publishing stories in every issue of the *Littleton Report* from April 2018 to present.

### **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:**



Moving forward to adoption of the Comprehensive Plan in the fall of 2019, the Communications Department staff will work with the project manager and consultants to continue this high level of engagement utilizing all of the city's platforms. (See *Community Engagement Plan Phase I Vision* and *Community Engagement Plan Planning for our Future*).

### **Case Study #3 – Fire Unification**

On December 5, 2017, the city council instructed the city manager to begin negotiations to unify Littleton Fire Rescue with South Metro Fire Rescue (SMFR). On April 17, 2017, city council approved a Preunification Agreement with SMFR.

**STRATEGY** - Over the next 11 months, there were front page stories about unification in every issue of the *Littleton Report* up to the November election. Once the question had been approved by the SMFR board to be placed on the ballot, a consultant was retained in the spring of 2018 to assist with messaging and graphic design for the unification question. Communications Department staff worked with the City Manager's Office and the consultant to implement the communications strategy. This included producing three videos for play on Channel 8 and YouTube that were pushed out through social media. One featured the chiefs of the two departments talking about improved fire and EMS, one with the finance director explaining the mill levy, and one with the public works director discussing the need for more funding for streets and infrastructure. A Fire Unification button was added to the homepage of the website where every document about the issue was available, business size cards were created for employees to encourage their understanding of the issue, the second Telephone Town Hall was dedicated to the fire unification topic, and many collateral materials such as posters and flyers were created for distribution.

The staff maintained a social media calendar for the question and this became a very important tool to monitor what participants were saying about the unification question. Because of the trends that staff noticed, the messaging was modified in the final weeks before the election to address questions and false information being raised on social media sites. (See *Littleton Fire Unification May-June Implementation Plan* and *Social Media Calendar*).

**KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR** – Voters approved the unification question by a large margin. There were 12,430 'yes' votes versus 8,486 'no' votes, a margin of 59% approval. Considering the question will cause a tax increase for property owners and the many other competing tax questions on the ballot (Littleton Public Schools \$298 million bond for example), a comprehensive communications strategy was an important factor in the unification question.

## Lessons Learned

- Social media is a critical tool for pushing out information but more important, for gauging public sentiment around any question. Its immediacy allows the city to respond quickly to issues or factual errors and that's why it is constantly monitored *and* responded to when needed. More than a quarter of the city's residents subscribe to Nextdoor and the city has over 8,000 followers on Twitter, an increase of 48% since 2016. (See *2019 Communications Metrics and Strategies*).
- The *Littleton Report* remains the #1 source of information about the city according to the *2018 Resident and Business Surveys*. It is trusted and relied upon by many residents. Second is Littletongov.org with 322,600 visitors in 2018. Technology changes rapidly and even though the website was rebuilt in 2016, the staff is auditing the city's website and will come back to council during the budget sessions with a recommendation for upgrading it in 2020.
- The city has held two Telephone Town Halls that were very successful. Participants could engage in six ways: on their phone, via Facebook Live, on their computer, live on the city's website, live on Channel 8, and in person. It was also available to watch on demand on YouTube.
- OpenLittleton.org is a powerful citizen engagement tool to get feedback on emerging topics. It has provided valuable information to the city since it was implemented in 2016. However, it has been underutilized. Staff is working with other departments to help them understand what this online engagement platform can do and how they might use it to obtain input on virtually any topic.
- Storytelling is a critical component to communications. Staff strives to turn a complicated issue into a story that is easily understood. Key messages on complex issues (fire unification) are vital to a successful outcome.
- The city subscribes to Sprout Social to schedule social media posts simultaneously on all channels and to measure their reach. In 2019 the city subscribed to Meltwater which measures the reach of social, broadcast and print media. This allows us to see trending topics and their impact.
- The *2016 Strategic Communications Plan* was written as part of the Certified Public Communicator Program at Texas Christian University. It is a three-year plan so staff will update it this summer for implementation in 2020.
- Digital marketing strategies evolve rapidly so it is important that staff stays abreast of trends and techniques through learning and education opportunities.