

Announcing a City Communication survey on Tuesday

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [City government](#), [Communication survey](#), [Gadfly's posts](#), [Serious Issues](#) March 25, 2019

On Gadfly's calendar for Tuesday, March 26, at 3:30 in Town Hall is a press conference announcing a City Communication survey. Gadfly is not exactly sure what's up here, but he believes it is rooted in the following section of CM Reynolds' "Bethlehem 2017" report — more like a vision statement (full document is linked on the Gadfly sidebar).

At least, Gadfly hopes that's what this event is about. Followers know that public participation and communication fuel the Gadfly project.

Well worth reading.

from

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Bethlehem City Council President

"Bethlehem 2017"

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#3 Engaging Bethlehem

As technology has been progressing exponentially in the past several years, so have citizens' expectations of the application of that technology. In 2007, being "friends" with or "following" an elected official or governmental body passed for a successful social media interaction. Over time, people have come to expect a quicker and more personal interaction with their governmental officials and organizations. Many times, citizens look to the internet or social media to solve a governmental problem (such as a quality of life issue) which is a different utilization of technology than was used ten or fifteen years ago. While some departments in the City of Bethlehem do an effective job of responding to the citizens of Bethlehem, by and large, we remain behind other cities and municipalities in interacting successfully with our citizens of Bethlehem. Some of that issue is likely inevitable in a world where technology is changing so quickly. Technology is moving quickly and the City has not made it a priority to come up with a comprehensive plan on how to engage our citizens through social media. We must, however, switch from a reactive authoritative system to a proactive interactive system of social media services

if we are going to optimize the current extensive opportunities available for technological citizen engagement.

Why can't the issue of Social Media be looked at with Open Data?

There are many similarities between social media and open data. Both involve computers, technology, and interaction between government and their citizens. They are not, however, the same thing. Open Data is data produced or commissioned by government or government controlled entities that can be used to create something new and innovative. The data is used to accomplish a separate larger goal of the community and the government. Social media centers on websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social interaction. The user goal of social media can often be met through the individual interaction. The difference between the two is stark and understanding the difference is important in comprehending the future goals of the individual mediums as they relate to the City of Bethlehem.

What should be done?

The City of Bethlehem should look at what we currently do now in the field of social media and how we can increase interactions with the members of our community. Potential goals to be included:

1. **Find out what people want.** The world of technology is moving quickly and we increasingly have citizens who receive the majority if not all of their information from their computers and their phones. Finding out what people want from the City of Bethlehem is an important place to start the conversation.
2. **Study other cities.** Many other cities use social media in various ways related to the services that they provide. Looking at what other cities do and the value it brings to the efficiency of their services should be an immediate goal of the city.
3. **Interact with and talk to the members of our community who are actively involved with social media.** The Bethlehem community is filled with many professionals who specialize in social media. They should be utilized for information as well as best practices in determining what the City of Bethlehem is not currently doing well.

4. **Encourage more questions of our community.** Many political leaders and governments throughout the country make open-ended questions a key aspect of their social media presence. Asking questions of our community increases interactions, reach, and effectiveness of our social media efforts.
5. **Post and be willing to respond quicker – ex. disaster related information.** We have not always responded to natural disasters such as snow events as efficiently as we could have or in the same effective way that other cities have. For example, other cities have been constant in interacting and responding to community questions/concerns. Other ideas include creating hashtags such as #SnowBethlehem as a way for community members' questions/concerns/frustrations to be read and directed to city departments or employees with the capability to address that concern.
6. **Encourage more posting of pictures relating to services (leaf collection, code violations, etc.)** The most basic job of a city government is to provide basic city services. For decades, the way people relayed a service concern was by a phone call or a trip to City Hall. Social media allows people to report concerns and complaints instantly. This, however, needs to be done through a concerted effort to **encourage** people to do this. For example, "Please send pictures of garbage violations to #BethlehemTrash" or "Please send pictures of garbage violations in a Direct Message to @BethlehemTrashConcerns"
7. **Create #hashtag days among departments to maximize reach of branding and news #VisitBethlehem #LiveBethlehem #SafeBethlehem, #WalkBethlehem, etc.** Cities have been using hashtags to brand themselves for years. Getting everyone who handles a City of Bethlehem social media account to tweet on the same topic increases not only the branding of Bethlehem but also the reach of important community events.

How should we go about improving our social media operation? It is my belief we should follow the same procedure as outlined previously for Open Data and our Climate Action Plan. Resolution #3 outlines goals to be accomplished in 2017 in the area of social media in the City of Bethlehem. A Social Media team should be created using members of the Administration,

current social media contacts in our individual departments, members of City Council, and, most importantly, people in our community who utilize social media on a daily basis for business. Giving the Social Media Team ample time to study what we do, what other cities do, and create goals for the City of Bethlehem.

There is also an open house at the Banana Factory for the Southside Streetscape Design at 3:30-5:30, but, thankfully, also at 6:30-8:30, so no need to miss out on Tuesday's doin's.