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CITY OF PEMBROKE PINES PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN



CITY OF PEMBROKE PINES
COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION
601 City Center Way

Communications Plan Overview

The City of Pembroke Pines has made communications a strategic priority, with the intent of increasing awareness of the policies and programs of the City and generating enhanced engagement of constituents in the government process. Communications with citizens is a basic obligation of government and an essential part of achieving success in every City project, event, program and activity. Effective and timely communication helps build pride, trust and awareness within the community, increases participation, and contributes to strengthening the quality of life in the community.

This plan was designed as a living document -- Updates to this Communications Plan will be made on a regular, ongoing basis as technologies and communication strategies change to meet expectations of our residents. Staff will make every effort to improve public access to information about the City of Pembroke Pines and its services; assure timely communication with citizens; assure that the City provides clear, accurate and useful information; and enhance transparency of decision-making and outcomes.

The Communications Plan sets the foundation for effective communications for the City of Pembroke Pines and is built upon presence, transparency, openness, and awareness of the City's mission, goals and objectives between the City and all stakeholders involved. The success of the City's long term goals and objectives cannot be met without a strong communications foundation especially in today's digital age, when governments are expected to be open, transparent and effective.

This document primarily addresses communications processes and tools, goals and key messages to provide a unified City identity for our residents, businesses and future members or visitors. It also promotes the importance of a unified brand identity that reflects Pembroke Pines' cultural diversity, community achievements, and unique attributes which strengthens Pembroke Pines' image and fosters a sense of community among the City's residents and businesses. Specifics, regarding the logistics of branding, crisis communications steps, internal policies and employee protocols are described more in-depth in the City's Internal Communications Plan, laying a strong foundation for implementing external communication.

The adoption of this plan is an action that understands the importance of communications, both internal and external, as well as recognizes and embraces the importance of a shared communications vision by administrators, elected officials, city departments and staff. Ever-evolving technology requires a consistent, cohesive strategy to compete with so many other voices, which is why it is important that the City controls and conveys its own voice. One brand. One message. One community. One voice.

A Basic Obligation of City Government

Due to changing technology, cities today are challenged with reaching residents, businesses and visitors through a variety of means quickly and accurately. The City of Pembroke Pines identifies the need to ensure there is an integrated strategic communications plan to meet communication challenges and evolve as needs evolve. The Communications Plan works in partnership with all City departments, taking into account master plan information developed via community input, and City strategic goals.

- **Communication encourages informed participation.** Citizens can more effectively express their needs and work cooperatively with the City when they know the facts about City plans, actions and activities. Communication from the City can start a democratic dialogue, provide useful information and encourage citizen involvement.
- **Communication builds community pride and satisfaction.** The more citizens learn about City services, the better they understand how their tax dollars are used and the better they feel about their government. Educating citizens about City services and successes helps develop a positive reputation for the City and builds pride in the community.
- **Communication encourages growth, attracts good employees, and improves service.** A good reputation through effective communication can also draw people to the community, encourage business development, and attract capable employees who will ultimately strengthen City services. It can also change behavior and perceptions if necessary. Positive and authentic communication ultimately engages residents to be ambassadors for their city – they will promote Pembroke Pines as a desirable place to live, work and play.

Purpose

The primary purpose of the Communications Plan is to guide the City of Pembroke Pines communication organization and execution, as well as to integrate and coordinate communication among all City Departments, Divisions and community organizations. Such foundational concepts help guide the communications approach:

- **Clear and Direct** – the City will always strive to use the most direct and straightforward language in communicating its policies and programs to ensure that all communication is understandable and accessible to the widest possible audience.
- **Proactive** – whenever possible, the city will provide information on emerging issues, and follow up to ensure the most accurate and complete information is available to the public as soon as is possible.
- **Transparent** – the City will be open in communicating its business and make information about the policies, finances and operations of the City available to all citizens, encouraging service on boards and soliciting input via meetings, town halls and surveys.

- **Listening and Learning** – the City recognizes that communications flows two-ways, both providing information and receiving feedback. Listening to residents builds better trust and credibility so the policies and programs created by the City also reflect the needs and wishes of the community.

Communication Objectives

The primary objectives of this plan is to build presence, transparency, openness, and awareness of programming and Commission priorities for the City of Pembroke Pines with its employees, media, constituents, businesses and developers, neighboring communities, and local and regional governments. The following objectives have been developed to guide the communications effort:

- Clearly and effectively tell our story: Ensure the Mayor and Commission’s strategic goals and actions in support of those goals are communicated to the media, the public, funding bodies, internally and externally;
- Establish a clear, cohesive foundation of key messages;
- Be responsive to change through obtaining resident feedback (direct, social media and surveys);
- Communicate the City of Pembroke Pines’ primary values, initiatives, Commission directives and goals;
- Recommend means by which to increase community engagement, promote use of City facilities and programs, and build on positive relationships with businesses, developers, community organizations and other regional governing bodies;
- Position the City of Pembroke Pines as a financially sound, stable, culturally diverse, safe, attractive community for potential and current residents, businesses and visitors;
- Ensure that disseminated information is accurate and timely;
- Provide policies and procedures around media relations, crisis communications and graphic standards.

Key Messages

Effective City communication:

- Aims to improving the quality of life within our communities;
- Strives to create a city which is environmentally sustainable;
- Is forward thinking, progressive and inclusive--delivering information on a range of services and programs for all members of the community;
- Provides and encourages diverse recreational, educational, and cultural opportunities and promotes the maintaining of a full range of municipal services;

- Strives for responsible economic development and aims to enhance economic competitiveness;
- Understands the interconnectivity of our communities in the area;
- Is committed to responsible governance;
- Provides the basis of a positive work environment that encourages teamwork, initiative, productivity and individual development;
- Collaborates with a wide range of partners and communicates the support of initiatives which help deliver a positive, healthy lifestyle and cohesive community.

These strategic goals are incorporated into all City plans and projects, and ensure consistent alignment and effective communication internally and externally.

Communications Tools/Platforms

The City of Pembroke Pines through its Office of Communications achieves effective and cohesive communication by utilizing a wide range of platforms including **social media** (Facebook, Instagram, (Twitter) X, LinkedIn and Next Door); **YouTube**, under Pembroke Pines Media, offers a glimpse into City activities as well as provides important information via creative videos; the City **Website**; digital newsletter **Newsflash** which residents can subscribe to (emailed once a month to nearly 36k residents and businesses in the City); digital newspaper **City Connect** provided in both English and Spanish (was previously printed from Dec. 2011 to Dec. 2023 but now is digitally found on the website 6x a year); **PEG (Public Education Government) TV**; digital **signage** (7 signs placed throughout the City); and **Spotlight**, found on the City website, providing a quick summary of agenda items (including video) from Pembroke Pines Commission Meetings. **Press releases** are sent to media twice a week and posted on the website, with staff maintaining and building cohesive relationships with local reporters. Town Hall meetings and workshops are also useful tools in promoting resident input to ensure a cohesive and effective communications path.

A [Social Media Policy Terms of Use](#) for the public was created and can be accessed via the City's website, and an internal Social Media Policy and internal Digital Signage Policy were created to ensure guidelines are consistently met.

The City's **social media**, in addition to 'stories' and posts, also utilizes advertising when warranted to reach a larger audience and is now looking more closely into (and already has on a limited basis) involving effective social media influencers when promoting a specific special event. Social media followers have grown and continue to grow exponentially (consistently increasing engagement, reach, video plays and overall growth) due to a critical understanding of the platform algorithms – more is not better or effective; each post should be engaging and visually appealing; timing of posts has been adjusted to keep more followers and reach more people.

The City's website was refaced/updated in 2022 and serves as a gateway of information for residents, businesses and visitors. The City's website, www.ppines.com, regularly uploads webcasts featuring board and Commission meetings, highlights special events, a calendar of events, and provides useful information regarding the city's various departments. The website also provides comprehensive information regarding hurricane preparation under Pembroke Pines Prepared, on Child Safety, Mental Health Resources and numerous topics under Resident Resources. It also features "Notify Me," a user-friendly tool that allows users to engage and personalize their experience, as well as the Pines Pal Chatbot, a tool that allows users to ask questions and get answers easily and quickly. Research is currently being done to discover a website platform with user-friendly visual compatibility to mobile devices.

Public Records Law – Archiving Communications

The City of Pembroke Pines complies with this law. Florida's Freedom of Information legislation, originally passed in 1967 and commonly referred to as 'the Sunshine Law' or Florida's Government in the Sunshine Law, requires government agencies (i.e. state, county or municipal board or commission) to preserve public records regardless of physical form. This includes the digital records that are created on social media.

Public Records Law: Florida Statutes Chapter 119

"Public records" means all documents, papers, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, films, sound recordings, data processing software, or other material, **regardless of the physical form**, characteristics, or means of transmission, made or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business by any agency.

External Communications vs. Internal Communications

External communications encompasses all social media, printed media, public relations, media relations, advertising, sponsorships and visual communications. It is how the City communicates externally with target audiences and all who will view the communication. The City also follows a more in-depth internal Communications Plan which includes crisis communications steps, brand standards, logo and city seal use; typography, employee policies, specific protocols, etc. – it is an all-encompassing extension and works hand-in-hand, allowing for comprehensive implementation. Overarching goals and corresponding objectives include:

Authenticity

For potentially controversial or difficult implementations, proactive communication is essential. A good communication strategy is rooted in authenticity, so that any message that comes from the city is consistent, whether it's coming from the Mayor, a member of a board, or a member of staff.

Transparency

The Mayor and Commission—and by extension, every staff member at the City of Pembroke Pines— works for the public. Therefore, having an open door policy and sharing information in an accurate, timely, relevant way to the public is vital.

Consistency

Information: Facts rather than hearsay; statistics rather than speculation; numbers rather than gut feeling. Consistency of delivery is essential when the City communicates its message, regardless of the content.

Media Relations

Positive media relations are necessary for a strong communications strategy, and it is important that the Mayor and Commission, Administration, and project managers receive regular training on media protocol. The City has established and will continue to promote positive relationships with local media reporters. To ensure a cohesive and accurate voice is presented to the media, the City Manager and Office of Communications should be notified of requested interviews from the media to elected officials.

1. The Communications team should always be aware of potential crises as they develop in order to “stay ahead” of the story, as well as to continually be proactive – anticipating resident needs, questions and concerns.
2. Convey the City as a trustworthy source in order to provide correct, current information and, alternatively, correct misinformation
3. Work with media to direct the reader/listener to the City’s website or other channels where the public can seek the information they need or direct public concerns in an appropriate manner.
4. To be unified – all departments are part of the City and no one department should be perceived as separate from the City, it’s goals or messages.

Not all media are the same. Understanding the difference between local, regional, national and international media is critical to effective communications. Local media providers who live and work in or near Pembroke Pines have a much deeper understanding of local issues and a different obligation in their reporting than journalists from outlying areas. The relationship between the City of Pembroke Pines and local media is symbiotic, and it is important that this relationship be nurtured in a positive and professional manner—and that those communicating with local media treat them as partners in communication rather than adversaries.

Mainstream media outlets, in particular, can be more competitive and more driven to find controversial, sensational or unusual items. This is why it is critical that the city deliver a clear message and work with the media in presenting our story properly and professionally, as everything is on the record.

Media Protocol

All incoming media requests should be directed to the City PIO/ Division Director of Communications, City Manager or his/her designee unless received by the designated spokesperson (usually listed as the media contact on a news release). No staff member is to talk to the media unless they are a Department head or are deemed the most appropriate expert by the Department head or by the City Manager or his/her designee.

Media Releases

Media releases have no cost and are effective for generating publicity and awareness about City issues and events. Local media is very responsive to City news releases, and the Communications liaison provides consistent releases to ensure there is always an open line of communication present.

Public Service Announcements

Public Service Announcements (PSAs) are used for community service events or projects disseminated by the media without charge, with the objective of raising awareness, changing public attitudes and behavior towards a social issue. They are useful for communicating public safety information and are most commonly used via Pines Media TV.

Advertising

Online advertising via social media platforms offers the opportunity to target the Pembroke Pines community on selected sites. Messages can be tailored by each campaign and the user can easily click through to the website for further information. Social media ads have been successful in promoting various City events – ads must meet branding standards, the logo vs. the seal is used.

Advertising in official event programs, print media and any other media platforms must meet branding standards and be approved by the City Manager, his designate or Department Head from the Department providing the ad. Currently, there is no central approval or monitoring of ads which can dilute overall branding if branding standards are not followed.

Events

City presence at community events is an important part of engagement, public relations and communicating City projects. If a member of the Commission cannot attend community events, a representative of the City should attend in their place and provide comments on the event.

City events for all age groups are a great opportunity for the community to gather and for the City to shine. Promoting such events via effective communication using a variety of platforms helps ensure participation and allows the City to express its key messages.

Photo Gallery

The adage about a picture saying a thousand words remains true. Furthermore, news releases, social media posts, newspaper articles and PSAs have a greater chance of being run by the media and read by our audience when they include relevant, high-quality images.

Communications staff takes photos and videos, and archives them in the City's Share File for use by all departments, and for promotional and historical purposes.

Website

A website is often the first point of contact for anyone seeking information. The website is the online face of the organization and should aim to be attractive, intuitive, informative and updated at all times. All media, advertisements and information should direct the reader to the website. Content on the City's website is updated on an ongoing basis via each department, and kept up to date with timely news stories, media releases and events listings.

Branding

All printed media shall follow branding standards as laid out in the Internal Communications Plan or the City's Style Guide.

Measuring and Monitoring – Evolving and Updating

As a living document, this Communications Plan will be evaluated periodically and updates will be made accordingly. Evaluation of the plan's effectiveness can be measured by several standards:

- Consistency of brand and graphic standards
- Consistency of external communications and customer service
- Internal staff surveys regarding communication and morale
- Website analytics
- Social media and digital publication analytics
- Relationships with other governance organizations
- Feedback from media
- Feedback from residents regarding access to information
- Public perception