**CITY COUNCIL
STAFF REPORT**

**From: City Manager
Report Type: STUDY SESSION
Lead Department: City Manager**

Meeting Date: April 10, 2023
Report #: 2302-0935

TITLE

Report and Discussion on Community Engagement Activities Planned to Implement the City's Workplans for Calendar Year 2023

RECOMMENDATION

This item is a study session, and no action is requested. Staff recommends that the Council receive a staff report and provide feedback to staff on community engagement activities planned to implement the City's workplans for calendar year 2023.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a summary of community engagement activities planned and underway to further the City's workplans for the calendar year ahead. This update seeks to ensure that ongoing activities are aligned with the Council's expectations for community engagement and advancing workplan priorities.

The report offers both 2022 key achievements (Attachment A) and work planned for calendar year 2023 to build community awareness, enhance civic participation and receive stakeholder input on City decision-making and programs. Approaches include town halls, community information sessions, office hours, neighborhood meetings, online surveys, polls, and digital engagement platforms. These efforts fall into three focus areas:

- topic-based community engagement,
- open-ended engagement such as listening sessions, and
- follow-up/closing the loop on issues raised by community members.

It should be noted that this scope of community engagement is a significant expansion from the approach described last year. In 2022, the second and third bullets above were not explicitly identified as focus areas. For this year's workplan, staff believes it would be helpful to specifically identify and focus on these dimensions of community engagement.

In addition to providing input on the overall alignment of the work provided within this staff report, the Council may want to discuss specific items such as the Neighborhood Town Hall format and planning process, City hosted events as part of the community engagement workplan, and the Palo Alto Community Survey cadence (set annually).

BACKGROUND

Last March, staff presented an annual look-ahead sharing efforts planned and underway on community engagement that further the City's workplans in calendar year 2022[i]. A key and new area of focus was the reimagined and retooled Neighborhood Town Halls effort. The City Council also directed that the Palo Alto Community Survey be funded annually instead of bi-annually with direction to execute a survey in calendar year 2022. Both bodies of work were initiated and accomplished.[ii] On January 28, 2023, the Council adopted a renewed set of priorities for calendar year 2023[iii] and approved an extensive set of objectives that further define projects and focus for the year ahead.[iv] As noted by the list in Attachment A, key achievements have helped inform Council decision-making, further 2022 Council priorities, enhance engagement and community input received, and build City/community connections and relationship building.

Approaches and methods that the City uses for engagement are broad and tailored to the audience, type of input sought, and timing available to gain the feedback to help inform decision-making. The City uses the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) as a guide to structure community participation and align that participation with the type of input or feedback needed based on the project/issue:

- **Inform:** Fact sheets, webpages, blog posts, information sessions, open houses, frequently asked questions, and website feedback forms
  - *Specific example:* The City's website forms are one tool used with currently 115 active forms available on the website gaining input on various topics, such as City Manager Comments feedback[v]
- **Consult & Involve:** Surveys, focus groups, questions and answer sessions, office hours, public meetings like community meetings, town halls, panel discussions, workshops, and polling
  - *Specific example:* OpenGov Online Survey[vi]: A forum to share feedback on specific issues, programs, projects and initiatives. The intended audience is resident-focused and includes an option for residents to follow the platform to obtain surveys via email as they are launched. Current surveys open or recently completed: University Streetscape and Visioning, Recreation Wellness Center, and Wilkie Bridge weather stripping.
- **Collaborate & Empower:** Working groups, ad hoc groups, feedback groups, boards, commissions and committee meetings, community advisory panels, advisory groups, digital engagement platforms, and voter ballot measures.

- *Specific examples:* 2022 voter measures K and L. Business-specific and resident-specific committees on California Avenue/Ramona Street visioning. City Boards, Commissions and Committees.[vii] Palo Alto Digital Forum, an online participatory engagement to enable interaction on major initiatives like fiber and sustainability.[viii]

ANALYSIS

This report shares a set of community engagement strategies planned and underway that:

- Support the implementation of the City's workplans
- Inform City Council decision-making
- Build community through listening and receiving and responding to feedback received
- Enhance civic participation

As part of this report development, staff met with City Council Members to gain their thoughts on what community engagement looks like to them, areas of opportunity for the year ahead, and other items related to this body of work. Several ideas and thoughts are included in this staff report, while balancing staffing and resource limitations.

The City of Palo Alto maintains an extraordinary level of community engagement on specific topics as well as general engagement and ongoing communication on City programs, services and events. From a general engagement standpoint, the City has used several approaches to build community awareness, enhance civic participation and gain feedback. Approaches include town halls, community information sessions, office hours, neighborhood meetings, online surveys, polls, and digital engagement platforms.

Generally, these efforts fall into three focus areas of which the report is organized by:

1. Topic-based community engagement to help inform Council decision-making
2. General engagement such as listening sessions/opportunities that are open-ended
3. Follow-up, closing the loop on issues raised by community members

Section 1. Topic-based community engagement planned to enhance civic participation
City Council Priorities with Community Engagement Identified for the Calendar Year
The following list offers a sample of community engagement items specific to implementing the City's workplan and focused on topic-based engagement. It should be noted that each of the priorities listed also involve multiple City Council and committee discussions as well as other steps.

This summary is an illustration of the volume of communication tied to these efforts and the level of effort anticipated over the upcoming months to engage residents and other key stakeholders.

Community Health and Safety
- Human Relations Commission survey to learn about the lived experience of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (AANHPI) in Palo Alto
- Wellness/Recreation Center
- National Night Out
- Begin Fire Station 4 rebuild
- Palo Alto Link Pilot Program implementation
- Bike and Pedestrian Plan Development
- Rail Grade Separation Quiet Zone Study
- Rail Grade Separation selection of alternatives
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. & Coretta Scott King Artist Residency
- Long term use of the Cubberley property
- Implement a strategy for provision and promotion of unleaded fuel at Palo Alto Airport
- Engage the SFO Roundtable on SFO's Ground Based Augmentation System project

Economic Recovery & Transition
- Economic Development Strategy Development
- University Avenue Streetscape Design Project
- Car Free Streets – California Avenue and Ramona Street

Housing for Social and Economic Balance
- Rental Registry and Renter Protection Outreach
- Revise Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) regulations
- Begin Homekey Palo Alto development

Climate Change & Natural Environment: Protection & Adaptation
- Residential Home Electrification Strategy, including launching of the City's Heat Pump Water Heater Program
- Commercial Electrification Strategy
- S/CAP Plan adoption/approval and implementation of the 3-year workplan
- Earth Day at Rinconada Library and Palo Alto Reads series of events

Budget /Fiscal Sustainability
- Public Hearings, Town Hall and Online Survey
- Stakeholder engagement and new business tax implementation

Department-Specific Community Engagement Identified for the Calendar Year
Many of these items listed below were reviewed as part of the Council discussion on Council priorities at their retreat on January 28, 2023, and as a follow-up to the retreat through the objectives adopted on February 13, 2023.

This list is meant to show examples of policy issues and topics that are tied to department-specific work:

- Rental registry community meetings and outreach (Planning)
- Downtown Housing Master Plan (Planning)
- Development of parking using parking in-lieu fees; potentially in conjunction with an affordable housing project (Planning/Transportation)
- Council certification of the North Ventura Coordinated Area Plan (NVCAP)CEQA document and Plan adoption is targeted for August 2023 (Planning)
- Begin implementation of next phase of parklet regulations to the community (Planning/Public Works)
- Citywide retail zoning code changes (Planning)
- Housing Element adoption (Planning)
- Capital Improvement program engagement such as Charleston/Arastradero Corridor opening (Public Works)
- San Francisquito Creek JPA Neighborhood Workshop and Newell Road Bridge Replacement (Public Works)
- Changes to the revised Tree Protection Ordinance (Public Works)
- Neighborhood traffic safety community outreach (Transportation)
- Fiber Backbone Build Out (Utilities)

Section 2. Listening/Open Ended Engagement

The following list of examples are community engagement planned intended to be open ended and listening sessions.

- **Neighborhood Town Halls:** Hosted by two Council Members and Neighborhood leaders, a series of four community meetings in specific neighborhood groupings is planned this calendar year, to be held quarterly. The audience is intended to be neighborhood-specific and the topics are resident-focused. The second Neighborhood Town Hall was completed on Sunday, March 26, 2023 with the neighborhood areas of Greenmeadow, Greendell, Walnut Grove, Fairmeadow, Charleston Meadow, Charleston Garden, Charleston Village, Adobe Meadow, Meadow Park, and Greenhouse.

- **Community Satisfaction Survey:** The City has a long-standing goal of engaging the community through an annual Palo Alto Community Survey which benchmarks the City against other community surveys, engaging the community through a random sample of community members. Per Council direction in the adopted FY 2022-23 budget, the last survey was completed late 2022 and shared with the City Council on January 23, 2023.

- **Workshops/Open House:** General engagement opportunities and issues or service-based workshops to engage and inform. Recent examples include the Making Better

Choices in Your Home workshop (residential electrification resources) and the re-launch of the Municipal Service Corporation (MSC) Open House in 2022.

- **Palo Alto 311:** This online application reporting tool provide the community a forum to report issues directly and for staff to track, manage reports and follow-up with residents, businesses, and visitors24-hours a day, 7 days a week.[ix] In calendar year 2022, the City received 4,121 requests. Year-to-date as of March 27, the City has received 1,396 requests, many storm-related items.

- **City Service Feedback:** This new online feedback tool and community resource to share customer service experience citywide is intended for all audiences and customers at any City facility or online. Initially launched in Fiscal Year 2021-2022, it was recently expanded to include specific Planning and Development customer service tools. The City Service Feedback tool has received 200 responses from community members providing service level input.

- **Community Information Sessions:** Information sessions are established as a more informal format to share information, gain input and answer questions often on a specific topic. Examples using this type of format include the Storm Update and Q & A session, and Automated License Plate Reader technology information session.

Section 3. Follow-up/Closing the Loop
The following list of items are a mixture of community engagement and communications methods to respond to residents' questions or input and share information.

- **Direct Email/One-On-One Discussions/Virtual Lobby Receptionist:** Staff interact with community members daily, whether they are out in the neighborhood, at a local park or at a City facility, via email, direct meetings, front lobby service requests, and more. All interactions are both gaining input and a level of following-up or closing the loop. In addition, through the pandemic, a virtual lobby receptionist was added to enhance the City's service options and continues today as an important and many times, first point of contact for residents to gain assistance.

- **Digital Newsletters:** Regular outbound communication enables readers to be informed of major issues, upcoming events and community engagement planned. The newsletter is one of several communications methods to inform and engage the community. Staff receive several emails per week from the community, often questions about a topic shared or ideas on future topics. New this year include topic-based newsletters on economic development, housing, and relaunched transportation newsletter.

- **Printed/Mailed Newsletter:** The first edition of the City's newsletter was mailed in the fall of 2022 to all Palo Alto households and shared a variety of updates, with online resources to gain more details. Estimated quarterly cadence.

- **Social Media:** Platforms like Nextdoor, Facebook, and Instagram are opportunities for two-way conversations both for others to engage on posts and send direct messages for staff to answer specific questions from residents. Some of these platforms offer polls and surveys, which the City uses as well.

- **Website/Medium.Com Community Updates:** The City's official websites provide engagement tools and a platform for sharing information. Web forms provide another way to provide input and ask questions. The City's medium.com site offers a similar platform as a website though with social media benefits such as "following" the City or "following" specific topics and sharing input/asking questions through the platform.

Council Discussion

Staff is seeking Council input on community engagement activities planned to implement the City's workplans for calendar year 2023. In addition, the Council could consider sharing feedback on specific items such as the Neighborhood Town Hall Council co-host selection process, City hosted events as part of the community engagement workplan, and the Palo Alto Community Survey cadence (set annually), among other thoughts and feedback.

FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT

The details shared above provide activities planned using existing staff resources. Some additional costs for platforms, materials, event hospitality, and mailers are not included in the FY 2023 budget. Pending the feedback from this study session staff will align recommended resources for these as part of the FY 2024 budget process.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The staff report outlines a series of citywide and department-specific engagement efforts planned to implement the City's workplans.

In addition to the information summarized above, the City looks to neighborhood, educational, and community organizations with existing community connections such as Palo Alto Neighborhoods (PAN), Stanford University, Cool Block, Emergency Service Volunteers, churches, parent groups, and many more to engage and inform. These existing groups share engagement opportunities with their community networks, acting as ambassadors for increased public dialogue and engagement. We will continue to use these and other existing community groups and networks to enhance communications and engagement efforts.

The City's website is a trusted source of information. The community actively uses the City's official site at www.cityofpaloalto.org website with over 800,000 users last year gaining event details, service information, and engagement through online forms, frequently asked questions, white papers, fact sheets, general surveys, the City's new City Service Feedback tool and more. The Community Engagement web page at www.cityofpaloalto.org/engage is a direct connection to the City's Open Town Hall and other ways to connect with the City.

In addition, throughout the year staff host community events and community programs to bring the community together, increase community building, and enhance community pride and civic participation. Examples of events and programs planned for the year, include:

- Citizen Academy (Police)
- Municipal Services Center (MSC) Open House (Utilities)
- Neighbors Abroad Sister City/Sibling City partner and event coordination such as Cultural Day and/or arts (City Manager's Office)
- Safe Streets for All Action Plan (Transportation)
- Safe Routes to School (Transportation)
- Palo Alto Art Center *Food for Thought* exhibits Fall 2023 (Community Services)
- Art Center and Foundation research initiatives to learn more about community needs for arts and culture programs in the current COVID-recovery landscape (Community Services)
- Public Art's King Artist Residency focused on diverse underserved communities residing and/or working in Palo Alto and experiencing socio-economic or housing instability (Community Services)
- California Avenue Murals artwork (a ten-day series) (Community Services)
- Code:ART, October 12-14 in downtown Palo Alto, offering seven interactive installations activating downtown spaces in new and exciting ways (Community Services)
- Cubberley Artist Open Studios/Open House to meet 22 artists that are part of the Cubberley Artist Studio Program, April 29 (Community Services)
- Summer concerts and annual community events (e.g., May Fete) (Community Services)
- Community safety trainings and Emergency Services Volunteer programming. (Office of Emergency Services)
- FireMed Ambulance Subscription Program (Fire)
- Summer Reading Program (Library)
- The Elizabeth Stewart Youth Writing Contest (Library)
- Library-supported National Heritage & Celebration Months and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion programming including celebrations of Lunar New Year, Norooz, Day of the Dead and Diwali (Library)
- Teen Library Advisory Board (Library)

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This agenda item is informational only and is not a "project" requiring review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A summarizes key community engagement achievements in calendar year 2022.

APPROVED BY:

Ed Shikada, City Manager

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[i] Community Engagement Study Session, March 2022: https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=59386&repo=r-704298fc&searchid=cf35652c-7764-4a14-8a05-57846e779fc6

[ii] Palo Alto Community Survey Results, February 2023: www.cityofpaloalto.org/engage

[iii] City Council Priorities 2023: www.cityofpaloalto.org/councilpriorities

[iv] Objectives to advance the 2023 City Council Priorities, February 6, 2023 Staff Report: https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=61656&repo=r-704298fc&searchid=f84c99a9-16d3-400b-a395-4a225d3673a0

[v] City Manager Comments Feedback Form www.cityofpaloalto.org/citymanagerupdates

[vi] OpenGov Open Town Hall Survey, www.cityofpaloalto.org/engage

[vii] City Boards, Commissions and Committees, www.cityofpaloalto.org/bcrecruit

[viii] Palo Alto Digital Forum, https://forum-palo-alto.hub.arcgis.com/

[ix] Palo Alto 311, https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/paloalto311