



SUN PRAIRIE

Ad-Hoc Communications Committee Final Report
October 2025



MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

Dear Reader,

Thank you for your interest in city communications. When my colleagues and I were on the campaign trail, we heard from many of you about feeling disconnected from local government and unaware of what was happening at the local level. While the city utilizes a variety of communication tools, Sun Prairie is a growing community, and we need to make sure our methods are reaching all our residents. This is why I asked the City Council to create an ad-hoc committee to identify these communication challenges and recommend solutions. In May of 2025, the City Council created the Ad-Hoc Communications Committee.

Over the last several months, the committee has met to evaluate the city's existing communication tools and practices in depth. The committee explored alternative means for city communications and discussed accessibility and inclusion enhancements in city communications to reach diverse audiences. The committee offered several recommendations to explore and developed overarching goals for the city's communication efforts. Recognizing limitations of the city's funding and staff capacity, the committee identified priority levels and emphasized areas of initial focus for progress.

As the committee's work comes to an end, I am pleased with their participation and expertise. I am excited about the implementation of its recommendations and thank our members for serving in this capacity.

Sincerely,



Steven C. Stocker, Mayor
Chair of the Ad-Hoc Communications Committee



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ad-hoc communications committee would like to recognize all current and past members for their contributions to this report:

Steve Stocker, Mayor
Cassi Benedict, Alder
Santiago Rosas, Alder
Jule Cavanaugh
Mara Duening
Krystal Johnson
Chris Mertes
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Cora Seibt, SPU Communications
Coordinator, Ex-officio

Bill Baker, Alder
Casey Drengler, Alder
Mariah Boos
Bill Connors
Jennifer Hanson
Patti Lux Mlsna
Theresa McIlroy
Steven Sabatke
Sunshine Anderson, Museum Programming
& Design Coordinator, Ex-officio

The committee would like to thank all those who attended the meetings and the public feedback sessions, provided information to the committee and facilitated the work of the committee:

Scott Kugler – Community Development Director
Ashley Manthei – Communications Manager
Aaron Oppenheimer – City Administrator
Sandy Xiong – Chief of Staff to the City Administrator
Sun Prairie Media Center Staff

Thank you to the Colonial Club and the Sun Prairie Area School District for serving as host sites for the committee’s public feedback sessions.



SUMMARY

The ad-hoc communications committee was created in May of 2025 to enhance city communication efforts to better meet the diverse needs of its residents and provide recommendations on how the community would like to receive information. The committee met nine times over the span of five months. In addition to their regular meetings, the committee held three public feedback sessions to gain insight into how residents currently engage with city communications, their communication preferences, and what improvements they would like to see.

The committee was charged with:

1. Convene experts and advocates to explore how the city can better communicate with the public
2. Examine and assess the city's current communications strategies, practices, and processes including website, social media, and direct messaging tools
3. Explore additional communication tools to publicize City meetings and activities such as a City newsletter
4. Ensure information is accessible to all members of the community, inclusive in both language and ability
5. Assess the preferences of the community in content and delivery method
6. Submit a written report with findings and recommendations to the Common Council

Throughout their meetings, the committee discussed several topics, including:

- Analysis of the city's existing communication tools
- Challenges and opportunities with city communications currently
- Accessibility and inclusion measures to incorporate into the city's communication strategy and processes
- Preferred content and methods of delivery
- Communication goals and recommendations



SUMMARY

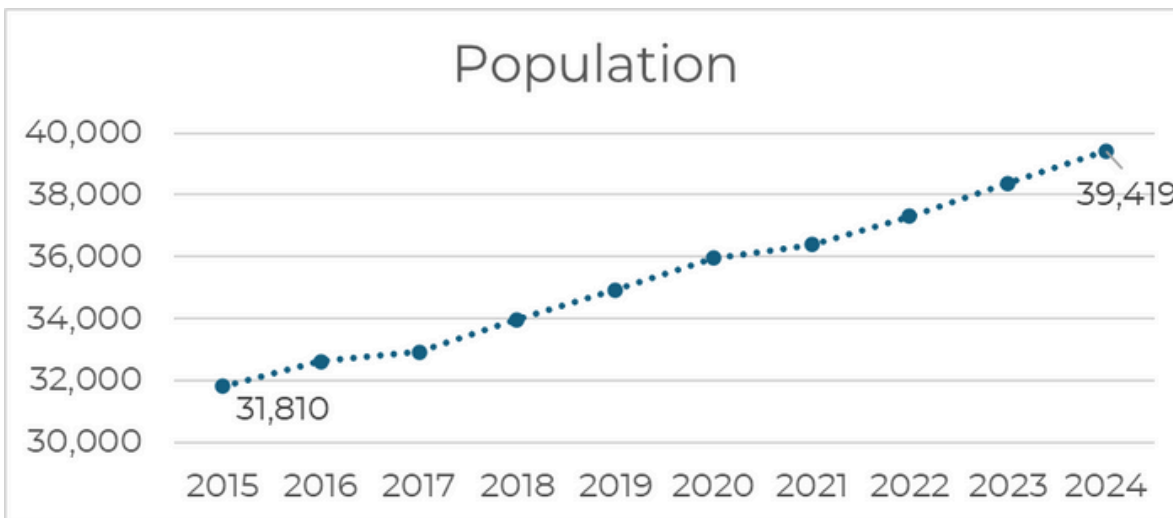
The committee recognizes communication requires effort on both the sender and receiver. While communication is the responsibility of the city, residents ultimately also have a responsibility to be willing to receive the information. With that in mind, the committee and staff recognize that while implementing these strategies will help to improve city communications, residents will need to actively engage with the city to receive information.

The committee ultimately identified several recommendations to advance the city's communication efforts, which are reflected in this report. While the recommendations may be broad in nature, staff will be responsible for developing the steps needed to achieve them along with identifying metrics to measure progress. Many recommendations may require new or additional resources. As such, staff will work with the City Council to provide appropriate funding as budget allows to invest in these efforts.



STATE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Sun Prairie has experienced strong population growth over the last decade, seeing a population increase by 24% since 2015. Projections from the Capital Area Regional Planning Commission (CARPC) show the city will be home to over 54,000 residents by 2040. With a rapidly growing community comes diverse communication preferences and a desire for more city information.



The city has one full-time position dedicated to communications. Sun Prairie Utilities has one full-time position dedicated to communicating Utilities-specific information. The Sun Prairie Media Center consists of the equivalent staff of three full-time employees and several part-time staff to support their operations.

Additionally, staff have established an internal working committee of representatives from across departments who assist with communications in their respective departments to align communications strategy and implementation. This decentralized approach has allowed for more communication across the organization, however, may create inconsistencies and make it more difficult to measure overall effectiveness.



STATE OF COMMUNICATIONS

The city currently uses the following city-owned communication channels to disseminate city information:

Digital

City Website

Social media*

- Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram

E-newsletters*

Press releases

Direct Notification

Email

TextMyGov

Nixle

Sun Prairie Media Center

KSUN Now

KSUN Life

103.5 The Sun Community radio

Print

Recreation Guide (published three times a year)

City Services Guide

Direct mailers (postcards, flyers, public notices, etc.)

Public Meetings

City meetings

State of the City

Earned Media and External Partners

The Star

Visit Sun Prairie

Sun Prairie Chamber of Commerce

Sun Prairie Area School District

Colonial Club

Sunshine Place

**In addition to the city's social media and e-newsletter, several city departments have newsletters and social media pages for their respective departments.*



TARGET AUDIENCES

Understanding the city's audiences and stakeholders is important to ensure that the city is reaching its audience effectively. The committee recognizes that different stakeholders have different needs, priorities, and concerns and may require different communication methods to communicate and engage with them.

The following groups make up the city's target audiences:

Residents of Sun Prairie: The City of Sun Prairie is accountable to the community it serves and desires to cultivate a strong relationship of civic engagement and trust between the two.

Elected Officials: Elected officials represent the community and serve as liaisons between their constituents and the city.

Businesses and Non-Profit/Community Organizations: Sun Prairie is proud to be home to a variety of businesses and non-profit organizations providing services that contribute to our thriving community.

School District and other Government Agencies: Sun Prairie maintains partnerships with the Sun Prairie Area School District and other government agencies including surrounding municipalities, Dane County, state, and federal agencies.

Visitors/Tourists: From our longstanding traditions like Fire & Lights to new ones in the making such as Mural Fest, Sun Prairie is proud to offer a variety of activities year-round for residents and visitors alike.

ANALYSIS

The committee recognizes an increasing need for city information to be accessible and distributed in a timely manner. As a part of their meetings, the committee identified barriers and concerns in the dissemination and access of city information. Comments were also gathered from residents during the public feedback sessions. A summary of this information can be found below:

- Interest – residents have different interests and priorities
- Preference - residents have different ways in which they access information
- Reach – the city currently does not have a mechanism to directly reach all residents in Sun Prairie
- Digital Divide – the committee recognizes the need to engage with residents who do not have internet access or utilize social media
- Language– the city is committed to ensuring city information is accessible and available in different languages
- Information Overload – the 24/7 news cycle and constant flow of information can result in digital fatigue and information overload
- Overabundance of city information – the city has a lot of information out there; it is hard to distill the information to find what is relevant
- City government is complex – residents want to understand how decisions are made and how city operations function
- Timeliness - residents want targeted and timely information to stay informed so they can provide feedback to staff and elected officials



PUBLIC FEEDBACK SESSIONS

The ad-hoc communications committee held public feedback sessions to hear from residents on how they currently receive city communications, the topics they are interested in, and overall satisfaction with city communications.

The committee held three public feedback sessions:

- September 23, 2025 at Colonial Club
- September 24, 2025 via Zoom
- September 29, 2025 at West High School

The sessions were promoted in a variety of ways:

- SPMC radio program hosted by Steve Sabatke
- Highlighted in the August 29 episode of Inside Your City
- Highlighted in September Big5 Newsletter
- Highlighted as news flash on the city website
- Flyers distributed at Colonial Club, Library, City Hall, Sunshine Place, and Westside Community Services Building
- Direct text message via TextMyGov to all subscribers
- Promoted at the September 19, 2025 Sun Prairie West vs. East football game
- Residents could register to receive email reminders on the public feedback sessions

The public feedback sessions included two activities. The first activity was an interactive poll using Slido, a Q&A and polling app. The second activity was a small group discussion led by committee members. Following the public feedback sessions, the committee held its regular meeting. Attendees were welcome to stay for the meeting, if desired. A total of 29 respondents, including committee members, completed the poll. Survey results can be found at the end of the report.

SUMMARY OF COMMITTEE FINDINGS

The committee identified three goals for city communications. These goals are what the committee hopes to achieve with city communications.

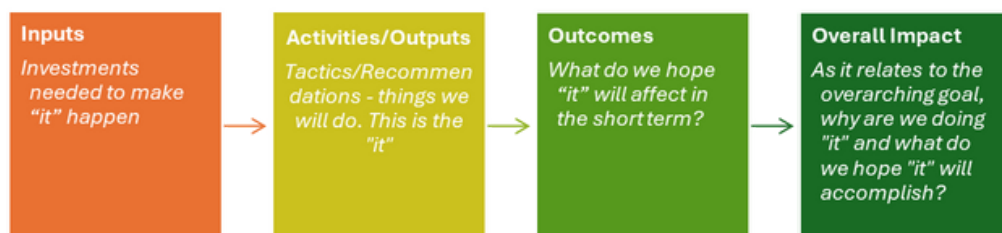
1. **Build public trust:** City government is transparent and trusted by the public
2. **Increase reach and accessibility of information:** The public is well-informed, and information is easily accessible
3. **Build a more engaged community:** Sun Prairie has a high level of civic engagement

The committee identified several recommendations to reach the goals. The recommendations were ultimately grouped into four strategies:

1. Plan and continuously improve communications through strategy, training, and branding
2. Strengthen Website, Digital & Social Media Channels to increase awareness and reach a broader audience
3. Strengthen public understanding and engagement with city government
4. Build partnerships to expand reach

The recommendations are presented in the next several pages using a logic model. The logic model is a framework that can assist with planning and program design. It also serves as a visual representation to communicate the recommendations from the committee. The committee identified the priority level for each recommendation. The committee recognizes some recommendations may require more resources or time to implement. As such, the committee also identified the overall time/effort needed to complete each recommendation. Following the conclusion of the committee's work, recommendations will be implemented as funding and staff resources allow.

At their October 20 meeting, the ad-hoc communications committee approved the recommendations as presented in this report.



Activities/Outputs	Overall Impact	Priority Level	Overall Time/Effort
Strategy #1: Plan and continuously improve communications through strategy, training, and branding			
Tactics – things we will do. This is the “it”	As it relates to the overarching goal, why are we doing “it”/what do we hope “it” will accomplish?	Priority Level – high (now-1 year), medium (1-2 years), low (2-4 years)	Time/Effort dedicated to complete this tactic
Coordinate staff resources and staff expertise to support communication efforts (Internal Communications Committee)	Increase reach and accessibility of information; build a more engaged community	High	High
Build brand voice and tone guidelines	Build public trust; increase reach and accessibility of information; build a more engaged community	High	Medium
Create internal one-pagers to reference for content around hot-button issues	Build a more engaged community	Low	Medium
Maintain a coordinated content calendar via social media software or other tool and develop a policy for social media posting frequency	Increase reach and accessibility of information; build a more engaged community	High	High
Develop platform/channel specific communications strategies and guidelines	Build a more engaged community	High	High
Set measurable goals to track success of communications, adjust communications according to results	Build a more engaged community	High	High

Utilize email lists across departments (identify opportunities to communicate about general city projects/initiatives via department e-newsletters)	Increase reach and accessibility of information	Medium	Low
Develop policy for use of AI in city communications	Build public trust	Low	Low
Strategy #2: Strengthen Website, Digital & Social Media Channels to increase awareness and reach a broader audience			
Leverage Sun Prairie Media Center resources to create more engaging digital content	Build a more engaged community	High	High
Increase outreach to neighboring media channels	Increase reach and accessibility of information	Low	Low
Ensure digital platforms are accessible and are compatible with assistive technologies	Increase reach and accessibility of information	Medium	Medium
Utilize QR codes that track scans and engagement metrics	Increase reach and accessibility of information; build a more engaged community	High	Medium
Conduct a website redesign/overhaul including search optimization	Increase reach and accessibility of information	High	High
Begin advertising and boosting on social via pay-per-click	Increase reach and accessibility of information	Medium	Low
Track engagement on different forms and topics of content to determine public interest. Cater communications strategy to topics and formats that stand out as most engaging.	Build a more engaged community	Medium	Medium

Cross promote different communications initiatives (i.e. Big 5 on Facebook)	Increase reach and accessibility of information	Medium	Medium
Utilize short-form video content as a messaging tool for public information and education	Increase reach and accessibility of information	Medium	High
Create a physical and digital version of a welcome wagon – a hub on city website for key city and school information	Increase reach and accessibility of information	Medium	Medium
Strategy #3: Strengthen public understanding and engagement with city government			
Implement two readings of ordinances before passage at Council	Build public trust	High	High
Following elections, develop methods to introduce new alders to their districts	Increase reach and accessibility of information	Medium	Medium
Develop templates, tools, and training to support alder efforts in communications and outreach	Increase reach and accessibility of information	High	High
Include signage on city properties including city park signs and park-and-ride on how to stay connected	Increase reach and accessibility of information; build a more engaged community	Low	Low
Provide information in Parks, Recreation and Forestry Program Guide	Increase reach and accessibility of information	Low	Low
Host semi-regular forums for residents to communicate with city staff and/or elected officials, including School District as able	Build a more engaged community	Medium	High

Develop policy for translating materials into different languages	Increase reach and accessibility of information	Medium	Medium
Provide materials in alternate formats, such as large print	Increase reach and accessibility of information	High	Low
Develop a plain-language communications policy to break down city jargon	Increase reach and accessibility of information	High	Medium
Strategy #4: Build partnerships to expand reach			
Partner with civic groups to share city information and engage trusted leaders in underrepresented communities to serve as communicators (community ambassadors, Neighborhood Navigators)	Build public trust; Increase reach and accessibility of information; Build a more engaged community	High	Low
Utilize Chamber of Commerce communication methods	Increase reach and accessibility of information; Build a more engaged community	Medium	Low
Collaborate with Sun Prairie Area School District	Increase reach and accessibility of information; Build a more engaged community	Medium	Low
Leverage Sun Prairie Media Center channels to expand reach of content	Increase reach and accessibility of information; Build a more engaged community	Medium	Medium
Utilize local business bulletins	Increase reach and accessibility of information	Low	Medium
Utilize utility bills and library as a resource for communications method	Increase reach and accessibility of information	High	Medium

Post flyers at apartment buildings, businesses, churches and nonprofits	Increase reach and accessibility of information	Medium	Medium
Advertise with Madison Metro	Increase reach and accessibility of information	Low	Low
Coordinate with newspaper staff (The Star) to publish monthly column and identify regular circulation opportunities	Increase reach and accessibility of information	High	Low
Collaborate with Colonial Club on their monthly newsletter	Increase reach and accessibility of information	Medium	Low

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The Ad-Hoc Communications Committee has dedicated significant time and effort to understanding the city's communication tools and providing recommendations to enhance city communications. These next steps lay the foundation for long-term success in advancing the city's communications.

Based on discussion with the committee and feedback from the public feedback sessions, staff have identified three initial recommendations to begin implementation:

- Coordinate staff resources and expertise with the Internal Communications Committee
- Address website and conduct overhaul of pages
- Leverage Sun Prairie Media Center resources

Staff will provide updates to the City Council and community to inform them of progress at regular intervals. As a living document, this work will be ever evolving based on the emerging needs of the organization and community. This report concludes the work of the ad-hoc communications committee.

City of Sun Prairie, Wisconsin

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE CREATION OF AN AD-HOC COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

Presented: May 20, 2025

Adopted: May 20, 2025

Resolution No.: 25/045

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the City of Sun Prairie is seeking input from community members on enhancing city communication efforts to better meet the diverse needs of its residents; and

WHEREAS, the City of Sun Prairie is committed to maintaining a transparent government that communicates clearly and effectively with residents about local government operations such as municipal finances, city events, programs, and activities; and

WHEREAS, the outcome of the committee's work will support the city's effort in informing the community, enhancing public trust, and encouraging civic engagement.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Common Council of the City of Sun Prairie, Dane County, Wisconsin, that an Ad-Hoc Communications Committee is created to assess and provide recommendations on how the community would like to receive information.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the committee shall consist of the Mayor who shall serve as chairperson, up to four alderpersons to be appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by Council, up to 12 residents to be appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by Council, and city staff who will serve as non-voting advisors to the Committee.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Ad-Hoc Committee on Communications has the following purpose:

- 1. Convene experts and advocates to explore how the city can better communicate with the public;
2. Examine and assess the city's current communications strategies, practices, and processes including website, social media, and direct messaging tools;
3. Explore additional communication tools to publicize City meetings and activities such as a City newsletter;
4. Ensure information is accessible to all members of the community, inclusive in both language and ability;
5. Assess the preferences of the community in content and delivery method; and
6. Submit a written report with findings and recommendations to the Common Council by October 21, 2025.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this committee will dissolve on November 1, 2025.

APPROVED:

Signed by: Mayor Steven C. Stocker
Steven C. Stocker

Date Approved: May 20, 2025

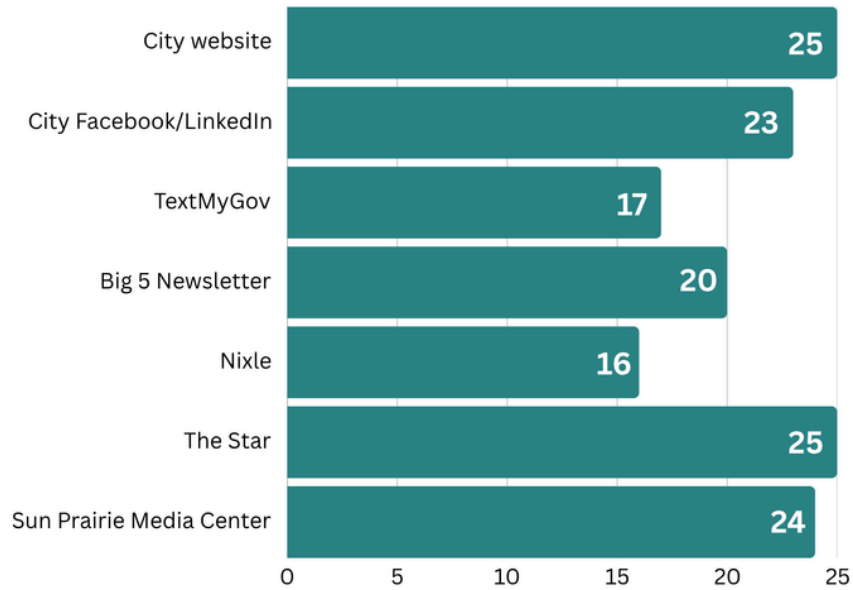
Date Signed: May 28, 2025

This is to certify that the foregoing resolution was approved by the Common Council of the City of Sun Prairie at a meeting held on the 20th day of May 2025, and was submitted for signatures on the 28th day of May 2025.

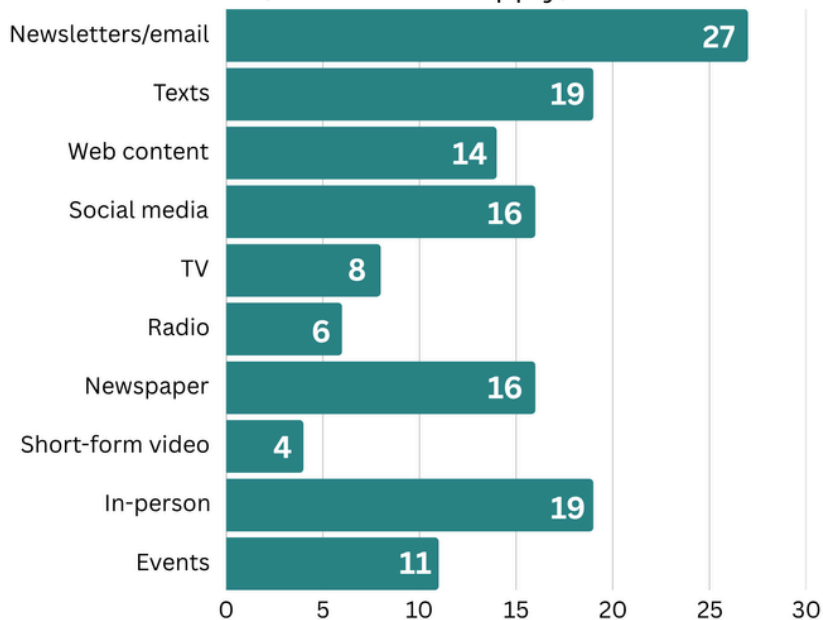
Signed by: Elena Hilby
Elena Hilby, City Clerk

SURVEY RESULTS

Which city communications channels were you aware of prior to this evening? (select all that apply)



In what format do you like to receive information? (select all that apply)

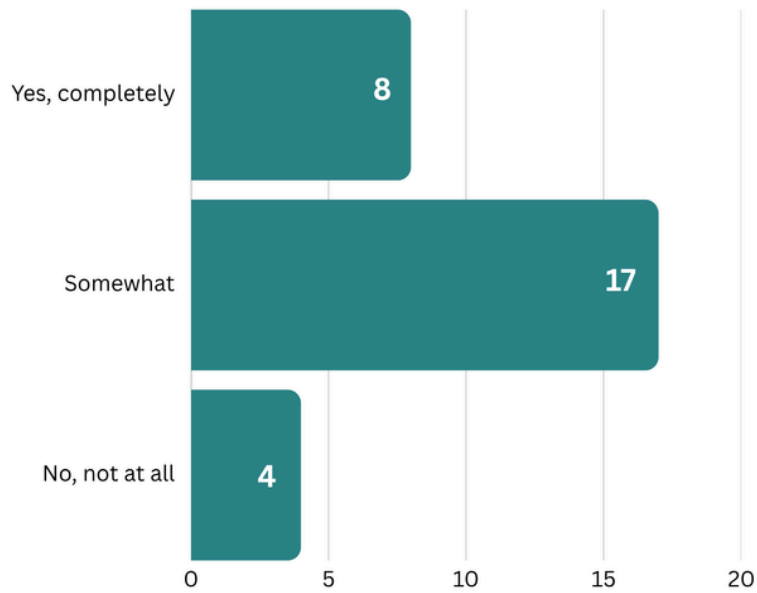


SURVEY RESULTS

What information/topics are you most interested in?
(rank in order of importance)



Do you feel well-informed about city meetings, events, operations, projects, and initiatives?



SURVEY RESULTS

Rate your overall satisfaction with how the city communicates (1-5 scale, 1 being entirely dissatisfied, 5 being completely satisfied)

3.13



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION FINDINGS

What do you like about how you currently get communications from the city?
What are some areas of opportunity for improvement? Please share real examples if possible.

SUCSESSES

- Residents appreciated the Sunshine Place listening sessions and would like to see more town halls with their alders
- Huge improvement in how information/complex topics are broken down in meetings and on social media
- Appreciation for different communication channels which can also pose challenges on where to look for information
- Utilization of electronic traffic signs on Main Street and Highway 19 for special events/information

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Educating residents on what communication tools are available
- City website navigation and search function
- Over-abundance of outdated or old information on city website
- Getting information to residents not on social media or without internet access
- Need to leverage Sun Prairie Media Center resources
- City operations and services can be complicated, residents would like to see more processes explained so they understand how the city functions
- Ways to introduce and engage new residents who have just moved here
- Opportunities to provide feedback before policy approval or project implementation

Communication is a two-way street – and we all have a role to play! Let's discuss what might prevent you from staying informed on city matters, and how we can work together to improve that. We'll start by completing this sentence, "I would be more engaged with city government if..."

- "I understood how city government worked."
- "There was one trusted resource I could go to."
- "The city website was not so bogged down."
- "I felt like I was being listened to."
- "I knew about popular or controversial issues sooner."
- "I knew how things impacted me."
- "Information went out sooner."

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION FINDINGS

Over the course of several meetings, the committee has identified these three topics as top priorities moving forward:

- Build public trust
- Increase reach and accessibility of information
- Build a more engaged community

Based on what you've learned here tonight, would you agree that these are the correct priority areas? Why or why not?

Residents concurred with the goals presented at the public feedback sessions. They want to hear from their alders and want to be able to easily access city information. Residents want to ensure the city's strategy focuses on reaching as many residents as possible.