



To: Mayor and Council

Agenda Item #: V. B.

From: Jordan Gilgenbach, Communications Coordinator

Action

Date: Sept. 16, 2015

Discussion

Subject: "Speak Up, Edina" Report

Information

Action Requested:

Receive report on August 2015 "Speak Up, Edina" discussion about interactions with elected city officials.

Information / Background:

Since June 2012, the City of Edina has used the online engagement website, www.SpeakUpEdina.org, to collect ideas and opinions from residents. One of the City Council's six strategic priorities for 2014-2015 is Communication and Engagement: "To clearly understand community needs, expectations and opinions, the City will consistently seek the input of a broad range of stakeholders in meaningful and interactive communication." A goal of that is to host a monthly discussion on www.SpeakUpEdina.org.

In August 2015, the discussion topic centered on residents' interactions with elected city officials. Edina's elected officials make decisions based on staff recommendations and on resident feedback. Their goal is to represent the residents of Edina. In order to understand community sentiment, they often rely on feedback they receive from the community. The Mayor and City Council interact with the public through "Community Comment" and public hearings during meetings; other public meetings, open houses and events; "Walk with the Mayor" events; written communications, including letters and emails; www.SpeakUpEdina.org; and others. In this discussion, the City posed the following questions:

- Do you contact your elected city officials? If so, how often?
- How do you prefer to interact or express your opinions to elected city officials?
- What other opportunities would you like to see to be able to interact with the City Council?

The discussion was open for comments between July 30 and Sept. 7. During that time, 41 comments were made. Additionally, 808 users visited the site 1,084 times, garnering 4,081 page views. All but one commenters in this discussion were from Edina.

Attached are the comments for the discussion.

Interaction with Elected City Officials

Closed Sep 05, 2015 · Discussion · 18 Participants · 3 Topics · 41 Answers · 5 Replies · 13 Votes

18

PARTICIPANTS

3

TOPICS

41

ANSWERS

5

REPLIES

13

VOTES

SUMMARY OF TOPICS

INTERACTION METHODS

 8 Answers · 0 Replies

How do you prefer to interact or express your opinions to elected city officials?

Joel Stegner · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55435) · Aug 04, 2015 5:23 pm

 0 Votes

In writing or in one on one or special feedback meetings. I cannot attend Council meetings, as they are so long and I have another commitment on their meetings. I also never pass up the opportunity to participate in focus groups, surveys, planning meetings and Speak Up Edina, all of which I think are under promoted and utilized. I also communicate with staff when I hope to influence how they are approaching certain key topics such as Grandview. I have found staff very receptive to this. It works better than Communicating just to the Council and hope my ideas are forwarded to staff.

Ted Adams · Citizen · (Postal Code: unknown) · Aug 08, 2015 2:05 pm

 2 Votes

I would like to be able to write to the city council via email, particularly in response to a request (via email) for comments on whatever is the current issue.

Barbara La Valleur · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55435) · Aug 25, 2015 3:08 pm

 0 Votes

It depends upon the issue. If I need a response in writing, I'll email. If it's to express an opinion, I've found a personal (phone or in person) conversation valuable and I also use text and voice mail.

Cindy Perusse · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55436) · Aug 27, 2015 12:38 pm

 0 Votes

I usually prefer my first contact to be by email. My approach is similar to Barbara's

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Hope Melton · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55424) · Aug 27, 2015 1:09 pm

👍 0 Votes

What type of contact I use depends on the issue involved and whether or not there is a public participation process. Contact with individual council members via email or phone is important, but public interaction, such as within a town meeting, is also essential.

stephanie mullaney · Citizen · (Postal Code: unknown) · Aug 31, 2015 9:58 am

👍 0 Votes

I prefer emails, but I would hope when I send items to be included in packets, there would be follow up discussions pursued. I did not find that to be the case. There needs to be REAL public meetings, where the public is invited to attend and to truly discuss what is on their minds, with all the council members attending. It feels like to me, that there is very little opportunity for a regular ol citizen to be able to speak about items that are current. There are rules about what you can talk about at council meetings, rules about how many council members can be at meetings, etc. We have not had a public hearing on Grandview for 3 years. I would like to see a TRUE open communication venue available.

Chris Bremer · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55410) · Aug 31, 2015 12:43 pm

👍 0 Votes

I prefer face-to-face conversations, as I feel I learn more that way. Once I've met a council member, email can be a good vehicle for continuing a conversation. Public meetings are a good thing, but it is hard to tell which points were really taken in by council members. Sometimes I have wondered whether a particular meeting is really about gathering input or more about creating buy-in (not always a bright line, I know). Also, sometimes these meetings seem overly structured with too little time for discussion.

Jim Stromberg · Citizen · (Postal Code: unknown) · Aug 31, 2015 7:46 pm

👍 0 Votes

I think I like email the best, as it allows me to clearly state what I wish to convey. It also provides me and the entity I'm writing to a "hard-copy" of the topic I'm addressing. However, I DO feel that attending a meeting (Council or Commission) and voicing my concern or point of view, is important, as it lets those folks know that I care enough to be present at their meeting(s) to address those concerns.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

🗨️ 13 Answers · 1 Replies

What other opportunities would you like to see to be able to interact with the City Council?

Joel Stegner · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55435) · Aug 04, 2015 5:26 pm

👍 0 Votes

Kevin S. has been willing to meet for coffee to discuss ideas. I hope that other Council

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members are willing to do this occasionally - I had the temerity to ask - not everyone would.

Donna Callender · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55436) · Aug 11, 2015 7:02 am

👍 1 Votes

Dunk tank, anyone? At least it would get their attention.

Barbara La Valleur · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55435) · Aug 25, 2015 3:12 pm

👍 2 Votes

One possibility is during City Council meetings, for the Council structure to be more flexible to change the agenda order. I've attended numerous meetings where a large number of people are attending for an item that doesn't get addressed until after 10 p.m. or even later....even after midnight! It seems to me that there could be a way for a change of order in the agenda to bring those items to the beginning of the evening.

Barbara La Valleur · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55435) · Aug 25, 2015 3:12 pm

👍 0 Votes

should

Barbara La Valleur · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55435) · Aug 25, 2015 3:13 pm

👍 1 Votes

...also perhaps an "edit" button for this venue when you see you've made a typo

Response:

Jordan Gilgenbach · Admin · (Postal Code: 55424) · Aug 26, 2015 4:39 pm

Thanks for your comment, Barbara! I'll let our vendor know of this.

Barbara La Valleur · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55435) · Aug 26, 2015 5:30 pm

👍 0 Votes

Thanks, Jordan!

David Frenkel · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55424) · Aug 27, 2015 9:42 am

👍 0 Votes

This forum gets very few responses. I would suggest trying another method of getting feedback from residents such as more town hall forums. The mayor, city council and staff hold very few public meetings in the community out of city hall.

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Hope Melton · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55424) · Aug 27, 2015 1:24 pm

👍 3 Votes

I agree with David. Why is this discussion being held during high vacation season?

I also agree that we need more public forums.

I don't think the issue is whether or not we need more types of opportunities for interaction. The issue is whether the Council uses the venues we have--both individual contact and public interaction--with integrity. If the information gathered from public venues is ignored, as when 4-5 people having private conversations with a council member on a given topic is given equal or higher weight, when the council member votes, than the response of hundreds via surveys or public venues, something is wrong with the system.

Now I understand that the majority is not always right, and there are times when an elected official must follow their conscience and good judgment when making a decision to vote for or against an issue of public policy. But their reasons for doing so should be clearly and publicly stated.

Hope Melton · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55424) · Aug 27, 2015 4:06 pm

👍 1 Votes

These are all helpful questions but they assume one-to-one contact between an individual and their council member(s). These are private interactions regarding public issues. What's missing is the essence of democracy. That is publicly held debate and discussion.

Democracy and civil society is built upon relationships of trust, respect, reciprocity and responsibility--or accountability--that are developed over time. The public dimension is when we come together to reason and debate policy issues that, ultimately, affect us all as a community of individuals. Individual contact is essential, but it's less than half the story.

stephanie mullaney · Citizen · (Postal Code: unknown) · Aug 31, 2015 10:06 am

👍 2 Votes

I agree about the order of the city council meetings. Also, the inability to talk about anything currently being worked on is not helpful. As I said in the other issue post, there needs to be TRUE communication between the city and the people.

What I have gleaned from the Grandview process is that "public input" meetings are not for public input. Then, when a few people get deeply involved in an issue, the council believes that, though they truly represent the MAJORITY of the public with respect to city-run survey numbers, that the Council believe they are just a small very vocal group that don't represent public opinion.

I have taken away from this process that since the Council reps are elected officials, that they have the power to make the decisions because they were elected. The city asks for input, but public input is NOT used in their decision making.

If the Grandview process represents the public process, the process is sorely lacking. It

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has certainly left a bad impression on me as a citizen that tried to get involved in a community effort, but felt very little impact.

Chris Bremer · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55410) · Aug 31, 2015 1:01 pm

👍 1 Votes

Public meetings are very important but sometimes they are too big for real conversation. I wonder if it might be worth trying to have multiple rooms available, each with a facilitator and a city council member (and maybe a city staff member, depending on the topic), for more focus-group type discussions. The the results from the multiple groups could be looked at together for similarities and differences. I think one could have more confidence in the outcome of such discussions if similar results came out of multiple conversations.

Jim Stromberg · Citizen · (Postal Code: unknown) · Aug 31, 2015 8:00 pm

👍 0 Votes

Truly a difficult item to discuss. I have always felt that decision-makers making decisions based on feedback from a very small segment of the population they serve is problematic. Do twenty vocal individuals with a certain point of view reflect the feelings of a majority? No one knows. And, the difficulty, of course, is that in responding to the twenty, how do you possibly know if you're talking to twenty or a thousand? I don't envy Council or Commission in seeking information from those they represent - it's troublesome to move in one direction, not knowing if it is the correct direction. So...asking for info is important. Having the most tools available to your public to utilize in contacting you is also important. THEN...please recognize that a couple dozen citizens saying one thing may not represent what another thousand might feel. And this forum of "Speak-Up" has such a low participation rate, that trying to glean useful direction might be folly.

CONTACT

🗨️ 20 Answers · 4 Replies

Do you contact your elected city officials? If so, how often?

Joel Stegner · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55435) · Aug 04, 2015 5:16 pm

👍 0 Votes

I am on a commission, so .I regularly review Council agenda and minutes, fairly often providing written feedback - rather than attending long council meetings. I also get member Staunton's newsletter and have meetings with him.

Joan McMillan · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55435) · Aug 06, 2015 5:01 pm

👍 1 Votes

I recently e-mailed all council members and the mayor concerning the huge earth moving trucks and dump trucks parading by on 76th street all day long. A constant parade which forced me to leave my home for days on end as the noise was horrible--two very large heavy noisy trucks at a time every 10 to 15 minutes! The only response I received was from the Edina Safety Commissioner who related to me that

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Edina had numerous multi-million dollar projects happening in this end of town and that was that. The intersection of 76th and Edinborough Way crosses to the Centennial Lakes park and many of the owners of the 392 units here like to cross the street to enjoy the park and I pointed out that the children from the Edinborough Day Care cross this intersection as well--numbering about 15-20 little people with their caregivers. This did not impress our safety commissioner as these were "multi-million" dollar projects --most of them apposed by the residents. If the city builds condos across the street from a park--please relocate the truck lanes. I think this must be the most crossed intersection in all of Edina. And no one from the city council nor the mayor responded. To be fair--the mayor is normally more responsive than this.

Response:

David Frenkel · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55424) · Aug 06, 2015 10:52 pm
Who is the Edina Safety Commissioner?

Lisa Nelson · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55436) · Aug 06, 2015 7:55 pm

👍 4 Votes

I was disappointed to hear that when the Park Board wanted to discuss Grandview, they were told by the City Manager/City Council not to. I understand that these boards are only advisory, but I don't believe that anyone should be limiting the discussions by them. The members are frequently more knowledgeable in their area of expertise and have different networks which can bring other information and opinions in to discussions. Although I think email, voicemail, speak up and community forums are valuable, my sense is that there is an "inner circle" whose voices predominate over all of those.

Lisa Nelson · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55436) · Aug 06, 2015 8:15 pm

👍 3 Votes

I have not been active in the Grandview discussions, but I did attend two of the open houses. I don't think there was an opportunity to talk to council members at the Community Center, but there was at the Senior Center open house. I did approach two members, both of whom didn't welcome my questions and seemed exasperated that they had to listen because they felt they had all the input they needed and had already made their decision. They bordered on hostile and, based on that experience, I am not eager to approach council members. I don't think they respect their constituents' opinions, but rather those of the staff. While staff may have a lot of information, it is what residents VALUE that should govern decisions.

Response:

Donna Callender · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55436) · Aug 11, 2015 7:00 am
I was also at the Senior Center Grandview open house, and you're absolutely right. The entire thing was structured to discourage questions and comments. Two of the organizers were even a little giggly as they conspired ahead of time about using applause for each other to end questions, just in case anyone tried to start an unauthorized discussion. (Note to the Council: If you're going to sabotage your own process, look around and make sure there aren't any citizens within earshot.)

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Marlys Grantwit · Citizen · (Postal Code: unknown) · Aug 07, 2015 6:30 am

👍 0 Votes

comment...I like "Walk with Mayor" because I can discuss an issue easily with him. Otherwise I call the City Hall and talk to the correct staff member or write a letter. That is sufficient for me.

Andrew Brown · Citizen · (Postal Code: 67204) · Aug 11, 2015 7:09 pm

👍 0 Votes

I think the Mayor & the City Council try to do their best. Even though I can be very heavy handed in my communication & completely disagree with some of their decisions they have always treated me with respect. I have gradually learned about the many pulling forces the City leadership face between Hyper active developers, demands for services, & the influence of the Met Council & State policies. They get pulled in many directions, I hope they can somehow focus on core issues, transportation, density & keeping Edina great and connected to the state and the region and I think they worry about that too. I'm concerned about the liquor business, because of the new external market forces that have changed the business but I think Bob Stewart can help guide with his business experience there. The Mayor & Council care about Edina & I respect and appreciate that.

Barbara La Valleur · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55435) · Aug 25, 2015 3:06 pm

👍 0 Votes

My experience over the past 10+ years living in Edina has been very positive in terms of communicating with and hearing back from City Officials whether it's Mayor Hovland, City Council members or city staff. Whether it's a call, text, email or one-on-one conversation, my questions are always answered and I tip my hats off to all of them and thank them for their service. On another note, I live at 76th & Edinborough Way and while we have experienced heavy truck traffic the past couple of months, I'm thrilled that Minnesota Drive and now Edinborough Way are receiving new surfaces. I'll happily put up with a few weeks of noise to have a smooth driving surface for years to come!

Hope Melton · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55424) · Aug 27, 2015 10:25 am

👍 0 Votes

I have frequently interacted with elected officials regarding the Name Your Neighborhood, Valley View/Wooddale, and Grandview projects. I've mostly talked with Council members directly, usually at scheduled events, or corresponded through email.

While the first two projects were successful by any measure--Grandview was bungled from the onset. For a project of its size and importance, there should be widespread, open, and comprehensive public discussion. Not only did that never occur, the public input data from several meetings and city-wide surveys was consistently ignored. There were multiple advisory committees involved, but every time they leaned towards the creation of a 21st century community center, they were abandoned and reconstituted. These are simply two examples from many (also cited in other's comments above) that left the impression that somewhere along the line, a back room deal was done for private development of the site. That is unacceptable.

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Cindy Perusse · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55436) · Aug 27, 2015 12:32 pm

👍 0 Votes

I have contacted city officials twice during the discussion about naming neighborhoods and when I had a question about placing a neighborhood entry sign. I went to the meetings and stopped into city hall to speak to someone in person. I don't regularly contact city officials though. If I had a particular concern I would probably just email them first.

stephanie mullaney · Citizen · (Postal Code: unknown) · Aug 31, 2015 9:55 am

👍 0 Votes

Since I became involved in the Grandview issue, i have been in contact with the city council and city officials on a regular basis. Mostly through emails at least once a month, abd occasional meetings with council members. Attended the Grandview public meetings, but they were hardly a venue for any type of two way discussion.

Chris Bremer · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55410) · Aug 31, 2015 12:28 pm

👍 0 Votes

In the past two years I have become engaged in the work of our neighborhood association and as a result I have contacted one or more city council members almost monthly about items of specific interest to our neighborhood. These interactions have all been positive and informative.

Lois Ring · Citizen · (Postal Code: unknown) · Aug 31, 2015 12:53 pm

👍 0 Votes

Occasional contact. I have had the best feedback from Bob Stewart. Negative response from Ann Swenson - almost get the feeling she does not care to hear my point of view.

Marilyn Listvan · Citizen · (Postal Code: 55436) · Aug 31, 2015 2:54 pm

👍 0 Votes

limited to no contact --- except for "voting" down sidewalks on our street-curbing project --

I am frustrated that there seems to be no motivation to limit the "Mc-Mansion" developments in Edina --- keeping lower cost housing or a balance of housing cost ranges does not seem to be part of the political philosophy --- and I recognize that more expensive homes reap more tax dollar\$ for the city,yet it almost seems like a conflict of interest that city officials willy-nilly approve any property expansion. without taking into account some balance (e.g. how can younger families afford to move into a community if only "Mc-mansions" are available----or if developers scoop up older homes as tear-downs before they are even on the market)

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Laura Lehmann · Citizen · (Postal Code: unknown) · Aug 31, 2015 6:19 pm

👍 0 Votes

I have lived in Edina for 23 years. A few issues have been addressed promptly (e.g., sod killed by street construction). Most others were either quite prolonged (months for permission for a 3-inch change to setback from street when remodeling garage - had to meet with inspector, get permission of neighbors in 1000-foot radius, attend variance meeting and say why it was necessary) or ignored (had neighbor who built McMansion with hideous cement wall facing outward - I advised city of his disregard of state statute/city ordinance for best side of fence facing outward and was told I should have brought it to their attention when the wall was being built so they could send an inspector!) I waited over 5 hours to testify at a city council meeting, and was given 2 minutes to ask that Edina adopt a resolution of support for the usual referendum process in the question of a sales tax to build the Twins Ballpark (and not support a referendum waiver). I pay a lot of taxes, but don't feel especially heard by the entity that collects them.

Laura Lehmann · Citizen · (Postal Code: unknown) · Aug 31, 2015 6:25 pm

👍 0 Votes

As an addendum to above, I attended the neighborhood meeting held for input to the re-do of W 70th Street, and one regarding the development of the area behind Byerly's. I felt our suggestions fell on deaf ears. It seemed the city already had a plan, and meant to stick to it.

Jim Stromberg · Citizen · (Postal Code: unknown) · Aug 31, 2015 7:40 pm

👍 0 Votes

I do write to the Council or Planning Commission when an issue comes to my attention that I wish to address. I have also attended both Council and Commission meetings to voice my thoughts on issues being considered or discussed at those meetings. I would guess that I have made contact about a half dozen times over the last two years.