

Faribault Daily News Column
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Tim Madigan, City Administrator

Effective City Communications

The City of Faribault was recently recognized for the open and public process used in selecting the new Chief of Police, Dan Collins. A panel made up of Faribault Correctional Facility Warden Connie Roehrich, Rice County Attorney Paul Beaumaster, and Civil Service Commission member Wade Karli, provided citizen input in the selection process.

We used the same process in selecting Tim Murray for the City Engineer position. Community input was provided by James Wolf CEO at District One Hospital, Darlene Meillier Vice President at State Bank of Faribault and Todd Markman, President of Reliance Bank.

The above approach is just one example of the efforts made by the Mayor, City Council and city staff to maintain a fluid process of communication with the Faribault community.

In 2007, the City Council and city employees carried out many successful projects that have laid the groundwork for several major initiatives in 2008. The successes of past projects are due, in part, to the use of open processes and effective communications.

Take, for example, the various improvement concepts centered on our downtown district in recent years. The City has been in constant communication with the downtown community regarding these initiatives through a consultant study, a task force and countless meetings. As with all complex development projects, challenges arise when attempting to keep all stake-holders informed and involved throughout the process. If and when someone is left out of the communication loop, every effort is made to take a step back and bring those left out up to speed.

Effective communications and openness in government is not reserved for special projects; it is a way of life for our municipal organization.

In addition to live broadcasting of regular city council meetings on channel 10-FCTV, and providing open access to the local news media, the City Council and staff are constantly searching for new ways to interact with the public. Fortunately, changing technology allows us to explore new lines of communications.

A few weeks ago, for example, the City's new web site was rolled out. The easy to read and navigate web-site offers the community a wealth of information and data on city services and area activities. It also provides information on how to contact various city representatives. Check the new site out at faribault.org and let us know what you think.

Despite ever-advancing technology, we still use the old fashion methods to communicate. The award winning Buckham Bulletin, for instance, is a joint venture with the Faribault Public Schools and is mailed to every household in the city and school district. One of the unique things about the Buckham Bulletin is that in addition to providing information about city and school district activities,

it presents a full range of events and activities by Faribault non-profit groups. Essentially, the Bulletin (now in its tenth year of service) is a one-stop shopping guide for what is happening in Faribault.

Community groups should be aware that the Mayor, Council members, and city employees are available to speak to civic clubs on a wide range of issues such as economic development, recreation, library services, public works and public safety. If you are interested in having a representative from the City speak to your group, please contact Lorri Smith, Administrative Assistant, at 333-0353, to arrange for a speaker.

I should note that at times we are careful in releasing information to the public. We are protective of City employee data for example, and we follow the direction set forth in the State law on the release of employee information. When the City is involved in a lawsuit, information is released through the judicial process, instead of by the City Council or staff. Of course we try to conduct labor negotiations directly through employee representatives rather than through the local media.

Does the City always get our communication processes right? No, but not from lack of trying. Even those who are critical of decisions made by the City officials know they will have an opportunity for their concerns to be heard. Because we take public service seriously, feel free to contact any city representative through our web-site, in writing, by phone, or in person if you have a question or concern. My phone number is 333-0355 if you wish to speak to me directly.