City of North Plains

Strategic Communications Plan

March 1, 2020 - March 31, 2021

Presented by

PRICHARD
Communications for a better world
**Designated Communications Staff Member**

Hiring a communications coordinator, firm or volunteer will free you up to focus on high-level communications strategy and plan oversight. We recommend hiring a designated communications staff member this spring who can focus on implementing the plan, creating content and coordinating communications.

**Budget**
- Communications Coordinator: $40,000 - $50,000
- Firm: $3,375 - $6,750 per month or $40,500 - $81,000 annually

**Community Management & Messaging**

With two distinct audiences and a growing population, it’s important that you have a community management protocol and messaging guidelines in place. Along with recommending basic updates such as adding an info@northplains.org email address and creating a basic style guide, we created a community management protocol and suggested FAQs that you can adapt to your needs and staff capacity.

**Website & App**

Redesigning or restructuring your website will better guide visitors to the information they’re seeking. We recommend prioritizing top pages such as FAQs, news and events in the redesign. With an annual spike in website traffic on July 4, we suggest making initial updates by this date. To complement the website redesign, we recommend that you gauge community interest in an app.

**Budget**
- Website overhaul: $20,000 - $40,000
- Website redesign: $10,000-$15,000

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- App development and creation: $10,000 or less

**E-Newsletter**

With email as community members’ preferred method of communication, we recommend refreshing the e-newsletter design to build stronger engagement. We also encourage you to incorporate new elements such as guest columns, repurposed content from other local newsletters and city meeting highlights. Community members who prefer traditional communication can still opt-in for hard copy newsletters.

**Social Media Strategy**

As one of the City’s top communication channels, Facebook is an ideal venue to reach and build on your current audience. We created a set of social media best practices that will help you to ensure posts are clear, consistent and engaging. We also drafted a response protocol for the North Plains community-run Facebook group. We suggest hosting a social media training for city staff and leaders who serve as ambassadors of North Plains.

**Events, Media & PR Strategy**

Longtime community traditions such as the North Plains Garlic Festival present community outreach and media opportunities. We recommend planning in-person meet-and-greet events to bring residents together, conducting regular media outreach and creating a story bank of narratives you can easily reference. We suggest that city staff members go through media training before this outreach and that you initiate ongoing coffee meetings with reporters.

**Total Budget**

- $60,000 - $131,000
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Overview & Assessment of City of North Plains Communications

The City of North Plains asked Prichard Communications to assess its current communications and create a one-year communications plan. With a strategic plan, the City will improve its ability to communicate with residents and businesses and prepare for regional growth.

We began this project by facilitating a kickoff meeting with City staff to discuss the project and timeline. From there, we interviewed five community leaders and one team of library employees about their feedback, concerns and communications needs.

We then surveyed North Plains area residents, employees, business owners and property owners to learn about their experience of city communications. Our goal was to hear how community members would like the City to communicate with them.

As part of our assessment, we also reviewed the following North Plains platforms:

- Website
- Social media
- E-newsletters
- Google Analytics

Our assessment of current communications work revealed opportunities to better organize information and update content in more engaging ways. With a small city staff and growing population, these proactive efforts to improve communications will prove important.

With this background information, we made recommendations for the following:

- Designated Communications Staff or Firm – $40,500 - $81,000 per year
- Community Management Strategy
Website Strategy – $10,000 - $40,000 for website redesign or overhaul
App Strategy – $10,000 or less for app development and creation
Social Media Strategy
Events, Media & PR Strategy

This plan will give the City a map to follow for the next year. We recommend revisiting the plan and revising as needed, especially depending on staff capacity and whether you hire a new team member. Communications goals will inevitably change as North Plains continues to grow.

SWOT Analysis

Based on external interviews, community survey responses and a communications assessment, we identified the following as the City of North Plains’ strengths, weaknesses (challenges), opportunities and threats. These items will inform the communications plan, as all strategies will seek to address them.

Strengths

- The City and community members see a need to streamline communications efforts and leverage a strategy
- North Plains is a tight-knit city with stakeholders who want to help
- The City has a rich history of traditions and events to highlight
- An influx of young, diverse families are bringing new energy to the city

Weaknesses (Challenges)

- A high-level city communications strategy is lacking
- Old and new North Plains have distinct communications needs
- Spaces intended as central hubs of communication are underutilized
- Community groups often duplicate communication efforts and share differing information

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Opportunities

● Community events are an ideal place to focus communication efforts
● Restructuring website elements will enhance the user experience
● Survey respondents’ preference for email/newsletter communication presents an opportunity to leverage the E-newsletter
● Respondents’ overall preference for online communication and widespread use of Facebook makes this a key channel

Threats

● Without a communications strategy that reaches a broad audience, the City risks upsetting longtime residents and missing the opportunity to engage new residents
● A proactive communications strategy will be crucial as regional growth continues to accelerate
● With the upcoming 2020 gas tax on the ballot and the urban growth boundary project beginning, the City risks missing opportunities to educate the community

Summary of External Interviews

The first step in this project was to conduct phone interviews with local community leaders. Our goal was to gather their insights into city communications and areas for improvement.

Top 5 Learnings from North Plains Community Leaders

1) There are two groups in North Plains with distinct communication needs.
   ● Longtime residents are accustomed to traditional communication methods such as banners, flyers and word-of-mouth outreach.
The young, diverse families moving to North Plains are more likely to prefer online communications such as email blasts and social media (Instagram).

Interviewees noted the balance of maintaining North Plains’ small-town charm while preparing for regional growth.
  - There’s a perception that it’s hard to be “in the know” unless you’ve lived in North Plains for a long time or play an active role within the community.

2) **Community leaders share a desire to streamline communications and preserve resources.**
   - They described how groups in North Plains often duplicate efforts, sometimes sharing differing information that can lead to confusion.
   - Interviewees would like to see a central hub for the city’s happenings that is coordinated by a specific person or team.
     - “Just a coordinated interface would be lovely – visually driven, keeping the message simple. People have so much coming at them.”
     - Each interviewee brought up the idea of a designated communications employee(s) or volunteer(s) but they understand budget constraints.

3) **Community events are an ideal place to invest in communication efforts.**
   - In phone interviews, community leaders shared their enthusiasm for events such as the Garlic Festival. They describe North Plains as a community filled with rich traditions.
   - Local leaders view community events as an opportunity to connect “Old North Plains” with “New North Plains” as the region continues to grow.
     - “North Plains is a gem. People have the right to be protective of it but we should embrace what is to come.”
4) Local leaders believe simple, visually-driven communications can better catch the community’s attention.

- Interviewees have noted how residents have busier lives and shorter attention spans. By refreshing North Plains’ communications with a modern, visual style, they believe the City could better engage residents.
- By focusing on quality over quantity in digital communications, the City could expand its reach without having too many channels to maintain.
  - By and large, local leaders recommended electronic newsletters and the website as top priorities, followed by Facebook, then Instagram (an opportunity to reach Millennials and young families).
  - Local leaders provided feedback that it’s important to get to the point in communications and not overwhelm residents with too much information.

5) It’s important to shift to a proactive communications strategy moving forward.

- With regional growth accelerated by “Silicon Forest,” interviewees noted how the City will need to continue preparing instead of reacting with its communications.
- Multiple local leaders noted how with an increasingly diverse population, North Plains will want to consider communications in other languages.
  - One interviewee spoke about how a robust website and social media presence will be helpful to share North Plains’ story with potential business owners and developers.
“With thousands of people moving here, the demand for instantaneous communication is going to go up.”

Survey Summary

After conducting interviews, Prichard invited North Plains area residents, employees, business owners and property owners to take a community survey. Our goal was to learn about their experience of city communications and hear how community members would like the city to communicate with them.

During a two-week period, 128 respondents completed the survey. More than 85 percent of respondents identified as North Plains residents. See the survey here.

Top 5 Learnings from the North Plains Community Survey

1) **Respondents prefer online communication overall but traditional communication still plays an important role.**
   - Email is respondents’ top form of communication, with 73.4 percent preferring the city to communicate with them through this channel. Social media is a close second at 70.3 percent.
   - A smaller fraction of respondents still prefer traditional communication, with 41.4 percent preferring print flyers or brochures, and 25 percent preferring traditional mail.
   - When asked where they currently look for city events and news, respondents’ most popular answers were online or the newsletter.
     - Out of 115 responses to this question, 31 respondents listed Facebook and social media, 23 listed the newsletter and 15 listed the website.

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These preferences for email and newsletter communication present an opportunity for the City to leverage its E-newsletter.

2) When they need to report information to the City, respondents prefer to do it via email or phone.
   - Email came in as the top method for reporting information, with 49.2 percent of responses. Along with email, 17.7 percent of respondents preferred reporting information via social media.
   - While 66.9 percent of respondents prefer online reporting, 33 percent still prefer traditional reporting methods, with 23.4 percent preferring to report information via phone.
   - These statistics align with the previous question’s findings that a consistent segment of respondents prefers traditional communication.

3) The vast majority of respondents are on social media, with Facebook as their favorite social channel.
   - Out of 126 responses to this question, 90.5 percent of respondents indicated that they’re on social media.
   - Of these 114 respondents on social media, 88.9 percent indicated they are on Facebook.
     - With respondents’ preference for online communication and widespread use of Facebook, this is a key channel.
     - In the future, the City could consider expanding its social media presence to the next most popular channels, Nextdoor (56.4 percent) and Instagram (52.1 percent).

4) A majority of respondents have not attended city meetings and those who have had mixed reviews.
   - Out of 128 responses, 61.7 percent of respondents hadn’t attended a city meeting.
• The most common reasons for not attending city meetings are busy schedules, timing and uncertainty about how to get involved.
• Of the 49 respondents who had been to city meetings, they were split on whether it was a positive or negative experience.
  ○ Those who had a positive experience noted that meetings were informative and professional.
  ○ Of those who had negative experiences, there was a perception the meetings were formal and inaccessible.

5) **The City’s website calendar is underutilized, with respondents suggesting it could be more user-friendly.**
• Out of 128 respondents, 68.8 percent indicated that they do not use the calendar.
• Of those who do use the calendar, 11 respondents noted suggestions for improvement, such as ensuring that information is up-to-date and accurate.
• Respondents also expressed an interest in making the calendar more user-friendly and easy to navigate.
  ○ “I wish it [had] the ability to subscribe so I [could] get notifications.”
  ○ “[it] would be great to have everything there with hyperlinks to additional info.”

**Additional Feedback from Respondents**

• On top of email communications, text alerts would be helpful for community members.
  ○ “You could send out weather hazards, accidents, local happenings, etc. via text.”

• A central hub for news and events would make the website’s user experience better.
  ○ “Make it easy to access, read and navigate”
• Rural surrounding communities would like to be included in communications decisions, as they consider North Plains a home base.
  ○ “How are rural resident concerns being included?”

• The business community has a desire to see regular communications related to economic development.
  ○ “I don’t always know about issues that affect me or my business.”

• “Don’t forget that you have a very diverse audience. You must take the approach of a broad comms plan – city meetings + social + informal gatherings + calendars, etc. As we grow, you have to bring everyone along.”

Communications Goals & Objectives

Based on our research and our meeting with you to discuss these initial findings, we recommend the following communications goals and objectives.

The goals for North Plains’ communications are:

• To clearly and consistently communicate with all North Plains community members, reaching both those who prefer traditional communication and those who prefer digital communication.
• To set realistic expectations about city communications while proactively preparing for regional growth.
• To roll out a new or redesigned website by December 2020.
• To roll out a city app to complement the website by December 2020.
The measurable objectives to support these goals are:

- Refresh the newsletter and publish 12 monthly e-newsletters (opt-in hard copy version available) with an average 28 percent open rate and four percent click-through rate by April 2021.
- Receive three earned media placements – or stories you pitch to the media – about North Plains events in local and regional publications by April 2021 (this figure can be adjusted to departments’ media coverage).
- Increase Facebook followers by 25 percent (1,354 to 1,693) by April 2021.

Email benchmarks based on MailChimp’s reported averages for government.

Recommendations

1. Designated Communications Staff Member

Add a communications coordinator and/or firm to support city communications.

Why we are recommending this tactic:

As of early 2020, communications responsibilities are split among staff members who already wear many hats in their roles. Based on your current needs and challenges, we recommend allocating resources to hire a part-time or full-time communications staff member to support the City.

If a paid staff member is not feasible in the foreseeable future, a communications firm could provide additional support and consultation as North Plains begins implementing the plan. The City could also explore hiring a contract writer on a monthly basis.

Outside of a paid staff member or consultant, North Plains could consider training a college intern or look to the community for a volunteer (start by exploring the University of Oregon internship connection). If the City pursues a
community volunteer, this could be someone such as a retired former teacher or stay-at-home parent.

As of early 2020, the city is leaning toward hiring a college intern and working with a communications firm on parts of the plan such as the website.

**If North Plains were to hire a designated communications staff member, this would free the current city staff up to:**

- Oversee the plan implementation
- Focus on high-level communications strategy
- Review materials such as website content, e-newsletters and social media copy as needed before publishing
- Lead annual and semi-annual communications planning to check in on annual goals, review messaging and make recommendations

**Based on our assessment, a communications specialist or consulting firm could focus on:**

- Leading implementation of the plan
- Managing Facebook and future social media pages
- Creating new website content such as blog posts
- Maintaining and updating the website
- Drafting, laying out templates and sending monthly e-newsletters
- Maintaining and updating newsletter distribution list
- Developing media relations strategy and opportunities
- Coordinating among stakeholders to ensure city information is accurate and up-to-date
- Identifying ongoing communications needs

**Potential resources for making this hire:**

- [Engaging Local Government Leaders](#)
- [Mac’s List](#)
- [National Association of Government Communicators](#)
- [Public Relations Society of America – Oregon chapter](#)
Universities such as:
  - University of Oregon
  - Lewis and Clark College
  - Pacific University
  - Portland Community College
  - Portland State University
  - University of Portland

**How to implement this recommendation:**

- **March 2020:** Discuss internally and decide if the City is able to hire a communications coordinator and/or firm (or if you would prefer to recruit an intern/volunteer)

- **April 2020:** Hire communications specialist and/or engage firm (or recruit an intern or volunteer)

- **May 2020-March 2021:** Communications specialist, firm and/or intern/volunteer execute(s) deliverables under supervision of city manager

- **March 2021:** Assess communications goals for next year and hire additional staff as needed

**Budget Estimate:**

- Communications Coordinator: $40,000 - $50,000 annual salary for a person with 1-3 years of experience (based on Glassdoor salary reports)

- Firm: For reference, Prichard’s hourly rate for local government clients is $225/hour. For this work, we estimate 15-30 hours per month which would be $3,375 - $6,750 per month or $40,500 - $81,000 annually (this budget could be adjusted depending on the final scope of work)
2. Community Management Strategy

Employ a community management protocol and messaging guidelines that establish expectations around how the City communicates with the community, response times and feedback loops.

Why we are recommending this tactic:

With two distinct audiences in North Plains, it's important to develop clear guidelines for communicating with the community. By setting expectations about how frequently the community can expect to hear from you and through which channels, you'll be able to simplify and streamline your efforts. This strategy will inform the e-newsletter, website and social media strategies that follow in this plan.

How to implement this tactic:

Basic Contact Information
Implement a consistent email signature line with job titles and contact information for all city staff members. Update the website “Contact Us” page to be more prominent and consider adding a general info@northplains.org email that the communications coordinator can manage, helping redirect general messages that may go to leaders like the mayor. These simple changes will help to improve communication between city staff and community members.

Boilerplate Options for PR/ Media
Use one of these boilerplates for marketing materials such as press releases, media kits and on the website.

Option 1 for general use: The City of North Plains is a small community located 15 miles west of Portland. With a rich agricultural history, the city is home to the award-winning North Plains Elephant Garlic Festival and popular outdoor venues including Pumpkin Ridge and Hornings’
Hideout. Incorporated in 1963, North Plains retains its small-town charm while providing easy access to the city and Oregon coast. Learn more at [www.northplains.org](http://www.northplains.org).

**Option 2 for events:** Located 15 miles west of Portland, the City of North Plains proudly hosts annual community events including the North Plains Elephant Garlic Festival and the Fourth of July Parade. With a rich agricultural history, the community is home to popular outdoor venues such as Pumpkin Ridge and Hornings’ Hideout. Since its incorporation in 1963, North Plains has combined small-town character with easy access to the city and Oregon coast. Learn more at [www.northplains.org](http://www.northplains.org).

**Community Management Protocol**
Reference these community management guidelines as a resource for email, e-newsletter, social media and web strategy. This is a living document that can be adapted for changing needs and staff capacity.

**Overall Protocol for Communications**

- The City of North Plains communications coordinator will respond to email, e-newsletter, social and web inquiries within two business days. This policy applies when an inquiry comes through over the weekend or on a holiday.

- The communications coordinator will reference the FAQs section below and respond with short, simple answers to questions. They will personalize their responses by including the person’s name and addressing any specific aspects of their inquiry.

- If the communications coordinator doesn’t have an answer, or if an issue arises that requires a bigger conversation, they will engage a city point person prior to responding. We recommend that the point person be the city manager.

- When the communications coordinator is out sick or on vacation, the point person (city manager) will provide coverage. If the point person is not available, the next coverage option would be a trained council

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member or community volunteer who is familiar with these protocols and social media guidelines.

- When someone asks for more information about the city or ways to engage, the communications coordinator will share several options with links for keeping up with city news and happenings:
  - Sign up for the [e-newsletter](#), with an opt-in hard copy
  - Follow the [Facebook](#) page
  - Visit the [website](#) and app (in the future)
  - Participate in meet and greets several times a year (in the future)
  - Attend one of the [5-6 city meetings](#) each month

- **Communications Frequency**

  - The City shares 2-4x Facebook posts per week. (We recommend this figure based on staff capacity. The industry recommendation is 3-5x Facebook posts per week.)
  - E-newsletters are published monthly
  - Website content gets updated at least monthly
  - The communications coordinator designates 15 minutes each business day to community management (responding to comments and questions via email, web and social media; following up via phone call or email if needed)
  - City departments such as the library strive to cross-promote each other’s social media posts

- **Visual Brand Guidelines**

  In order to keep your branding and marketing materials consistent, narrow in on a simple set of guidelines. It would be beneficial to work with a contractor or graphic designer to establish these guidelines.

  - **Logo guidelines:** Determine size and proper proportion, including white space around the logo, logo variations and when to use them, and any other rules about how the logo is used
○ **Color palette:** Choose three specific colors to emphasize in your materials, with RGB and the HEX Code as guides for digital media and CMYK as a guide for printed materials

○ **Typography:** Choose three primary typefaces and determine when to use bolded, underlined or italicized typefaces. Also determine consistent alignment and spacing.

○ **Imagery:** Share image examples that have been well received in your marketing efforts, such as social media photos. Consider aspirational imagery that can inspire the City’s imagery.

● **Engaging with Commenters/Questions**

○ Respond in a timely manner

○ Prioritize questions and complaints (unless the question or complaint is clearly trolling)

○ Acknowledge positive comments and feedback when possible

○ Use template responses and reference FAQs, but personalize messages so that they don’t sound like automated responses

○ When possible, take negative conversations offline/out of the comments to de-escalate the situation

  ■ *Facebook comment example:* “Hi ____, We appreciate your feedback and are looking into this. Can you please send us a direct message so that we can learn more about your concern and how we can best help? Thank you, City Staff”

○ Do not delete comments; hide comments that contain profanity, are inappropriate, nonproductive or become threatening

  ■ On Facebook, you can set a profanity filter and report threatening comments or messages

  ■ Document controversial questions or comments with screenshots

  ■ As a last resort, block users who abuse the site

○ When in doubt, consult a colleague before addressing a conflict

*See Social Media Strategy on page 26 for social media best practices and guidelines. These include a suggested protocol for responding in the community-run North Plains Facebook group.*
To complement the community management protocol, we recommend keeping an ongoing FAQS document. This may take extra time upfront, but it will save you time and energy in the long run. These can also be added to your current website FAQs.

Here are suggested FAQs to include:

**What does the growth in Washington County mean for North Plains? Tell me about the urban growth boundary expansion.** Over the years, North Plains voters have encouraged slow growth through the urban growth boundary so that the city remains a small semi-rural community. This has helped North Plains to retain its small-town character.

With major regional growth anticipated in the next 20 years, the City is preparing to address housing and employment needs by expanding the urban growth boundary. This way, North Plains can thoughtfully maintain its charm while planning to welcome new residents and businesses.

**How is regional growth going to affect traffic and transportation options?** Add answer here.

**How are you going to accommodate the additional people moving in?** The City of North Plains is in the process of expanding the urban growth boundary to prepare for housing needs during this time of regional growth. A 2018 Portland State University Population Research Center report determined a need for 1,547 new dwelling units in total, 756 within the current urban growth boundary and 791 outside of the current urban growth boundary.

**Do you have affordable housing, and if so, what sort of options are available?** The City is a partner with The Housing Authority of Washington County, an entity working with developers, financial institutions and government agencies to build or acquire/rehabilitate thriving affordable housing communities in Washington County. At this time, there are two apartment communities in North Plains geared toward low-income seniors and people with disabilities: North Plains Senior Plaza and Kaybern Terrace.

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Where would my kids go to school in North Plains? North Plains is located within the Hillsboro School District. We currently have one grade school, North Plains Elementary, that feeds into Evergreen Middle School and Glencoe High School in Hillsboro. For more information about schools, visit https://www.hsd.k12.or.us/.

How good are your schools, and will more schools be added in the future? Hillsboro School District is the fourth-largest public school district in the state of Oregon, with 35 schools serving more than 20,000 students from preschool through twelve grade. The district has a skilled, caring and dedicated staff who are committed to supporting each student’s academic and personal growth in safe and inclusive environments. For more information about schools, visit https://www.hsd.k12.or.us/.

Do you have public transportation options? The City North Plains is served by the West Link Ride Connection Community Bus Service, a free shuttle that connects to the TriMet hub in Hillsboro. We are currently revising our Transportation System Plan (TSP).

I’m relocating from another state. Who can I talk to about living in North Plains? Welcome to our community! Please contact our communications coordinator at info@northplains.org to learn more about living in North Plains. You can also find information for new residents here.

What is the business community like in North Plains? The City has a vibrant business community that spans a variety of sectors, from retail to maritime, and aerospace to high-tech. The North Plains Chamber of Commerce provides business networking opportunities, education and support. For more information on the business community, visit our Business page.

What kind of community events are there in North Plains? Our community hosts the world-famous North Plains Elephant Garlic Festival the second week of August and an annual Fourth of July Celebration. Throughout the year, the City sponsors concerts in the park, dances and library programs for kids and adults. Learn more about our wide variety of events by visiting the North Plains community calendar.
How do I submit a business proposal? Business proposals can be submitted to City Hall during business hours. To learn more about starting a business in North Plains, visit our Business page.

What are the job opportunities in North Plains and the broader Washington County? Located in the heart of Oregon’s Silicon Forest, North Plains is part of a thriving tech scene. Our residents have access to jobs at multinational employers such as Intel, Genentech and Nike, along with diverse industries including education, healthcare, agriculture and craft beer brewing. Oregon Canadian and Jewett Cameron are two of North Plains’ larger employers.

What can you tell me about the new (Taco Bell, store, etc.) coming in? In instances like these, we recommend stating facts about the proposal(s) early on and offering the community an opportunity to share their thoughts during City Council meetings.

How to implement this recommendation:

- **March 2020:**
  - Update email signatures with contact information and make contact information more prominent on the website with info@northplains.org account
  - Indicate within info@northplains.org account, e-newsletter, Facebook page and web FAQs page that community members can expect to hear from you within two business days when they submit questions

- **April–June 2020:**
  - Implement the Community Management Protocol and FAQs. This is a living document you can continue to update and adjust as needed.

- **March 2021:**
  - Reexamine the community management guidelines and ask these questions:
Are these guidelines working for The City of North Plains?
- Does our community understand how we communicate and know how to communicate with us?
- Has anything changed this year that needs to be reflected in our guidelines or messaging?

3. Website Strategy

Redesign the website to be more user-friendly and to drive community members to this central hub of information.

Why we are recommending this tactic:

The website is a go-to source of information, but many community members report finding it difficult to navigate from the home page. Redesigning the website (or prioritizing a restructure of the home page and menu) will better guide residents, business owners and developers to the information they’re most often seeking.

Website elements to prioritize in the redesign:

- Organize dropdown menus through the lens of three distinct groups: residents, business owners/developers and visitors
  - Google Analytics indicate that residents often seek city resources such as the calendar, water bills, the library and jobs
  - These analytics illustrate that business owners or developers are trying to understand and access zoning information and municipal code
  - With the spike in July 4 traffic, it’s evident visitors are frequenting the site around this time
- Make the FAQs, news and events sections more prominent to ensure the home page is easy to navigate
- Increase the size of visuals and consider adding video content to break up text-heavy sections such as the “About Us” page

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• Update headers with engaging language to improve users’ experience (i.e. “Connect,” “Explore” or “How can we help?”)
• Refresh the calendar feature so that community members can subscribe to get updates and access hyperlinks with additional information
• Increase the search capability

**How to implement this recommendation:**

**April 2020:**
- Request bids from several potential website designers for a website overhaul or home page and calendar redesign
  - Ask about how you can prioritize updates that can be made before an anticipated spike in traffic each July 4 – a prime marketing opportunity

**May 2020:**
- Pick a designer within the city’s budget and begin the redesign, with Estacada, Gresham, Hillsboro and Tigard as local government website inspiration
- Determine what key content you would like to highlight for July 4; consider cross-linking to the Chamber and North Plains Events Association

**June 2020:**
- Begin website overhaul or redesign of key features
  - Map out content deliverables on the City’s end to coincide with website design (i.e. blocks of text, images, videos, etc.)
- Create calendar guidelines and processes that ensure information is accurate and up-to-date (consider having one person or team own calendar updates)
- Wrap up first iteration of updates by the end of the month before July 4

**July/August 2020:**
○ Continue website redesign after July 4 iteration
○ Organize opportunity for stakeholders and community members to test the new website design mockups from a user experience perspective

● **September/October 2020:**
  ○ Fine-tune design and content, factoring in the upcoming 2020 election
  ○ Finish web redesign by the end of Q3

● **November/December 2020:**
  ○ New website goes live
  ○ Promote new website and offer a way for the community to provide feedback
  ○ Create incentives to check out the new site

● **December 2020:**
  ○ Determine 2021 website goals and explore adding a blog section (as a content and SEO strategy) and text alert signups

● **Monthly:**
  ○ Check analytics on a monthly basis to observe trends such as monthly visitors, unique visitors and calendar click-throughs

**Budget Estimate:**

● Website overhaul: $20,000 - $40,000 (based on Prichard’s recent experiences with website redesigns for a variety of clients)

● Website redesign: $10,000-$15,000 (based on Prichard’s recent experiences with website redesigns for a variety of clients)
4. App Strategy

In tandem with the website redesign, explore communicating information to residents through an app.

Why we are recommending this tactic:

Given survey respondents’ interest in text alerts, a city app could be an ideal channel to communicate these updates and supplement website content. Communities such as the City of Dayton, Oregon and Hillsboro School District have found success with apps in recent years.

City staff envision that the app could become a better mobile version of the website, with information easily accessible by phone. In particular, they see that an aggregated calendar feature with notifications could be an upgrade from the website’s calendar feature.

How to implement this recommendation:

- **April 2020:**
  - Gain further insight and gauge community interest in an app through a survey or community interviews
  - Based on community feedback, determine the top features to include in an app, such as weather alerts, calendar reminders, election updates, important contacts and the ability to view code
  - Also determine the top pages on the website that should be prominent on the app

- **May 2020:**
  - Once the City has defined its goal for the app and conducted research that indicates residents would use the app, request bids for an app

- **June 2020:**
○ Begin creating wireframes and a storyboard with the selected designers to develop a prototype

**June-September 2020:**
○ App development phase
○ Finish app design and creation by the end of Q3
○ Plan for communications about app in conjunction with website updates, and consider hosting trainings at the library in which tech-savvy staff or volunteers support those who aren’t as familiar with this technology

**October-December 2020:**
○ App goes live with push notifications available
○ Train residents how to use the app with messaging and trainings
○ Plan for app strategy and goals in 2021

**Budget Estimate:**

○ App development and creation: $10,000 or less (based on figures the city manager received from Dayton, Oregon and the Hillsboro School District)

5. E-newsletter Strategy

**Monthly e-newsletters (with an opt-in hard copy version) will ensure that residents and businesses stay up-to-date on North Plains’ latest news and events.**

**Why we are recommending this tactic:**

Community survey respondents noted that email was their preferred method of communication. A refreshed newsletter design inspired by the City of Hillsboro’s newsletter will make these e-newsletters easier to read and more engaging for readers.
Additionally, the e-newsletter presents an opportunity for community engagement with new features such as guest columns, repurposed content from other local newsletters and city meeting recaps. You can send out an opt-in hard copy and consider quarterly newsletters to save printing costs.

**How to implement this recommendation:**

- **April 2020:**
  - Refesh the e-newsletter template with simple fonts, updated formatting and more white space in MailChimp or Constant Contact
  - Once a communications coordinator is in place, set up monthly meetings to map out newsletter content
  - Create an editorial calendar (in conjunction with website and social media content) that maps out a newsletter schedule including suggested topics and due dates
  - Communicate to newsletter subscribers and the Chamber that you’re moving to a predominantly electronic newsletter; those who prefer traditional communication can still subscribe to hard copy versions delivered with their water bill
  - Determine process for businesses community to buy display ads
  - Set business ad parameters for pixel, size and style requirements
  - Begin tracking results for advertisers

- **December 2020**
  - Plan out 2021 goals for e-newsletters

- **Ongoing e-newsletter deadlines**
  - Continue monthly newsletter with firm deadlines on the 15th of each month
  - Plan on three to five stories per issue
  - Along with events, city news and partner updates, begin incorporating feature stories on residents, business news and news from neighboring communities
○ Roll out these new newsletter elements with context about why you’re adding them and how readers can submit content for your consideration

● Monthly
  ○ Check newsletter open rates, click-throughs and subscriptions
    ■ See how new stories and features affect these figures
  ○ Create a way for community members who receive hard copy newsletters to share feedback (i.e. through a postcard included in the newsletter, via email or via phone)

● Other e-newsletter content
  ○ Put a call out for guest contributors from the community
  ○ Share community spotlights about local teachers, elected officials, volunteers, etc.
  ○ Ask other organizations such as the school district or coffee shop to submit stories or updates
  ○ Repurpose content from other local newsletters, such as the school district’s
  ○ Recap city meetings with “5 Fast Facts” or other highlights
  ○ Use larger images to break up text and engage readers

6. Social Media Strategy

Use North Plains’ existing Facebook page to reach and build on your current audience.

Why we are recommending this tactic:

With such a large portion of community members on Facebook, this is one of your top communications channels. We encourage staff to post North Plains news on their own pages using consistent messaging with the city page.

We also recommend providing context within posts and double-checking details. Your existing Facebook page can be a launching off point for future

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social accounts such as Nextdoor or Instagram (the next most popularly used social channels among survey respondents).

**Social Media Guidelines**

- **Facebook Best Practices**
  - Post 2-4x a week (3-5x a week is a best practice but we recommend fewer posts with a smaller staff capacity)
  - 180 characters (keep it short and sweet)
  - 1-2 hashtags; 2-3 tags
  - Ideal image size is 1,200 x 630 pixels
  - Tag relevant organizations and partners
  - Check-in location whenever applicable
  - Use Bit.ly.com as a link shortener
  - Consider using a scheduling platform such as Hootsuite
  - Repost library and partner posts with tags and context about the posts
  - Checklist:
    - Double-check that dates, facts, links and contact information are correct before posting

- **Writing Compelling Copy**
  - Use active voice for more engaging copy
  - Make sure your copy matches your visual content in voice/tone
  - Don’t be afraid to show personality, but keep it professional
  - Do more than re-share headlines by providing context
    - Ask yourself: Why am I sharing this? Why is this piece of content important to share with our community?

- **Does Your Copy Match Your Content?**
  - Only link to substantive pages with good information
  - Ensure your copy relates to your destination page

**Community Facebook Group Response**
North Plains has a Facebook group managed by community members. While it’s not an official city page, city staff and council members often respond to questions and complaints in this group.

In an effort to streamline these efforts, we recommend having one main point of contact in this group and designated point people to consult for topics such as public safety, business development and events.

- The communications coordinator will check the Facebook page and community Facebook group each business day as part of their 15 minutes of daily community management
- The communications coordinator will answer or respond to any general questions and complaints that are covered in the FAQs
- Should the communications coordinator require assistance in answering a question, they'll contact designated city staff and council members
- These city staff and council members will respond within 24 hours (on business days) to the communications coordinator, who will then post the response
- If a city staff member or council member sees a question or complaint that hasn’t been addressed, they will contact the communications coordinator to tip them off

* The Community Management Strategy on page 13 will inform these social media guidelines, especially the guidelines for engaging with questions and comments.

How to implement this recommendation:

- April 2020:
  - Implement social media guidelines above, along with the Community Management Protocol and FAQ in Strategy 2
  - Determine whether content such as memes/GIFs are appropriate for a local government page and set guidelines for this topic
  - Create content pillars that will inform an ongoing editorial calendar
    - I.e. Events, council meeting updates, community news, features such as community member or org spotlights

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- Develop an editorial calendar (in conjunction with the newsletter and website calendars) with content pillars that will help you plan social content in advance and ensure a variety of information is shared with accompanying visuals.

- **May 2020:**
  - Host a Facebook training with North Plains staff, council members and community leaders who share social content. As ambassadors of the city, it is important that they follow the same guidelines and use messaging that is consistent with the city.
    - Discuss unofficial city Facebook group and solidify a policy for who responds to these posts and the messaging they use.
    - Also discuss public safety issues and who is the spokesperson in these instances.
  - Facebook: Continue sharing news, events and updates 2-4x per week; monitor comments and messages on a regular basis.
    - Consider implementing Buffer or Hootsuite to schedule Facebook posts and save time.
    - Explore promoting posts featuring summer events such as the Fourth of July Parade, Garlic Festival, etc.

- **September 2020:**
  - Explore capacity to add Instagram and/or Nextdoor and consult with the library about Instagram; determine timeline for adding these channels if applicable.

- **December 2020:**
  - Plan out 2021 goals for social media.

- **Monthly ongoing basis:**
  - Check Facebook analytics to determine best performing posts and gauge which content is most popular with your audience.
○ Revisit community management protocol, social media guidelines and FAQs to assess how social interactions are going and make any adjustments
○ Ensure all comments and messages warranting a response have been covered

7. Events, Media & PR Strategy

With popular community events such as The Elephant Garlic Festival, North Plains has an opportunity to highlight longtime traditions in the media, reaching a variety of audiences.

Why we’re recommending this tactic:

An events strategy can bring together longtime and new residents, businesses and visitors. Events also present media opportunities to feature community traditions and build rapport with reporters.

Finally, events can be a way to gather stories from the community that can be repurposed as content for marketing. We recommend saving these stories in a story bank, or a collection of narratives you can easily draw from for purposes such as media interviews.

We recommend creating a simple story bank in Excel or Google Sheets that is organized by different events and themes. Include columns for notes, hyperlinks and other relevant information such as image ideas.

As a best practice for planning inclusive events, strive to provide food, beverages and childcare.

How to implement this recommendation:

● March 2020:
Initiate conversations with North Plains Events Association, Inc. about The North Plains Elephant Garlic Festival and other upcoming community events

- Discuss meet-and-greet gatherings such as ice cream socials for new residents to connect within the larger community
- Develop plans for information booths that offer incentives to “like” the North Plains’ Facebook page, sign up for the e-newsletter or check out the website

- **April 2020:**
  - Work through logistics for the information booth at events and gatherings such as ice cream socials (i.e. marketing collateral, how to track social media likes, etc.)
  - Begin developing a North Plains story bank about events with important data, facts and images relevant to the media

- **May 2020:**
  - Finalize story bank draft
  - Solidify event logistics and execute collateral needs
  - Media train city manager and mayor before coffee meetings with reporters; include any other staff members or city officials who will serve as spokespeople during summer events

- **June 2020:**
  - Have coffee with reporters from *The Forest Grove News-Times*, *The Oregonian* and local radio stations in your area to let them know about upcoming summer events
  - Pitch the North Plains Fourth of July Parade to reporters

- **July 2020:**
  - Pitch North Plains Elephant Garlic Festival to The Forest Grove News-Times, The Oregonian and local radio in your area a couple
weeks out from the event

- **August 2019:**
  - Host meet-and-greet event and information booth at The Elephant Garlic Festival; coordinate media coverage
  - Do a post-event and media debrief to determine what went well and what could be improved
  - Look ahead to the next event and media opportunities

- **Other Media Opportunities:**
  - Events at places such as Pumpkin Ridge and Horning’s Hideout
  - Look to existing local events and pitch North Plains as a partner or speaker

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### Budget

The City anticipates implementing recommendations that require financial resources after July.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designated Communications Staff Member</th>
<th>● Communications Coordinator: $40,000 - $50,000</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Firm: $3,375 - $6,750 per month or $40,500 - $81,000 annually</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website Strategy</th>
<th>● $10,000 - $40,000 for website redesign or overhaul</th>
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<tr>
<th>App Strategy</th>
<th>● $10,000 or less for app development and creation</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March-April 2020</td>
<td>• Add an email signature line with contact information for all city staff members</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Update web contact section with an email address</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Make decision about communications coordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Set up monthly communications meetings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Create editorial calendar for newsletter, social media, events and website</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Request bids for website redesign</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Decide whether to move forward with an app</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Refresh the e-newsletter template</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Implement social media guidelines and checklists</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Implement Community Management Protocol with best practices and FAQs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Determine summer event needs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Begin story bank about community events</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Monthly communications and content meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Post on Facebook 2-4x weekly</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Publish monthly e-newsletter</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2020</td>
<td>• Communications coordinator in place</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Pick a web designer</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Request bids for app design</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Begin implementing social media strategy (ongoing)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Host Facebook training</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Finalize story bank draft</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Solidify summer event needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2020</td>
<td>- Media train city manager before coffee meetings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Monthly communications and content meeting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Post on Facebook 2-4x weekly</td>
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<td>- Publish monthly e-newsletter</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Begin web redesign; first iteration ready by July 4</td>
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<td>- Create website calendar guidelines</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Begin app development</td>
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<td>- Coffee meetings with reporters</td>
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<td>- Pitch Fourth of July Parade to reporters</td>
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<td>- Monthly communications and content meeting</td>
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<td>- Post on Facebook 2-4x weekly</td>
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<td>- Publish monthly e-newsletter</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 2020</td>
<td>- Continue web redesign</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Continue app development</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Pitch the North Plains Garlic Festival to reporters</td>
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<td>- Monthly communications and content meeting</td>
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<td>- Post on Facebook 2-4x weekly</td>
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<td>- Publish monthly e-newsletter</td>
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<td>August 2020</td>
<td>- Continue web redesign</td>
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<td>- Continue app development</td>
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<td>- Host Garlic Festival meet and greet; coordinate media coverage</td>
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<td>- Event and media debrief</td>
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<td>- Plan for next events and media pitching</td>
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<td>- Monthly communications and content meeting</td>
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<td>- Post on Facebook 2-4x weekly</td>
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<td>- Publish monthly e-newsletter</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 2020</td>
<td>- Fine-tine web redesign and content</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Finish web redesign</td>
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<td>- Finish app design and creation</td>
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<td>- Explore adding Instagram and/or Nextdoor</td>
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<td>- Monthly communications and content meeting</td>
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<td>- Post on Facebook 2-4x weekly</td>
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<td>- Publish monthly e-newsletter</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2020</td>
<td>- Redesigned website goes live</td>
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<td>- App goes live</td>
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<td>- Promote and solicit feedback on website/ app</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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</table>
| November 2020 | ■ Train community on how to use the app  
■ Monthly communications and content meeting  
■ Post on Facebook 2-4x weekly  
■ Publish monthly e-newsletter |
| December 2020 | ■ Host initial 2021 planning and goal setting for website, app, e-newsletter and social media  
■ Monthly communications and content meeting  
■ Post on Facebook 2-4x weekly  
■ Publish monthly e-newsletter |
| January 2021  | ■ Host initial 2021 planning and goal setting for website, app, e-newsletter and social media  
■ Monthly communications and content meeting  
■ Post on Facebook 2-4x weekly  
■ Publish monthly e-newsletter |
| February 2021 | ■ Host initial 2021 planning and goal setting for website, app, e-newsletter and social media  
■ Monthly communications and content meeting  
■ Post on Facebook 2-4x weekly  
■ Publish monthly e-newsletter  
■ Host annual communications planning, examine metrics and discuss the success of each strategy  
■ Revise plan and strategies as needed for 2021-2022 |
| March 2021    | ■ Host initial 2021 planning and goal setting for website, app, e-newsletter and social media  
■ Monthly communications and content meeting  
■ Post on Facebook 2-4x weekly  
■ Publish monthly e-newsletter  
■ Reassess messaging needs  
■ Implement changes to plan as needed |

**Appendix**

**List of External Interviewees**

- Becky Rios, North Plains Elementary School
External Discussion Guide

Overview

The City of North Plains has partnered with Prichard Communications to assess its communications and create a strategic communications plan.

We are conducting a 30-minute phone interview with you to learn more about your insights into city communications. Your answers will help shape our communications strategy for the City.

Prichard’s Managing Director Erin Stutesman is leading this project with support from Account Executive Lisa Kislingbury Anderson.

About [Interviewee]
[Brief interviewee bio here]

Questions

1. Tell me about your role. How are you involved with the City of North Plains?

2. What has been your experience with North Plains’ communications?

3. What barriers or challenges do you think exist to reaching members of the community in North Plains?

4. Based on your role and experience in the community, what kind of communication do you think community members would find most
helpful from the City of North Plains? (For example, emails, blog posts, events, meetings or social media.)

5. Do you have ideas for how North Plains can improve and/or expand its communications and outreach within the community?

6. What questions do you think the City of North Plains should ask community members as we develop this strategic communications plan?

7. What else would you like us to know as we pull together our recommendations?

Community Survey

STRATEGY

Who should receive the survey
- City of North Plains residents, employees, business owners, property owners and neighboring residents

Goals for the survey
- Determine how the community wants to hear from the City

SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Are you a resident of North Plains?

2. Where do you look for information about city events and news?

3. What are your preferred forms of communication from the City? [Check all that apply]
   - City meetings
   - Social media

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• Email
• Phone
• Print, such as flyers or banners
• Media, such as the newspaper
• Traditional mail
• Radio
• Other ________

4. What is your preferred way to report information to the City? [Select all that apply]
• City meeting
• Social media
• Email
• Phone
• Traditional mail
• Library suggestion box
• Other ________

5. Do you use social media?
• Yes
• No

6. What social media platforms do you use? [Check all that apply]
• Facebook
• Instagram
• Twitter
• NextDoor
• LinkedIn
• Other ________

7. Have you attended a city meeting?
• Yes
• No
8. If so, was the experience positive? Why or why not? [Open-ended answer]

9. If you have not attended a meeting, why not? [Open-ended answer]

10. Do you use the community calendar on the City’s webpage?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Other ________

11. If so, what is your experience with the calendar? [Open-ended answer]

12. Is there anything else you’d like us to know as we develop a communications strategy for North Plains? [Open-ended answer]