



City of Sierra Madre Agenda Report

Gene Goss, Mayor
Rachelle Arizmendi, Mayor Pro Tem
John Capoccia, Council Member
Denise Delmar, Council Member
John Harabedian, Council Member

Melinda Carrillo, City Clerk
Michael Amerio, City Treasurer

TO: Honorable Mayor Goss and Members of the City Council

FROM: Elaine I. Aguilar, City Manager 

INITIATED BY: Elisa C. Cox, Assistant City Manager

DATE: July 12, 2016

SUBJECT: **Improving Community Communications**

SUMMARY

At the City Council's last strategic plan retreat, the City Council requested that staff bring forward a staff report with suggestions for improving community communications.

BACKGROUND

The City has a number of ways in which it constantly communicates with its residents including:

- Press Releases
- Website
- eBlast
- Facebook
- Nixle Alerts
- AM Radio
- Flyers
- Water Bill Insert
- Banners
- Wistaria Vine Community Newsletter

There are other avenues that the City uses from time-to-time depending on resources, both the physical expense and staffs' time:

- Direct Mailers
- Event Booths
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- Visiting Downtown Businesses
- Community Group Meetings
- Targeted Social Media
- Coordinating Council

And there are communication vehicles that the City currently does not use – although, some of these are in the works:

- Additional Banner Poles
- Citizen Request Dashboard
- City Mobile Phone Application
- Electronic Message Boards
- Emergency Alert System / Reverse 911

ANALYSIS

Additional Banner Poles

Multiple community surveys have indicated that the second most common way residents learn about what is going on in town is by the information provided on the

banner over Baldwin Avenue at Sierra Madre Boulevard (the most common way people learn about City business is word of mouth). In 2008, the City Council considered installing two banner poles east of the intersection of West Sierra Madre Boulevard and Lima Street – at the time the cost was estimated at \$26,000 for installation and would take five years in Banner Permit Fees to recover the cost of installation. Ultimately, the City Council at the time chose not to continue exploring this project, but if the current City Council is interested, staff can return with updated information and a draft RFP for a project to provide additional banner poles east of Lima Street on West Sierra Madre Boulevard. The 2008 staff report is attached.

Citizen Request Dashboard

The Citizen Request Dashboard or Online Citizen Reporting is a feature of the new City website that staff hopes to complete this summer. This dashboard will give residents a place to report problems or issues through the City's website – i.e. excess water waste, potholes, or a tree issue.

City Mobile Phone Application

Once the Citizen Request Dashboard is launched, staff will work on launching and publicizing the City App which will provide a quick way for residents and visitor to access the City's online calendar, agenda, and the Citizen Request Dashboard from their smartphones. The app will be available in the Apple App Store and the Google Play Store.

Electronic Message Boards

Another way the City Council increase information is through an electronic message board. Costs for a very basic board start at around \$399 (single line scrolling banner) but can increase up to \$20,000 (full color with graphics).



Although this method would easily provide information to public and the information would be easy to update staff anticipates that the installation of an electronic message board might be controversial as the municipal code currently prohibits these types of signs.

Emergency Alert System / Reverse 911

A reverse 911 system allows the City to contact residents and key personnel during an emergency situation using voice, email, SMS texting and social media at a moment's notice. Staff looked at three different service providers for emergency alert systems, Nixle 360, Inspiron Logistics, and Emergency Communication Network. Of the three options, staff recommends the City Council upgrade from our current Nixle service to Nixle 360 which will provide a completely web-based solution combining reverse 911 directories with a comprehensive databases of geographically-located phone numbers

that do not require citizens to opt-in for emergency usage. The annual cost for this service is \$5,000, which is \$1,250 more than what the Police Department is currently paying. The other systems would increase the City's current costs by \$5,000 or more each year and would not provide any additional functionality.

Increased Staffing

Much of the discussion on this topic at the Strategic Planning retreat centered around hiring a full-time person to work on community communications. Currently, the Assistant City Manager serves as the City's Public Information Officer and the Public Works and Library & Community Services Departments have staff whose ancillary duties include working on publicity. The City employs a part-time Website and Public Information Technician who primary responsibly is keeping the City's website up-to-date. The Police Department has also identified one of its part-time grant-funded Community Services Officers to work on social media and community outreach.

There is little doubt that a full-time employee dedicated to community communications would increase the public's information on the current status of various City programs and services. This person would be dedicated to community relations, media relations, Cable TV programming, the City website, and the various social media platforms; he or she would be able to create and implement comprehensive programs for dissemination of information to assure that the City's key messages reach the public, develop and coordinate official media strategies, and perhaps most importantly, promote, organize and stimulate good relationships with neighborhood and community groups and other local agencies, interpreting and explaining City programs and philosophies.

As envisioned above, this position would likely operate at an Analyst level, which cost approximately \$95,000 year in salary and benefits. Even if the City were to upgrade the current Website and Public Information Technician to a Community Communications Analyst, it would be at an increase of approximately \$75,000 each year.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Initiative	Cost
Additional Banner Poles	\$26,000
Citizen Request Dashboard	<i>In process</i>
City Mobile Phone Application	<i>In process</i>
Electronic Message Boards	Up to \$20,000
Emergency Alert System	Additional \$1,250
Increased Staffing	\$75,000 - \$95,000

PUBLIC NOTICE PROCESS

This item has been noticed through the regular agenda notification process. Copies of the report are available via the City's website at www.cityofsierramadre.com, at the City Hall public counter, and the Sierra Madre Public Library.

ALTERNATIVES

1. The City Council may instruct staff to upgrade the City's emergency alert system to Nixle 360 and to prepare a Request for Proposals for additional banner poles at Sierra Madre Blvd. and Lima Street.
2. The City Council may provide additional direction to staff on how to increase community communication.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the City Council instruct staff to upgrade the City's emergency alert system to Nixle 360 and to prepare a Request for Proposals for additional banner poles at Sierra Madre Blvd. and Lima Street.



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ATTACHMENT

Kurt Zimmerman, Mayor

MaryAnn MacGillivray, Mayor Pro Tem

John Buchanan, Council Member

Joseph Mosca, Council Member

Donald Watts, Council Member

Nancy Shollenberger, City Clerk

George Enyedi, City Treasurer

TO: Honorable Mayor Zimmerman and Members of the City Council

FROM: Elaine I. Aguilar, City Manager

INITIATED BY: James Carlson, Management Analyst

DATE: September 23, 2008

SUBJECT: **INSTALLATION OF BANNER POLES AT W. SIERRA MADRE
BOULEVARD EAST OF LIMA STREET**

SUMMARY

Staff recommends that the City Council provide direction regarding the installation of two banner poles east of the intersection of West Sierra Madre Boulevard and Lima Street.

ANALYSIS

Background

Over the past several years it has been suggested by a number of residents and community groups that the City consider installing an additional set of banner poles on the west end of the traditional downtown district. In July of this year, staff was contacted by a representative of the Sierra Madre Chamber of Commerce with a request to install the additional banner poles once again.

Overview of the Current Downtown Banner

The City of Sierra Madre has used a banner to promote City and community organization activities since the early 1970's. The location of the banner, just off Kersting Court and across North Baldwin Avenue, has proven to be a valuable method of publicizing a wide variety of events to Sierra Madre residents and visitors. Banners are provided by the organizations publicizing the events and Public Works staff attaches them to the banner poles on Mondays. A Banner Permit (Attachment A) is required for each banner which clearly lists the policies and procedures for displaying the banner. A fee of \$88.00 is also charged and is adjusted for CPI yearly at approximately 3%. It is City policy that there is no waiver of the fee for any banner. Applications and banners are processed by the Community & Personnel Services Department and approved by the Community Services Commission.

Staff has found that at least as far back as 2000, there have been suggestions by the public and community organizations that there are not enough opportunities to use the banner to publicize events. Often banners are forced to be scheduled at times that are not close to the date of the event. This is particularly difficult in the spring and summer when many events occur on the same weekend. For example the Huck Finn Fishing Derby may fall on the same weekend as Little League Opening Day.

Proposal for a Second Banner

A second banner located at the western side of traditional downtown would provide twice the promotion space for City and organizational events. It would also provide information at an additional access point into the downtown area. The location of this banner has been suggested by the Chamber of Commerce to be at the intersection of West Sierra Madre Boulevard and Lima Street. This location was also the preference of the Parks & Recreation Commission in 2000. The Commission's specific recommendation was that the banner should be located at a controlled intersection providing motorists a safe opportunity to view the information. Staff proposes that the banner location be just easterly of Lima Street, where the banner information can be viewed by vehicles stopped at the intersection.

At the Sierra Madre City Council meeting on October 9, 2000, a project proposal was presented for a second set of banner poles. At that time, Staff recommended the purchase of two simple taper steel posts at an approximate cost of \$5,000.00. The proposal was declined by the City Council at that time. Current research shows that the project could be considerably more expensive. The City of Monrovia completed a very similar project in 2006 at a total cost of over \$25,000.00.

Cost Estimates for Second Banner

Staff has been in contact with the contractor for the Monrovia project and has been informed that there are costly safety aspects for producing and installing permanent poles for street banners. These costs are associated with pole strength ratings in regards to windstorm events. Staff has also contacted six additional contractors for estimates. Generally, the contractors request a more specific scope of work that would be included with an RFP. All contractors have alluded to an extra cost associated with these types of poles. Any RFP would require that strength specifications be met for the specific purpose and location of proposed construction.

Consideration of Newer Safety Technology

At this time, Staff has been unable to locate information or specifications of the two existing banner poles located next to Kersting Court. It is believed that the poles are similar to the simple tapered steel posts that were recommended in the 2000 report. There is no indication, however, if the wind safety strength criteria was considered when the poles were installed.

Staff was able to find a vendor for breakaway swivels that could be installed at the connection point between the banner and the pole. These swivels can be purchased in a wide variety of "breaking points" ranging from 150 to 1800 pounds of tension. These items are listed for \$100.00 each (regardless of setting) and replacement parts are available at a minimal cost in the event of the breakaway feature being used. This technology could be considered for both improving the safety of our current banner poles, as well as possibly contributing to the safety rating of proposed new poles.

Staff discussed the breakaway swivel option with two of the potential pole installation contractors and in both cases they indicated it was possible that it could contribute to the poles safety rating, and may decrease the price of such poles. A representative from Composite Materials Technology indicated that they would be able to produce the poles, (without delivery or installation) for approximately \$3000 after considering the breakaway swivels and a pole height of 30 feet. Both contractors also indicated that more precise information, including pricing would be available after viewing the specifications on an RFP.

Environmental Review

If City Council decides to direct staff to prepare a RFP for this project, staff will prepare a Negative Declaration for the project, consistent with the approach taken in 2000.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Although the informal estimate from the Composite Materials Technology indicates that there is a possibility of receiving lower bids based on discussions with contractors, staff recommends using the \$26,000.00 Monrovia cost figure to discuss the benefits of producing the RFP. Staff would also recommend that analysis and retrofit with breakaway swivels or complete replacement of existing banner poles be included as an optional scope of work item within the RFP.

Funds have not been budgeted for this project and would come from the General Fund or Community Redevelopment Fund. In either case, Staff could consider using the new banner application fees to pay off the project. A \$26,000.00 project would pay for itself in approximately five years if it is used at 100% and CPI increases to the fee is approved for the next five and a half years. Staff would also consider approaching members of the Sierra Madre Coordinating Council to fund-raise for the project as it would be beneficial to their organization's marketing efforts.

Another financial benefit should be considered in respect to the additional publicity that would be provided to many of our community organizations in their fund-raising efforts. The financial donations the City receives from these organizations have proven to be a very important income to the City for many years. The intangible benefits of greater publicity for these events and groups is difficult to measure but should be recognized.

At this time, the Council may also want to consider the purchase and installation of breakaway swivels to our existing banner poles as a safety measure.

PUBLIC NOTICE PROCESS

This item has been noticed through the regular agenda notification process. Copies of this report are available at the City Hall public counter and the Sierra Madre Public Library.

ALTERNATIVES

1. The City Council may elect to direct staff to prepare and distribute a Request for Proposal for a project to provide additional banner poles east of Lima Street on West Sierra Madre Boulevard.
2. The City Council may elect to appropriate funds and direct staff to install breakaway swivels at the existing banner poles.
3. The City Council may elect to instruct staff to take no further action relative to the existing banner pole, or the request to install new poles.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council discuss whether to install two banner poles east of the intersection of West Sierra Madre Boulevard and Lima Street. If the Council decides to have the banner poles installed, the Council should direct staff to prepare a Request for Proposal (RFP) for banner pole installation based on the Council's recommendations. Staff also recommends that City Council consider the appropriation of funds and direction of staff to add breakaway swivels to the existing banner poles on North Baldwin.

Attachments (1):

Attachment A: Banner Permit (including policies & procedures)