External Communications

Why this Issue?

➤ *Municipal interviews*
➤ *Borough staff surveys*
➤ *Community leader interviews*
➤ *Resident surveys*
➤ *Focus group*
➤ *Business surveys*

Both within and outside of municipal government, there is a consensus that communications could improve. Municipal leaders and Borough staff mentioned issues of interpersonal communications, as well as a desire to improve official Borough communication avenues such as the website, newsletter, and social media. There is also a recognition that communications and advertising could be timelier. 72 percent of municipal leaders mentioned concerns about, or suggested improvements to, official Borough communications during their interviews.

Some community leaders and businesses have expressed they would like to be more aware of information from the Borough. There seems to be a general lack of understanding about how the Borough government works and what they do, who is responsible for what, and how the Borough can help and how they cannot help. While the general perception is that the Borough is making good effort and trying, there were also comments about needing to slow down and pay more attention to details (e.g. misspelled names of businesses when recognizing them in official Borough communications). Several businesses mentioned frustration with communication during the Potomac road construction project. Many community leaders also expressed a desire to see the municipal government coordinate better with community groups and organizations.

Most comments related to communications from the resident survey responses and focus group discussion were related to improving the newsletter and website and being unsatisfied with customer service and communications from municipal leaders and staff. In the resident survey, the following data supports the prioritization of external communications.

- The most common way respondents communicate concerns or questions about Dormont is talking to friends, family, or neighbors (332 respondents). The second most common way of finding out information about Dormont is from friends, family, or neighbors (449 respondents).

- The average response for whether people feel comfortable sharing information in a public meeting (1 = very uncomfortable and 5 = very comfortable) is 3.4.
- The third most common way of communicating concerns is the website and the fourth most common way of finding information is the website. Yet the second most common ways to both improve communications and make people feel more comfortable sharing ideas and thoughts was through making changes to the website.
- The most common barrier preventing people from attending, using, or visiting meetings, amenities, or events was that they did not know about it (308 respondents). The number one response to what would make it easier to attend, use or visit Borough meetings, places or events was to advertise and educate more (175 respondents). Many people were unaware of or did not use Savvy Citizen or Dormont Delivers, though those methods of incoming and outgoing communication address many of the gaps in information community members mentioned.
- One of the most common themes heard from across stakeholder groups is that official Borough communications could improve. People specifically mentioned dissatisfaction with the website and the newsletter. In general, people find it difficult to find the information they need in general and in a timely fashion.
- Another common theme across stakeholder groups was interpersonal communications. This ranged from customer service of Borough staff to Council behavior.

The feedback we have heard about Borough communications can be grouped into the following categories: 1) advertising, awareness and education, 2) communications accommodations, 3) Borough website, 4) Borough newsletter and mailed communications, and 5) other Borough communications such as in-person or over the phone communications, social media, Savvy Citizen alerts, and Dormont Delivers.

Recommendations

1. **Develop a comprehensive organization-wide communications plan.** Components to include:
    - Marketing and branding vision and plan, including timely advertising of events and programs
    - Annual content calendar for newsletter and social media
    - Annual events calendar

Resources and potential partners:

- ICMA community branding

- Keystone Oaks School District individualized learning

2. **Increase promotion of Dormont Delivers and Savvy Citizen.** Find creative ways to consistently share information about the availability of these items and promote their use by residents, businesses, places of worship, and nonprofit organizations in the Borough.

Resources and potential partners:

- Local community groups
- Businesses
- Dormont Public Library

3. **Revise language in all written methods of communication to be inclusive, inviting and respectful, and easy to understand.**

Resources and potential partners:

- See access memo

4. **Make changes to the layout, design, and content of the newsletter with a combination of community member input and professional expertise.** Add businesses and other community organizations such as places of worship to the newsletter distribution list.

Resources and potential partners:

- **Are Newsletters Effective? Assessing Their Role as a Communication Tool** *Purdue University*
- Partner with area universities and colleges for internship opportunities to work on specific projects.
- Residents or other community members with professional skills willing to volunteer time to help with projects. Could include high school students

5. **Make changes to the layout, design, and content of the website with a combination of website user input and professional expertise.** Recommended ideas to explore include:
    - Online form options (paying for day camp, e-permits, rentals, etc.)
    - More information about the pool (food rules, rentals, etc.)

Resources and potential partners:

- Shakopee, MN e-permits (example)
- Universities and colleges

6. **Seek community member input to develop an e-newsletter to be sent out in between print newsletter.**

Resources and potential partners:

- Universities and colleges
- ICMA

7. **Accessible and timely government information.** A major theme emerging from remarks about communications is that government communications are confusing, not easily found, not transparent, and not timely. Recommendations ideas to explore include:
    - Agenda minutes on the website for all commission, board and committee meetings.
    - Post meeting agendas prior to the meetings
    - Provide information about meetings and events in a timely manner

8. **Strengthen relationships with customers by humanizing staff and elected officials and highlight stories of the work they do to help the Borough.**