

Insert to go with Agenda item that :”Discussion and possible action regarding a review of our current transparency policy and practice. What is our current transparency policy and should it be in writing?”

What is our Transparency policy?

Last summer on July 12, 2016 at the request of two council members the council had a discussion and concluded that “more is better”.

The only written statement I could find addressing Transparency is in our budget Book;

Under the Roles of Council;

“The role of Council is to develop a long term vision for the Town, to develop policies necessary to achieve the vision, and communicate with, and seek input from, stakeholders. This includes

...promoting **transparency** in communicating with residents, businesses, and regional partners.” Page 10, 2016-17 Building a Solid Foundation, Budget Book.

I have updated the outline we covered of our history of Transparency in July of 2016.

“What is our history in Addison?”

The progress we have made since the “Dark Days” following the FBI investigation, death of our mayor and the Rolfe report back in the 80s, much has changed.

Began with Town hall meetings 2 times per year,
followed by meeting and exceeding the legal requirements for financial disclosure with our award winning Budget Books and Certified Annual Reports (CAFR) from our finance department.

A push for video broadcasting and archiving of council meetings began in 2008 initially meeting strong resistance yet by 2010 was implemented.

Since May of 2011

Town Hall meetings 2x a year continued with the agenda and

presentations determined by mayor and council members. Each meeting concluding with an extensive open mic Q&A session.

Video of all Regular council meetings was expanded to include P&Z meetings. Work sessions relocated downstairs to “parlor” for easier access and more comfortable space for spectators.

Police department began providing annual reports, weekly reports, sex offender reports and other crime information on line. Joined with citizens to reform Neighborhood Watch groups.

Finance department brought access to CAFR on line, Budget Book on line, Kanter reports and responses on line and archived, website updated to include easy access to all financial materials including on line check book and access to Open Gov. com.

Availability of mayor to media; DMN, DBJ, TV News, Blogs including Truth in Addison and Facts Matter.

Mayor and council ease of access by email and ipads.

Open Public comment section at the beginning of each Regular Council meeting.

Full time certified City Secretary to facilitate and expedite the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.

Economic Development luncheons to highlight our local restaurateurs on the first Monday of each month. Posted as an open meeting.

Mayor Coffees 2x month; First Wednesday and Third Thursday. Posted as Open meetings.

Waiver of Attorney Client privilege with respect to certain documents.

Weekly Mayor Newsletter since July 2011, in June 2016 over 2,000 subscribers.

Mayor Newsletter subscription list available to each council member for their own newsletter since 2013.

May 2016 council members Walden, Duffy, Angell, Arfsten and Hughes voted to terminate the mayor’s newsletter.

Not long after the termination of the mayor’s newsletter, the staff began writing a Town Newsletter. Council did not provide any guidance as to content.

Town to begin broadcast on cable channel in April 2017. No current council policy in place for guidance for staff as to content, advertising, etc.,,

Are those practices consistent with “promoting transparency in communicating with residents, businesses, and regional partners.”?

Do we agree that one of the intended purposes of Transparency is to “build and maintain trust”?

Are our current practices consistent with that purpose?

Do all council members make themselves available to the public?

Do council members have private meetings? If so, is that a good practice?

Are there other current practices that may be inconsistent with building and maintaining trust?

June of 016 council members Walden, Duffy, Angell, Hughes and Arfsten voted to terminate the mayor’s newsletter.

Soon thereafter Town staff began to write and distribute a weekly newsletter entitled; “A weekly wrap up of All Things Addison.”

That Town newsletter uses the subscription list of email addresses that were developed for the mayor’s newsletter.

The Town staff has added one full time person to our Communications and Marketing Staff.

The Council has not provided any policy guidelines for the Town newsletter.

What is the intended purpose of the Town newsletter?

Is it intended to fully inform our community
about “All Things Addison”?

What are the minimum disclosure requirements for our Town newsletter?

What are the reasonable expectations of our community about those disclosures and information?

Should the Town newsletter only report the “good” news as a marketing piece or all of the news?

In a recent Town newsletter there was a promotion of an event at a mayoral candidate’s business; is that a good practice?

In a recent Town newsletter there was mention and promotion of a public hearing for a playground issue yet in the very same newsletter there was no mention of a public hearing for a major rezoning of commercial property to residential to permit 349 apartments, is that good practice?

The Town newsletter reports on a limited number of council actions; not all.

What process is used in determining which actions are reported?

The Town newsletter does not report how each council member voted on any item, is that good practice?

The Town newsletter does not report on attendance statistics for council members, is that good practice?

Should the Town newsletter report on personnel changes on our staff?

Should the Town newsletter keep the community apprised of the status of investigations involving former employees? I.e. Former Addison Police Officer and treasurer of the Addison Police Association James Easterling?

In terms of keeping our community well informed what notices should be provided for Public Hearings, important council matters and zoning issues?

Should additional resources be used to inform our community; above the state minimums? I.e., 200 feet, use of the Dallas Commercial Record

Additional possible resources;

Town newsletter?

Signage?

Mail?

Social Media?

Develop and utilize an Addison APP?

How will the council guide staff on the utilization of our new TV Channel to fully and fairly inform our community?

What other current practices should be addressed, revised or new practices developed to “Build and Maintain Trust”?

While certainly intent is important, perception often guides public opinion. Full and open communication is the central component of our commitment to Transparency.

In the coming years Transparency that leads to building and maintaining trust will be critical for Addison. As we face the challenges of funding our necessary Infrastructure upgrades and deal with mandatory revenue caps that require community approval, the trust of our community will be essential for our continued success.

Abraham Lincoln; “Healing schisms requires a high level
of communication.”

George Washington; “It is essential that public opinion
be enlightened.”

Transparency takes time, pace and commitment.

Transparency is the key to building and maintaining trust.