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Community Engagement Initiative 2021



Why engage the community?

Bozeman residents care about where they live, work, and play. As the City of Bozeman works to maintain our high quality of life by providing basic services and infrastructure as well as programs that support what makes Bozeman special, we strive to integrate customer service, communications, and engagement. These opportunities for residents to interact with the City are all pathways for folks to take part in finding solutions and contributing to decisions that affect them.

Ultimately, we seek to build trust in processes that are equitable, transparent, and innovative as we work together to Engage Bozeman!

What is the purpose of this document?

The City of Bozeman City Commission places a high value on community engagement with Bozeman residents. The City's 2018 Strategic Plan outlines a commitment in Vision Statement 1:

“An Engaged Community. We foster a culture of engagement and civic leadership based on innovation and best practices involving community members of all backgrounds and perspectives.”

The Strategic Plan includes the creation of a community engagement plan in Section 1.2.b. to “increase community engagement in city decision making processes.” This document serves as that plan, outlining how City staff, leadership, and the community can contribute to a collaborative approach to local governance. The framework, language, and tools presented here will be woven into the work of the City to create a seamless and integrated approach.

Many of the key concepts of this initiative come from the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), a widely recognized organization focused on advancing the practice of public participation through professional development, certification, standards of practice, core values, and advocacy.

WHAT WE HEARD

As a part of formulating the Engage Bozeman framework, staff consulted community members through interviews and a community engagement survey. We asked respondents to provide feedback on how our efforts can support and strengthen the guiding principles of the initiative. For each guiding principle, we reflect on what we heard from folks who provided input via interview and survey.

Throughout the document, you'll see quotes and themes that have been highlighted by community members who have provided their input on the Engage Bozeman initiative.

Guiding Principles

Equity and Inclusivity:

- Include community members most impacted by City projects
- Acknowledge and address barriers to participation for underrepresented groups
- The City goes to the community as well as invites the community into City spaces

Transparency and Trust:

- The decision making process is clear and the community understands how their input influences decisions
- The City communicates back to the community about how their feedback was considered in the decision
- Elected officials, City staff, and community partners follow through on their commitment to the community engagement process

Innovation and Adaptation:

- Those who wish to engage can do so effectively through a variety of accessible engagement tools
- Identify future improvements by integrating community feedback on engagement and communication tools
- Make continuous improvements as we learn from our experiences and from other organizations and communities

WHAT WE HEARD

HUMILITY AND THE LEARNING PROCESS.

We heard that it's important that staff and leadership approach conversations around equity and inclusion with humility. Learning requires us to be reflective as individuals and as an institution to understand what we don't know and where we have made mistakes in the past.

"To acknowledge limitations builds trust"

"Be transparent about learning processes, leaders need to model the messiness of 'not knowing'"

Goals

1.

Create common understanding among City leadership, staff, local partners, and Bozeman residents on engagement and decision making processes.

2.

Build consistency in how we plan for engagement. Grow internal capacity and train staff to create and implement community engagement plans to ensure clear, effective, and inclusive engagement in City projects.

3.

Develop our toolbox: Broaden and deepen community engagement opportunities through a diversity of engagement techniques and tools.

4.

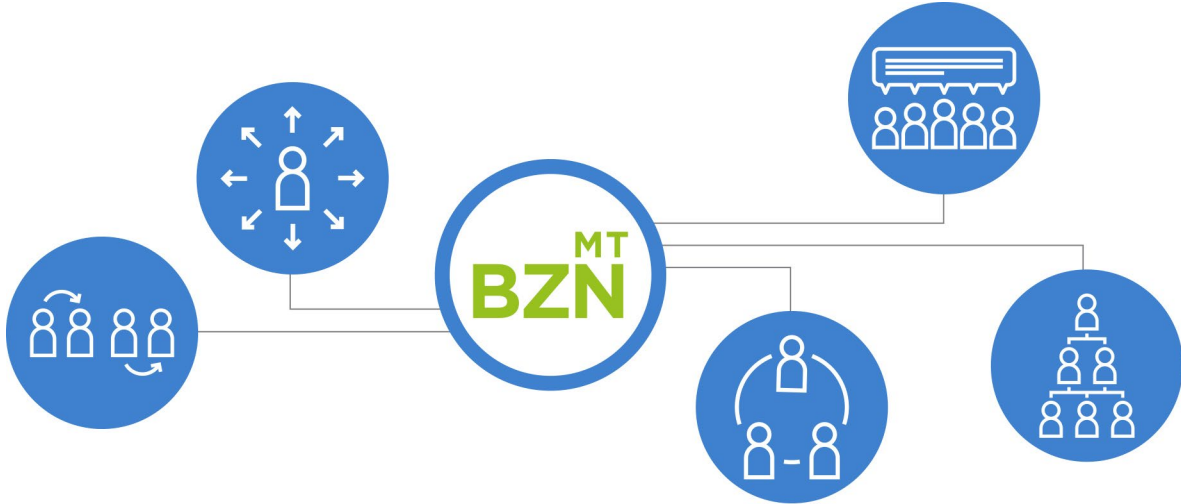
Close the loop by communicating back to the public about how their input contributed to a given decision or outcome.



What is our approach to Community Engagement?

Our approach for community engagement is adapted from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). IAP2 has advanced best practices and methods for effective, meaningful, and inclusive public engagement since 1990. IAP2 defines public participation as any process that involves the public in problem solving or decision making and uses public input to make decisions. IAP2 provides training, materials, and a process for creating engagement plans that help build consistency and clarity in how community members contribute to decisions that affect them.

In May of 2020, the City of Bozeman joined IAP2, gaining access to training, materials, and professional networks for staff. Several City staff are trained in IAP2’s Foundations course series, which includes community engagement planning and employing tools and techniques to implement community engagement plans. This document provides an overview of definitions, materials, and processes adapted from IAP2 that are at the core of the City of Bozeman’s approach to community engagement.



Defining Community Engagement

Community engagement is the term used in the City’s Strategic Plan commitment to “broaden and deepen engagement of the community in city government, innovating methods for inviting input from the community and stakeholders.”

Other terms such as public participation or public involvement capture the same meaning. Community engagement is the term the City of Bozeman uses to encompass this work.

To ensure that participation in engagement efforts are rooted in a common understanding, the following defines our community engagement efforts at the City of Bozeman.

Community Engagement is:

an **inclusive** and **ongoing process** that relies on a **two-way exchange** of information, ideas, and expertise between the public and the City of Bozeman to solve problems and make **sustainable decisions**.

Key Components of Our Definition

There are several key words called out within this definition. The following describes each of the components from the definition in more detail.

“Inclusive” means that we are striving to reduce barriers to participation, offer a greater diversity of ways to engage, and ensure that we are creating accessible and welcoming spaces for all people to engage.

“Ongoing process” means that we plan for multiple interactions in multiple formats. It is not just one public meeting or a single outreach event.

“Two-way exchange” means that information flows back and forth between the public and decision makers. One-way communications may be required throughout the process of community engagement to ensure that those who are participating have the information they need to contribute in a meaningful way. A key factor of engagement is that decision makers close the loop with those offering input by explaining how public input was considered and why public input was or was not reflected in the outcome of the decision. Additionally, members

of the community are valued as experts in their lived experience and day-to-day interactions with City services, projects, and processes. Community engagement efforts are founded in the idea that community members contribute to better outcomes by enriching the considerations before decision makers and City staff.

“Sustainable decisions” are the outcome of effective community engagement and clear decision making processes. They result in community members’ satisfaction with the process used to reach a given outcome, EVEN IF they are not satisfied with the outcome itself. They bring us closer to establishing the trust, transparency, equity, and innovation outlined in our guiding principles. Sustainable decisions balance the long-term vision and current realities of a changing Bozeman. As illustrated in the graphic here, they are **publicly acceptable, technically feasible, socially responsible, environmentally compatible, and economically viable**.

Defining decision making

Decision making is at the core of how we plan for community engagement. Clarity on what decisions will be made, who will make them, and what information will be considered throughout the process is essential. Many decisions are made throughout a given City project. Our approach calls on project teams to consider which decisions are already made, and which decisions can be made more sustainable by engaging the community. Which decisions the public will contribute to specifically must be clarified at the outset of the engagement planning process. Next, the public must be equipped with the right information and tools to contribute to a given decision.

Decision making process



Public needs at each phase



This graphic is an outline of a decision making process with 6 steps from defining the decision to be made, gathering information, establishing criteria, developing alternatives, evaluating alternatives, and making a decision. Depending on what stage or stages of the decision making process the public will be involved, they may need to be provided with varying information or methods of engaging.

WHAT WE HEARD

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOLLOWING THROUGH & FOLLOWING UP!

Community engagement processes are most successful when the decision makers and project team follow through on their promise to the public (as described in the Engagement Spectrum on page 8.) Following up directly with those who were involved in the process and letting them know how their input influenced the outcomes is both informative and closes the loop. This creates trust and encourages people to engage again. Decision makers should understand and respect the importance of following through throughout the process.

“It’s really important to follow up and show the outcome of the time that folks spent with you.”

“The way to build credibility is to follow through on what you say and demonstrate that the work is being done.”




When do we do Community Engagement?

City-led projects typically incorporate some aspect of informing or communicating with the community, but when should we go beyond communication to engage the public? There are many ways in which community members can provide input that benefits project outcomes, however not all City projects will include an engagement process. Authentic and genuine engagement occurs when a decision has not yet been made and there is opportunity for decision makers to integrate stakeholder input into their considerations of different alternatives or outcomes.


Adequate time and resources must be incorporated into work plans, budgets, and project scopes to plan for and implement successful community engagement efforts that are respectful of community member’s time and can truly integrate their expertise.

The following questions help determine the extent of engagement that may occur throughout a City-led project:



How can the public play a role in the decision-making process?

Does the City Commission or other decision makers want the public to help identify solutions, select options, or weigh in on their preferred approach?



What is the impact on the public?

How will the project benefit or burden specific groups in the community? What are potential unintended outcomes?




What is the timeline, budget and staff capacity?

Is there time and resources to plan for and implement a successful engagement process?

Defining the level of engagement

After there is clarity on the decision and how the public will participate in the decision making process, the level of engagement is determined. The IAP2 engagement spectrum outlines different levels of engagement and helps determine how community will contribute to the process and what the expectations are for achieving a given level of engagement. Throughout any level of engagement, one-way communication will occur to provide the community with the resources and information they need to contribute effectively.

Increasing Impact on the Decision 				
	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed and listen to and acknowledge concerns & aspirations and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns & aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice & innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
<h2>Inform/Communicate</h2> <p>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions.</p>				

Example Tools and Techniques				
	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
SELECT BASED ON LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys • Interviews • Focus groups • Public meetings • Public comment • Open houses (where there is an opportunity for the public to give input) • Public engagement platforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charrettes • Focused conversations • Community liaisons • World cafes/table talks • Open space meetings (self directed meetings) • Card storming (using sticky notes to generate ideas, identify priorities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciative inquiry processes • Deliberative forums • Advisory groups • Study circles • Workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen juries • Deliberative polling process



Tools and Techniques for Community Engagement

Different tools and techniques are employed throughout a project depending on the level of engagement selected. The selection of tools and techniques is guided by the Community Engagement Plan and the level of engagement from “consult” to “empower.” Additional considerations that play into the selection of techniques include who the project seeks to engage, what resources are available, and the project timeline.

Choosing the right tools or techniques

The guiding principles of Engage Bozeman encourage staff to think bravely and thoughtfully when selecting the best tools and techniques for a given project. As shown in the example above, the City has access to a number of options to engage at every level of the spectrum. In addition staff are always considering ways to evolve existing tools to better match an impacted audience and looking at new methods that may be new to the toolbox.

WHAT WE HEARD

TAKE RISKS

We heard that innovation requires flexibility and the willingness to pivot as we develop new processes and tools.

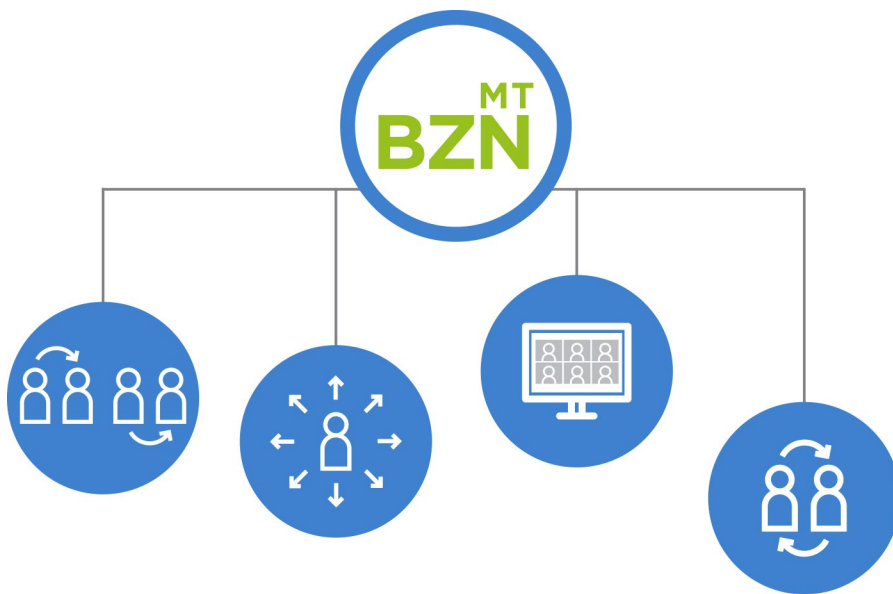
“Don’t be afraid to try new things and change your strategy if it doesn’t work”

“Growing is uncomfortable! You have to be willing to stop the way you’re doing things and start in another direction.”

Are these tools accessible for community members?

Time will always be a limitation for many folks who may want to provide input but are not able to attend meetings. Staff should consider how we can ease the burden of time, especially for those who may have higher barriers to participate. Consider tools that:

- Allow for people to participate in their own time
- Offer engagement opportunities that can be attended live or viewed afterwards
- Go TO the communities you're trying to reach to reduce travel burden for participants, and meet in spaces they are comfortable in
- Yes, virtual meetings are still a great option! They're easy to join and allow for folks to squeeze it into busy schedules or attend even if they're a caregiver



WHAT WE HEARD

TIME WELL-SPENT

In several instances, people mentioned that they felt heard and like their input was valued in one-on-one interactions with staff and elected officials. Similarly, people appreciated when events were organized in a way that is respectful of people's time - giving plenty of advance notice, not having meetings run long, and allowing flexible options for people to participate in their own time.

WHAT WE HEARD

DO YOU NEED TO HEAR FROM SPECIFIC GROUPS? DON'T ASK THEM TO COME TO YOU. GO TO THEM.

While asking folks to come to an event can still result in good engagement, it may not always be the most accessible. Consider the location of events. Are they near public transportation? Are they within walking distance of the audience you're trying to reach? Is childcare a factor for your participants? Going into the community may be the best way to reach those who wouldn't otherwise make it to an event somewhere else. This is also a way to give new people, who've never engaged before, an opportunity to have a voice at the "table."



ADVISORY GROUPS

Have you heard the term "citizen boards" "working groups" or other types of "advisory groups" before? A tool that is commonly used in local governments to address complex topics, advisory groups provide input, advice, and recommendations to decision makers on a regular and ongoing basis. As with all engagement tools, the role that they play in the engagement process should be clear from the get-go.



The relationship between Community Engagement and Communications

Communications is a one-way process that informs, educates and alerts.

As shown in the Community Engagement spectrum, efforts to “Inform/Communicate” underlie every level of engagement and are critical to successful community engagement processes. Communications and community engagement are always woven together.

Depending on the project, there may be phases of the project where communications is the primary focus. Some examples of how communications will be used as a part of the engagement process include:

- Creating awareness about an ongoing project and opportunities to participate
- Providing background education for those who engage
- Closing the feedback loop by communicating back to participants about how their input was used or influenced the decision
- Only “Informing” may be sufficient for increasing awareness and education on a project where community engagement has already been completed, or where another level of engagement is not required

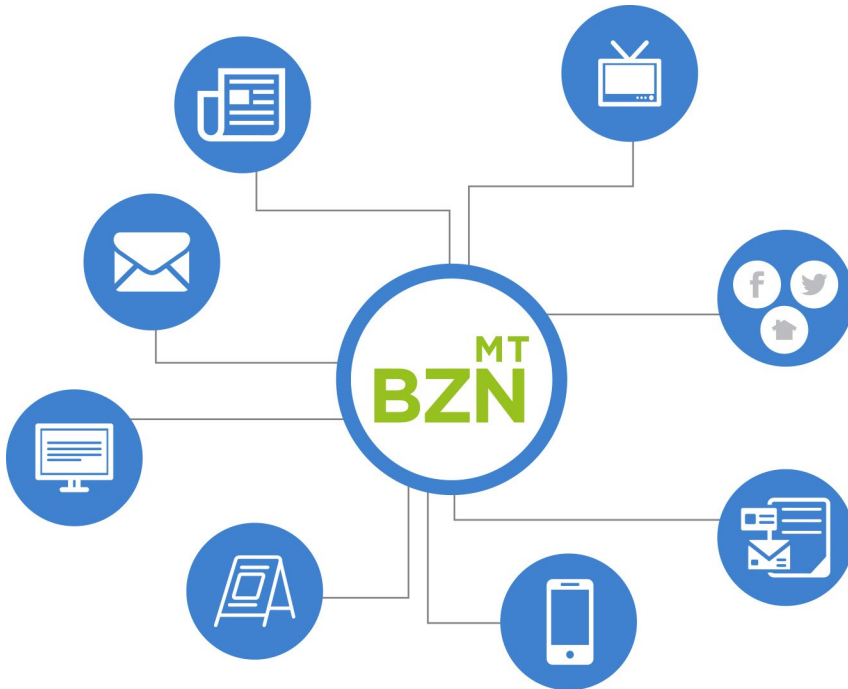
WHAT WE HEARD

I WASN'T AWARE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES!

Lack of a robust communications component can create one of the most significant barriers to participation for any audience. A common theme heard from those who don't participate is a lack of information or knowledge about upcoming opportunities for engagement. While community engagement provides the process and mechanism for soliciting public input in decision making, communications is the tool for inviting those same folks into a space where two-way engagement can occur.

Using the right channels for the audience

As outlined in the City's recently adopted Communications Plan (2020), the City is tasked with reaching an extremely broad group of people, depending on the topic. Clearly identifying the audience and then tailoring the different channels or avenues for reaching those people requires careful foresight, planning, budget, time and effort. While it is ideal for community members to seek information from the city (example: following or looking up City social media pages), it is our duty to recognize when it will be necessary to proactively reach out to the community by using communications avenues that directly target the groups that may be most impacted by the decisions being made as a part of the engagement process (example: receiving a direct email about an opportunity to give input on a project of interest.)



Bolstering current communications tools

As the City continues to prioritize community engagement, there remains a continued need to apply the same guiding principles to how the city does communications. Knowing that, there are spaces where the city can continue to innovate, adapt, and improve its existing tools to reach a broader and more representative group of Bozeman community members.



THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

As we innovate and make the most of new technology or methods for reaching out, we can not lose sight of the importance of word of mouth. Bozeman is growing but our community spirit is still very alive. Many folks still receive information and are drawn to participate as they interact directly with friends, colleagues, and neighbors. Fostering relationships and utilizing opportunities to share information with community liaisons remains important.

WHAT WE HEARD

THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

Sometimes, reading about a city project feels like you're reading something in a totally different language. Technical terms, political jargon, acronyms, can exclude people from participating. Sometimes language barriers are much more literal - project leads must consider translation needs for the languages spoken in our community (for example: Spanish, Arabic, and Mandarin.)

“When you're able to communicate with someone in their own language, it creates connection, it creates a safe space for people to have open conversation, knowing they will be understood.”

“Use language that's relevant to the person you're speaking to – keep it simple.”

How do we do Community Engagement?

Using IAP2's framework, we are in the early stages of establishing our process and building our capacity to plan for and implement community engagement efforts as a part of City projects. The following enumerates our process for planning community engagement efforts:

1. **Project planning:** As City projects are planned for, project teams consider which decisions have already been made, which decisions could benefit from community input, the potential impacts on the public, timeline, and anticipated level of public interest in their projects. These factors help determine the level of communications and engagement needed for a given project.
2. **Create a Community Engagement Plan:** A Community Engagement Plan outlines key roles, stakeholders, decisions to be made, engagement level, resources needed, and a schedule for engagement. Project teams work with the City's internal Community Engagement Team throughout the planning process to ensure that engagement processes are thoughtful, effective, and inclusive.
3. **Engage Bozeman!:** Project team leads community engagement efforts in coordination with staff and consultants. This includes utilizing appropriate tools and techniques to facilitate engagement with the public. Community members participate in engagement opportunities and share their input with the project team.
4. **Make the decision:** Input is compiled and provided to decision makers. Decision makers use public input as determined by the level of engagement to make better decisions.
5. **Follow up:** Staff inform the community of how their input influenced the outcomes and decisions made.
6. **Reflect and Evaluate:** Staff gather feedback from those who participated on successes, challenges, and ways to improve the engagement process.



The graphic above shows an example of how the engagement process works as a cycle to continuously improve and evolve through each project.

WHAT WE HEARD

JUST ASK!

We heard encouragement from stakeholders to ask participants what worked and what didn't as a follow-up to engagement efforts. Work with trusted community members to develop engagement activities that will be meaningful and effective for the folks you're seeking input from.

"Ask us! If we are in on something from inception, we can help make that better for everyone."

What's Next?

Building Internal Capacity

- Continue staff training:** City staff will continue to receive training from IAP2 on community engagement planning and techniques. Over the next year, we hope to have 15 staff across City departments certified through the IAP2 Foundations course. Additionally, we will continue to provide internal staff trainings on our approach as well as in meeting facilitation and engagement techniques.
- Grow the Community Engagement Team:** Bring in additional team members across City departments to provide technical support and advise project leads.
- Provide technical assistance:** Throughout summer 2020, our community engagement approach, definitions, and community engagement planning tools have been presented across City departments to directors, managers, and staff. Several departments have piloted the community engagement planning process and contributed to its ongoing development.
- Develop new tools and techniques:** Explore and pilot diverse and accessible approaches to community engagement. We will continue to draw upon the experiences and expertise of peer communities in community engagement best practices.

Measuring Our Efforts

Tracking the success of our efforts is an ongoing process that will occur as we build internal capacity and implement engagement plans out in our community. Tracking progress in the following areas can help guide where we invest time and resources to support community engagement efforts at the City of Bozeman.

- Track internal training:**
 - Deliver quarterly trainings to staff on planning and techniques for community engagement
 - Track number of staff who have received training across City departments
- Track completion and implementation of Community Engagement Plans**
 - Track number of plans per Fiscal Year
 - Track number of events hosted
 - Track attendance at events for each project
- Develop and distribute post-engagement polls to measure stakeholder satisfaction with the community engagement process and representation of demographics in participation events and activities**

WHAT WE HEARD

BUILD ON LESSONS LEARNED

Develop ways to measure the success and efficacy of community engagement efforts and set realistic goals according to capacity and resources.

“Set attainable benchmarks for who you are trying to reach, and communicate the intent in reaching out to people of a certain income, race, or ethnicity.”

“Set expectations and be clear about what the City can do with the staff and resources you have.”

**Find more information on the Engage Bozeman initiative
at www.bozeman.net/engage**

This effort is supported by:

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City Manager's Office
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