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July 30, 2024

Re: Communication Regarding City Live Stream and Meeting Recording Modernization

To the Honorable West Allis Common Council:

The Marketing and Engagement Department is pleased to share our modernization plan to make City live streams and recordings more accessible for the community.

As you may be aware, the City currently live streams public meetings to our YouTube channel and municipal cable channels on Spectrum channel 25 and AT&T U-verse channel 99. While franchise fees from cable providers historically supported the programming of our Spectrum/AT&T broadcasts, legislation created in 2011 discontinued this support. Since then, we have received no direct financial incentives from, and are under no obligation to, local cable providers to provide staffing or programming for their cable channels.

With this in mind, we have spent the past several months engaged in outreach and research to determine the best practices and platforms to provide live stream and recorded meeting content and to better understand the role cable channels currently play in municipal communications. In 2023, cable viewing accounted for only 31% of all television viewing nationwide, vs. 38% for streaming services such as YouTube.<sup>1</sup> These numbers continue to shift towards streaming as more people “cut the cord” and discontinue cable subscriptions, but we needed more data to determine how this trend was impacting us locally.

We surveyed the League of Wisconsin Municipalities member organizations to understand how municipalities have been providing content since the 2011 legislation ended the operation of more than a third of municipal cable channels in our state. While 82% of municipalities continue to livestream public meetings, 86% of them rely on their websites to host recordings (vs. cable or streaming).

As we do not receive viewership data from the cable channels, we leveraged our cable livestreams to invite our Spectrum and AT&T audience to complete an online survey or call the City to share their thoughts on the cable channel’s value. Of the two responses received, only one was from a West Allis resident, suggesting that livestream viewership on the cable channels is low. Indeed, the 2019 Resident Survey supported the notion of low community interest in municipal cable, with only 5% of respondents reporting that they received information from cable (by contrast, 51% reported using the City website for such purposes).

Low engagement with our meeting live streams is echoed on our YouTube channel. We average 5 viewers per live stream, and live streams account for less than 14% of our total YouTube viewership. However, subscribers are up 60% year over year, suggesting continued interest in the channel

While our live streams are not well-viewed, we believe they are a valuable public service and will continue to provide them. However, we now have a better understanding of how to host this content to ensure it is free, accessible, available where the most viewership lies, and viewable on-demand for our audience’s convenience. With more of our audience finding us via YouTube, on October 1, 2024, we are following the lead of municipalities such as Waukesha, Fort Atkinson, Mount Pleasant, Eau Claire, Beloit, Waupun, and Brown Deer and ceasing operation of our cable channels to focus efforts on YouTube.

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With this change, we have an exciting opportunity to build viewership on our YouTube channel. With 94.4%<sup>2</sup> of West Allis households having broadband at home, we are pleased to launch a campaign in the next two months titled “[Moving to Support Your Viewing!](#)” This comprehensive outreach campaign will leverage our cable channels, social media, e-newsletter, website and in-person public interactions to inform the public that we are moving all live stream and recorded content to our YouTube channel, easily accessible and familiar to most internet users. This will provide a one-stop-shop for anyone looking to engage with community meetings and information and will streamline our messaging as we encourage residents to join us on YouTube. Our hope is that viewership will increase on YouTube with this targeted campaign and will remind residents that our YouTube channel is available at no additional charge, 24/7, to keep them connected to their community at home or on-the-go on any internet-connected device.

We look forward to continuing to provide open and transparent government services to the public as we consolidate our live stream and recorded content to one platform via YouTube this fall.

Sincerely,

# Jenny Kosek

Jenny Kosek

Marketing & Engagement Director

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/consumer/streaming-surpassed-cable-americas-watched-viewing-platform-rcna95313>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ready.net/broadband-audits/wisconsin/city/west-allis-city-broadband-audit>