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July 10, 2024

Re: Communication Regarding “It’s Your City” Print Newsletter

To the Honorable West Allis Common Council:

As you know, the Marketing & Engagement Department (formerly Communications) has been responsible for preparing “It’s Your City,” our print newsletter, for many years. In 2015 this piece was cited by 65% of residents as their preferred form of City communication (by comparison, only 32% preferred the City’s website at that time.)

“It’s Your City” was changed from a two-color mailer to a four-color magazine in 2017. This new format was honored in 2018 with the City-County Communication & Marketing Association (3CMA)’s Savvy Award, honoring exemplary municipal communications.

In the 2019 Citizen Survey, sentiments towards the print newsletter had changed to align with evolving reliance on digital communications. In this survey, only 58% of respondents favored the print newsletter while 51% favored the City’s website. 39% preferred the City’s monthly digital e-newsletter, which continues to grow in popularity in conjunction with the over 94% of West Allis residents who have access to broadband in their homes. Today it is sent to over 1,200 subscribers, the majority of whom are over age 65.

Preparing and producing the print publication is extremely demanding on both staff time and budget. Each print issue of “It’s Your City” requires over 150 hours of cross-departmental staff time and costs approximately \$17,000 for printing and mailing, over \$34,000 annually. On July 14, 2024, the United States Postal Service will implement its sixth postage increase since 2021, raising the cost by five cents per first-class mailed piece. In addition to rising postage prices, printing fees have increased 3% since 2022 due to rising material and labor costs.

As City demographics trend younger (the median resident age now being 38.7) and more and more residents prefer to engage with the City electronically, combined with the skyrocketing costs of printing and mailing and continued budgetary limitations the City is facing, we recommend realigning staff time and budget to more impactful and measurable engagement efforts.

The City will continue to engage residents per our Mission “to provide cost-effective municipal services consistent with the needs and desires of the community” and in alignment with our 2022 – 2026 Strategic Plan focus area of Finance as we ensure we are “fiscally responsible and aligning organizational resources with the needs of the community.” To better allocate our resources and enhance our communication strategies, we plan to pivot our outreach efforts. We aim to expand and diversify our methods of connecting with residents through the following initiatives:

- Transitioning away from the “It’s Your City” print newsletter, with its final publication planned for 2024.
- Smaller, more timely print mailings of events information and garbage/recycling guidelines to ensure reach to residents regardless of digital adoption.
- Leveraging of quarterly utility bill mailings to include timely information and community updates.

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- Exploring use of assessor and sales data to proactively reach out to new homeowners.
- Continued participation by key departments at A La Carte, West Allis Night Out, and other in-person, community-focused events.
- Partnership with Neighborhood Services Specialist to provide information to Neighborhood Associations and expanded marketing of community conversations.
- The implementation of an app and mobile responsive website to make City information and resources ADA accessible, multi-lingual, and easier for users to find in real-time.
- Expanded use of social media to include video and exploration of new platforms to ensure best practices for engagement.
- Expanded use of the City's YouTube channel, where the largest audience sector is over age 65.
- Realignment of internal staff committees to support customer outreach and experience.
- Partnership with marketing agency to promote City brand, events and destination in a variety of media and channels.
- Ongoing surveys and feedback opportunities to ensure City outreach is meeting the needs of residents, businesses and visitors.

Marketing & Engagement thanks the Council for its long-standing support of "It's Your City" as we look forward to focusing on other impactful opportunities to engage residents and continue our work to become the preferred destination for visitors, residents and businesses.

Sincerely,



Jenny Kosek

Marketing & Engagement Director

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