

Village of South Nyack Communications Advisory Committee

Report and Recommendations

1st August, 2014.

Formation and scope: The committee was formed by the South Nyack Board of Trustees in Spring 2014, to examine all of the ways in which the village disseminates information to residents and the media and to make recommendations for improving the avenues of communication. The committee concluded that the aim of “improving village communication” is:

To efficiently provide as much relevant village information to as many South Nyack residents as possible

Members: Membership was drawn from village residents, village officials and village staff: Diana Zolli, Michelle Lockett, Deputy Village Clerk Denise Mishkel-Weber, Deputy Mayor Alain Leinbach, and Trustee Andrew Goodwillie (chairman).

Activity: The advisory committee (hereafter “we”) held ten meetings between April – July 2014.

Summary of recommendations

The committee considered eighteen different aspects of village communication, ranging from public meetings, the newsletter, website and social media to emergency communication and press releases. To achieve the goal of providing as much relevant village information to as many South Nyack residents as possible, the committee makes two overarching recommendations:

- A gradual transition from paper-based communication to electronic modes of delivery whilst retaining all legally-mandated noticing schemes and sufficient non-electronic methods to serve all village residents
- Documentation and consistent implementation of procedural workflows and succession plans.

Benefits of moving towards electronic modes of information delivery are an ability to purvey a wider range of up-to-date information with greater speed and efficiency, with access from anywhere at any time. And, once workflows are established, a reduction in staff time that is otherwise devoted to generating paper products and to directing residents to information that is already on-line.

Benefits of enacting workflows and having in place succession plans are an ability to better implement a consistent village communication strategy and deliver an unambiguous message, and a seamless transition during staff turnover.

These two overarching themes contain many dependent recommendations that are described in detail in this report. For example, in order to transition to electronic modes of communication, we recommend that the village website becomes positioned as the central source of village information. That requires e-mail messages

and Facebook posts to direct readers to the village website for full information, and an increase in the number of residents signed up for electronic information delivery.

Aspects of communication

The following aspects of communication were considered by the committee and are listed in their order of appearance in this report. Context and specific recommendations are to be found in each section.

- 1) “*State of the Village*” meeting
- 2) Village website
- 3) Social media – Facebook
- 4) Social media – Twitter, Instagram
- 5) E-mail to residents
- 6) Newsletter
- 7) Postal mailings
- 8) Press releases
- 9) Press interviews
- 10) Communication strategy
- 11) Emergency communications
- 12) Board of Trustees meetings, Videotaping
- 13) Community events
- 14) Village notification channels
- 15) Contacting the village
- 16) Official e-mail accounts
- 17) IT workflow and succession plans
- 18) Village logo

1) “*State of the Village*” meeting

The committee recommends that the village begins an annual “*State of the Village*” meeting, open to all, at which residents are given a survey of village affairs and have the opportunity to discuss issues with village officials and become better engaged in village activities. Logistical aspects were considered:

- **Timing:** Autumn versus spring: Autumn: Generally busy with children returning to school, Jewish holidays, changeable weather, and national elections. April: Less busy time, better weather, and comes after village elections.
- **Location:** Living Christ Church: In the village centre, less driving for most residents, good ADA access. Nyack Collage requires most residents to drive up the hill.
- **Notification:** Via e-mail, the newsletter and other household mailings, website and Facebook postings, press release.
- **Suggested format:** An address by the Mayor, followed by an Open Session.
- **Open Session:** May need to control the discussion. Could have questions submitted ahead of time (e.g. via a web form), and have a moderator categorise the questions and choose representative ones.
- **Taping:** News crews and the village can record the event.

Recommendation:

- Initiate an annual State of the Village meeting in April 2015.

2) Village website

In early 2014, the village had contracted with local web developer Doug Foster to redesign the village website. The committee's activity overlapped with the redevelopment. As a result, we were able to review preliminary versions of the new website and offer many suggestions – both general and detailed – to improve its appearance, navigation, ease-of-use and content. The suggestions were prioritized and many of the changes were implemented. A second phase of redevelopment to further improvements is now occurring.

We consider the website as being the primary source of village information and central to an overall communications strategy in which the website is the hub for village digital information and all other digital outlets point to it. For example, village e-mail messages and social media posts should contain short “teasers” that link readers to the village website where they will find the full information.

On any day with a meeting of the Board of Trustees, the News section should display the meeting agenda.

Information sourcing : The village website could act as a news aggregator by re-posting externally sourced information such as newspaper articles, press releases from the Tappan Zee Constructors company and so on. The committee was divided on this issue. Some committee members argued that the posting of externally-sourced content is acceptable as long as the content is correctly and clearly attributed. Others felt strongly that only information sourced from the village should be posted, that posting externally-sourced content is a slippery slope that could result in a perception of deliberate selectivity and bias, and that the provision of links to local media outlets would suffice. All committee members acknowledge that news aggregation services already exist. For example, Google can be used to trigger alerts about news articles related to specific topics. Even the selective posting of externally-sourced information about local or regional events that are not organised by the village could also lead to a sense of discrimination. For example, could an external event organizer sue the village for advertising a competitor's event instead of theirs? When the trustees make a determination on content posting, the website and Facebook pages should be checked for consistency with the policy. Postings that violate the policy should be modified or removed.

We also note that the content of the Facebook page, due to its social nature, may differ slightly from the website. For example, photos of Concerts in the Park may be posted to Facebook but not to the website.

Filed under *Documents > Forms and Applications*, the on-line information for sixteen sets of permits and applications requires careful review, consolidation and modification. For example, the planning board application is outdated and is confusing to both residents and planning board members. A much-improved planning board application packet was drafted in 2013 but still awaits review.

Anecdotally, we note that many village residents do not know that documents such as building permits and planning board applications are already available on the village website. We suggest that an annual e-mail reminder be sent, perhaps in spring time when residents are planning their home improvements for the warmer months. Doing so could save residents a trip to village hall and could free up staff time.

Administration: The website is hosted by WordPress. Denise is the primary administrator and has been working with the contracted web developer to learn how to make future changes to the website. Currently, the Deputy Mayor acts as a secondary WordPress administrator but it is preferable that each administrator be a member of the village staff rather than an elected official. A second website administrator should be brought on board soon. At the Board of Trustees meeting of 22nd July 2014, Village Clerk Sally Seiler was identified as being a suitable replacement for Alain.

Recommendations:

- Determine if village digital outlets should be aggregators of externally-sourced news and information or should serve only internally-sourced content, and ensure that all postings conform to the policy.
- Ensure that other village digital outlets provide “teasers” that point back to the website.
- Continue compilation of website feedback from users. Significant changes may need the services of a professional web developer, smaller modifications can be done by village staff.
- Review, consolidate and update the *Documents > Forms and Applications* content.
- Denise to train Sally in basic WordPress website administration.
- Send an annual springtime e-mail to residents about the on-line availability of permits/applications.
- On the day of a trustee meeting, post the agenda as a News item.

3) Social Media – Facebook

Facebook is a very popular social interaction medium, with more than 800 million daily active users worldwide. Denise, Michelle and Diana argued convincingly that a Facebook presence for the village should be a given. In fact, Denise had set up a Facebook page a number of months ago and undertakes to cross-post all of the website news content on the Facebook page.

All committee members recognise that a Facebook presence would help to engage with many residents who prefer to obtain information about the village that way. However, one unavoidable aspect of Facebook is that any user can add comments to any of the posts.

Some committee members are very concerned about the ability of readers to post comments on the village Facebook page. In particular, would the village be liable for the content of any of the comments? The village insurance advisor suggests that the village *could* be held responsible for comments posted by a third party. In contrast, NYCOM General Counsel Wade Beltramo considered that the village would *not* be responsible.

A set of *Community Guidelines* has been drafted – see the *Appendix* at the end of this document. If implemented, they could set the rules for posting comments. The draft guidelines have been sent to village attorney Keith Cornell and to NYCOM general counsel Wade Beltramo for their consideration.

We discussed whether or not the village should even bother to claim its Facebook presence to be the “official” Facebook page for the Village of South Nyack. If unclaimed, the page would remain unofficial and perhaps the village would not need to worry about the content of any posted comments. However, claiming it as the official page was thought to be more responsible.

So far, comments posted on the Facebook page have been tame. However, the committee was split over whether or not the village should respond via Facebook to any comments made to the Facebook page. Some committee members thought that Facebook responses to Facebook questions such as *How do I get a building permit?* should be permitted, whereas other committee members consider that the village should not respond via Facebook to any Facebook comments since there already exist many avenues that can be used by residents to contact village officials, since it removes any obligation for village staff to definitively know when to respond, and since, whilst comments can be removed, active monitoring of the page could be an undue time burden for village staff.

Three-fold goals of a village Facebook page were identified as being to drive residents to the village website; to show what life in South Nyack is like by making Facebook posts about such things as the Mayor’s update, events in the park, and pictures of village life; and, to convey emergency information to residents. We note that, as far as we understand the Facebook proprietary search algorithm, the posting of photos from village events is to be encouraged as it should promote the ranking of the Facebook page.

Denise serves as the main person responsible for posting to the village Facebook page. The posts are already part of her digital information workflow and do not add an undue time or resource burden. If the village chooses to continue having a Facebook presence, a second village staff member should be trained in its use.

In order to drive people to the hub of village information – the website – Facebook postings should generally be short “teasers” that link readers to the village website. For example, a post about the Mayor’s update should be just a couple of lines in length and should link to the full content on the village website, and a post about an upcoming village meeting should point to the agenda.

Overall, the village already has a Facebook presence and whilst its potential benefit is recognised, we do not know if the village will incur any liability for content, specifically for comments posted by users. The number of Facebook visitors is expected to increase, especially if the page is advertised widely, which should drive more traffic to the village website thus promoting the website as the primary source of village information.

Administration: Denise currently administers the Facebook account. A second village staff member should be identified and a succession plan should be put in place in case of staff turnover.

Recommendations:

- Seek legal advice on village liability for comments posted to its Facebook page and on the level, if any, of comment monitoring.
- Seek legal advice on whether or not the Facebook page should be claimed as “official”.

- Determine whether or not to respond directly via Facebook to comments posted on the Facebook page.
- Ensure that Facebook posts are “teasers” to drive readers to the website for full information.
- Post photos of village events to enhance Facebook page ranking.
- Identify a second person to administer the village Facebook account, and make a succession plan.

4) Social media – Twitter, Instagram

The committee could not identify a compelling reason for the village to start posting on the Twitter and Instagram social media platforms since Twitter functionality is already adequately covered by the village e-mail alert system and pictures can be posted on the village website and Facebook pages.

Recommendation:

- Take no action regarding Twitter and Instagram accounts at this time.

5) E-mail to residents

About 380 residents are on the e-mail recipient list which represents about one quarter of village households. With many residents expressing a preference to receive village news and information in digital format, we encourage all efforts to add more residents to the list noting that community events, as described elsewhere in this report, offer a perfect opportunity for village officials to obtain more e-mail addresses.

A postcard mailed to all households could be used to encourage more residents to sign up for village news. Ideally, it would be mailed in the autumn (after people return from holiday and after the new village website has been released), would adopt a colour scheme similar to the new village website, and would carry just one simple message pointing people to a web page to sign up. A stack of the postcards should be kept in village hall and handed to new residents, to applicants for building and planning board permits, and to residents who make other enquiries at Village Hall. The web page that residents use for registering for the village e-mails should include a tick-box for opting out of receiving the village newsletter in paper format.

Frequency: Although the mayor must regularly communicate with residents, we wonder if weekly Mayor Update e-mail messages might be too frequent especially during times with little village news. An alternative model is for the mayor to release an e-mail update every two weeks, staggered to alternate with weeks in which a Board of Trustees meeting is held. That could help to keep e-mail message content fresh and could encourage residents to attend Board meetings between the e-mails to hear from the mayor first-hand. Overall, the Mayor should not feel obliged to send an e-mail update if there is little news to report.

Administration: The village uses Vertical Response for its e-mail services and, like WordPress, is currently administered by Denise and Alain. It would be better to have village staff be responsible, rather than an elected official. Further, again like for website and Facebook administration, a succession plan should be drawn up to ease the transition when there is staff turnover.

E-mail delivery problems: We were made aware that, for reasons unknown, some people do not receive the weekly Mayor's Update e-mails at either their personal or official village e-mail accounts even though the addresses are on the recipient list. Nor are the messages being diverted to a spam folder. Denise should send a plain text message to the list to check reception status of the weekly template-based messages.

Recommendations:

- Make every effort to sign up more residents for the village e-mails, for example during community events and using an autumnal postcard mailing.
- Keep a stack of postcards on hand in Village Hall for new residents and permit applicants.
- On the sign-up web page, add a tick box to opt out of newsletter mailed paper delivery.
- Consider the frequency of the Mayor's Update e-mail: Weekly may not always be justified.
- Identify a village staff member to replace Alain as a Vertical Response administrator, and make a succession plan.
- Identify the reason why some residents on the list do not receive the village e-mails.

6) Newsletter

The village newsletter is a valuable source of information but is a fixed 'snapshot' of village information that soon becomes out of date. Additionally, many residents prefer electronic modes of information delivery which promotes timely delivery of up-to-date information, with no space limitation.

Current logistics:

- *Media format:* Printed paper newsletter, 11x17 (equivalent to two letter pages / four-sides), colour.
- *Frequency:* Typically produced twice a year.
- *Quantity:* 1,200 newsletters printed, with 1,000 newsletters mailed to residents.
- *Geographic distribution:* 15 newsletters mailed out of state, all others are within 109xx zip code.
- *Printing cost:* \$350.
- *Mailing cost:* ~\$275 (mailing permit rate is 27.4 cents for 109xx zip code, 29 cents out of state).
- *Total dollar cost per newsletter:* About \$625.
- *Staff resources:* A very rough estimate of 8-10 hours to produce the newsletter content and layout, with an additional 5 hours for newsletter taping, labelling, delivery to post office, etc.

Regarding resources, the committee's anecdotal evidence and personal experience suggested that the actual staff time required to create the newsletter content and layout was most likely substantially greater than the rough estimate of 8-10 hours. For example, newsletter creation takes place over a number of weeks, involves soliciting content from many different sources and usually requires multiple follow-up interactions, phone calls and e-mails. Although Denise's use of the previous edition's design layout as a template for the new newsletter was recognised as a useful time-saver, newsletter production is resource-heavy for staff time.

Quarterly versus twice-a-year delivery: We are concerned that there may not be enough useful up-to-date village-generated content to fill a quarterly newsletter, also that the dollar cost burden to the village would be doubled to approximately \$2,500 per year, and that yet more staff time would need to be devoted to working on its production.

Design: The newsletter should be redesigned to more closely match the colour scheme, appearance and font of the new village website. In addition, when the newsletter is folded, just a list of bullets should be visible, to grab readers' attention – the full information is obtained inside the pages. Committee member Diana Zolli, a professional graphics artist and web designer, offered to help redesign its look. The new version of the newsletter could contain a section on "South Nyack village government 101" to help orient residents around the structure and purpose of the various boards. A mechanism should be devised to allow residents to opt out of receiving a paper copy of the newsletter.

Since a number of village residents are not regular computer/tablet users, we suggest that a printed version of the newsletter continues to be produced but that it is smaller and less-frequent which would result in a potential significant reduction in staff time allocated to newsletter production and in reduced costs to village residents via lower printing charges and lower mailing fees.

We wonder if an intern – perhaps a savvy local high-school student – could be taken on to help with newsletter production and similar village tasks as a means to significantly reduce the time burden on current staff.

Recommendations:

- Move away from paper towards more efficient, more frequent digital avenues of communication
- Decrease the frequency of a printed newsletter, perhaps to one a year
- Decrease the size of the printed newsletter, perhaps to one piece of 8 ½ x 11 paper
- Redesign the newsletter to reflect the website appearance, with only the bullets visible when it is folded – Diana Zolli offered to help.
- Consider taking on an intern to help with newsletter production.

7) Postal Mailings

Apart from the village newsletter, village-wide postal mailings are done rarely. The two most recent fliers were to announce the community bridge meeting (March 2014) and to announce the Mayor/Police Chief retirement picnic (summer 2013). The mailings are sent to approximately 1,000 households and remote property owners.

For each flier, printing costs were about \$250 for 1,000 fliers and mailing costs were about \$275. Total: \$525. For comparison, the most recent four-sided newsletter cost \$350 to print and \$275 to mail. Total: \$625. A 4x6-inch postcard costs \$120 to print (1000 cards, two-sided, colour).

These cost estimates exclude the staff time required to generate and mail the items.

We recommend using a postcard as a cost-effective method to send a brief message that reaches all residents.

Recommendations:

- For short alerts, use a postcard to mail all residents.
- Mail a postcard to all residents in autumn 2014 pointing people to the e-mail sign-up page.

8) Press releases

Currently, there is no consistent strategy for issuing press releases or for officials being interviewed by journalists. That opens the potential for confusing or contradictory messages from village representatives. Whilst we recognise that the press committee has been asked to help with press release content, a formal procedure for issuing press releases should be adopted. One possible framework is outlined below.

Possible scenario for drafting, approving and disseminating a press release:

- The Village Clerk receives a draft press release from a village official.
- As a courtesy, the Village Clerk circulates the draft press release to all members of the press committee and to all members of the Board of Trustees and specifies a deadline for comment – we suggests one-business-day. A lack of response is taken as implicit agreement with the draft.
- One business day later, the draft is modified as necessary to reflect any comments.
- The final version requires approval from the mayor and press committee.
- The press release is sent electronically to the expanded list of recipients, and posted to the website.

The above mechanism ensures that at least two board members will have approved the release and that all other board members will have had the opportunity to comment upon the draft.

Recipients: Historically, press releases have been issued infrequently, the two most recent being to notify reporters about the village gaining its AAA fiscal rating and the TZ Bridge Community Meeting. They are sent via e-mail to a list of journalists. A few substantive press releases will probably garner more coverage than more frequent but less-important releases, and certain press releases may be of interest to only a subset of recipients who can be selected from the list. The following recipients should be **added to the existing list**:

- Laura Incalcaterra at LoHud lincalca@lohud.com
- Nyack Free Press – Bill Demarest
- Nyack Villager magazine
- Rivertown magazine

Recommendations:

- Create a workflow for approving and issuing a press release.
- Review the list of e-mail addresses of journalists to ensure that it is current.

9) Press interviews

Whilst the Mayor interacts most often with the press, there have been occasions when other village officials are interviewed. Journalists usually call without warning to request an interview. We strongly recommend that such interviews are rescheduled to allow individuals to confer with other board members to ensure that a consistent message is conveyed.

Recommendation:

- Ensure that village officials discuss content with board members before being interviewed.

10) Communication strategy

Mainly, the village conveys information in two modes. First, by actively sending it to residents (known in media circles as “push”) via the weekly e-mailed Mayor’s Update and other e-mail alerts and the mailed newsletter and, second, by passively (“pull”) posting it on the village website and Facebook page. We feel that this combination works well but would be improved by adding more residents to the e-mail list.

The issue of disseminating externally-sourced information such as local news articles and external press releases must be addressed, as already described in detail in the website and Facebook sections of this report. The committee was split on this issue.

Recommendations:

- Encourage residents to add their contact information to the village e-mail list.
- Make a decision about conveying externally-sourced information.

11) Emergency communications

During Superstorm Sandy in Oct 2012, most parts of the village lost power. Although the village website was updated frequently, residents without power were probably unable to access it. Printed information was taped daily to the door of Village Hall, as done in other communities, and the Deputy Mayor took part in a nightly press conference held in Nyack. The chaotic and very damaging nature of the storm strained village resources and the best was done to convey information. Other situations that prompt an emergency response from the village could include a water main break, boil water alerts, and winter storm warnings.

During emergencies, the picture scrolling area on the village website should be used for important notices providing the website administrator can access the pages. Although some residents may not have web access at home during an emergency, we see no downside to using that communication avenue, if feasible. To avoid a single point of failure, the village must ensure that more than one person can make changes to the website.

The mechanism of compiling emergency information and adding it to the website and Facebook page needs to be formalised and made clear to all village officials to ensure that content is both correct and coherent, and that there is a documented step-by-step procedure for posting the information . The generation of the information will likely involve DPW staff, the Police Department, and village officials.

Recommendations:

- Formalise the compilation and dissemination of emergency information.
- Identify at least two administrators for the village website and Facebook page.
- Post emergency information to the website picture scrolling area and to Facebook. In addition, send e-mail alerts and use other village information notification channels (see section 14).

12) Board of Trustees meetings, Videotaping

Trustee meetings are held on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of every month and offer an excellent opportunity for village officials and staff members to communicate with residents about the most up-to-date developments in issues affecting our village. Anecdotal evidence, though, suggests that many village residents are unaware of the meetings or of the role of village trustees, and are often surprised to hear that anyone can attend and that an Open Session allows any person to bring up any issue. To boost participation at trustee meetings, we recommend that agendas are posted on-line at least one day prior to the meeting (a provisional agenda is fine), and that opportunities such as newsletters and fliers are used to better advertise the meetings.

To help residents who may be unable to attend, the village has purchased video equipment and begun taping the Board of Trustee meetings. Video files are served through a professional Vimeo account (costing \$199/year) which allows flexible embedding options and has no advertising. Links to the videos will be added on the village website *Documents > Minutes and Agendas* page. Apart from removing any leading and trailing times, no editing is done to the content. A successful test of the recording and posting procedures was performed for the 22nd Jul 2014 Trustee meeting. Currently, video recording is done by Andrew and Alain administers the Vimeo account. Those responsibilities should be passed to a village staff member and a step-by-step workflow should be compiled to explain how to make the recording, post a video and embed a link on the website.

So far, the recording has been done using Andrew's laptop. The village should consider the purchase a low-cost modern laptop dedicated to capture the video. That would allow recordings to be made regardless of venue. A suitable laptop would cost roughly \$400-500. *Technicalities:* Video is captured with a *Logitech C615* webcam (\$50). Sound is recorded using a dedicated *MXL AC-404* microphone (\$67). The free *NCH Debut* and *NCH VideoPad* software programs are used for the video capture and for chopping off any leading/trailing footage.

Recommendations:

- Advertise the board of trustees meetings and post the agenda on-line.
- Purchase a laptop dedicated to capturing video for the village Board meetings.
- Identify two village staff members to take over the video recording and posting procedures and ensure that a workflow exists.

13) Community Events

Outreach is seen as a crucial role for village officials. It helps to disseminate information to residents and promotes the vibrancy of our community. A number of village-organised events take place every year, each offering the opportunity for village officials to interact with residents. Identified community events are:

- Concerts in the Park
- Special village meetings such as the Community Bridge meeting, Shared Use Path townhall
- Electronic waste collection
- Easter egg hunt
- Neighbourhood block parties
- South Nyack 10k run
- Christmas Tree sales at the Firehouse

The first four events are organised by the village. An information table was set up at the April 2014 electronics waste collection and provided a focal point for residents to chat with village officials. Similar information tables should become part of the other formal events especially the widely-advertised bridge-related meetings. We note that the first summer Concert in the Park did not offer a good opportunity for village officials to interact with residents – people came to hear the music instead. Whenever an information table is employed, sign-up sheets for village e-mails should be available and the officials present should make every attempt to have people sign up. Also, at community events, village officials should wear their name badge.

Organisers of block parties could be given village e-mail sign-up sheets with the request that they do their best to have their neighbours sign up.

The committee thought that an attractive one-off postal flier covering “South Nyack village government 101” might be warranted although that information could perhaps best be placed in a new-look newsletter.

Recommendations:

- Provide an information table and e-mail sign-up sheets at most events organized by the village.
- Request that block party organisers have their neighbours fill in the e-mail sign-up sheets.
- If a mailing is sent, it should include village e-mail sign-up information.
- Ensure that village officials wear their name badge at community events.

14) Village notification channels

To ensure that the village clerks use all necessary notification channels to reach residents, Denise will compile a list of all digital and physical avenues. Digital includes website, e-mail alert system, Facebook page, Google Calendar, press releases. Physical includes notice boards, village hall door, mailings, newspaper. When an important announcement needs to be made, such as when a meeting is relocated at the last minute, the list should be used to ensure that every attempt is made to communicate with residents.

Recommendation:

- The list of notification channels should be made available to all village officials responsible for disseminating information

15) Contacting the village

The website contains a prominent link to the village directory. In addition, a new info@southnyack.ny.gov e-mail address has been set up to allow residents to e-mail general enquiries to the village. The new address is also listed in the Facebook Community guidelines. Denise is the administrator of this new e-mail account and will continue her present approach of forwarding the messages to the most appropriate village official instead of responding directly.

Recommendation:

- Advertise the new info@southnyack.ny.gov e-mail address and add it to the website directory.

16) Official e-mail accounts

A number of village officials employ their personal e-mail account for village business. We recommend that all village officials use their *southnyack.ny.gov* e-mail account for all official village-related e-mails, and only for that purpose.

Recommendation:

- Ensure that village officials migrate from their personal e-mail account to the village account.

17) IT Workflow and succession plans

Denise has begun documenting the step-by-step procedures that she uses for various computer-based tasks for which she is typically responsible. These include sending the weekly Mayor's Update message, adding minutes and agendas to the website, and posting to the Facebook account. The committee encourages continued creation of workflows to aid other members of village staff to perform the tasks, if needed.

The village should come up with a formal procedure to ensure a seamless succession in IT administration and management responsibilities in case there is a turnover in staff.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that workflows are generated for each IT task and that at least two village staff members have enough familiarity to perform them.
- Ensure that there is a succession plan to aid in IT continuity should village staff members leave.

18) Village logo

A logo can help with brand identification. Resident Michael Lockett is helping Denise design a new village logo to go on the village website and all village mailings.

Recommendation:

- Ask Denise to present the logo options for selection by the Board of Trustees. Once a choice has been made, use the village logo on all village communications.

Report Summary

The Communications Advisory Committee has presented 49 recommendations to help the village to achieve its goal of *efficiently providing as much relevant village information to as many South Nyack residents as possible*.

Formally, a range of assessment metrics could be adopted to help gauge the success of village communication efforts. These could include keeping a tally of website hits and Facebook likes, keeping count of the number of people signed up to receive electronic information, and administering an on-line survey. Informally, perhaps the best measure of success is that residents express satisfaction with the communication efforts which, hopefully, would be manifest as their greater engagement in village affairs.

Overarching recommendations

- A gradual transition from paper-based communication to electronic modes of delivery whilst retaining all legally-mandated noticing schemes and sufficient non-electronic methods to serve all village residents
- Documentation and consistent implementation of procedural workflows and succession plans.

List of detailed recommendations, by section

1) “State of the Village” meeting

- Initiate an annual State of the Village meeting in April 2015.

2) Village website

- Determine if village digital outlets should be aggregators of externally-sourced news and information or should serve only internally-sourced content, and ensure that all postings conform to the policy.
- Ensure that other village digital outlets provide “teasers” that point back to the website.
- Continue compilation of website feedback from users. Significant changes may need the services of a professional web developer, smaller modifications can be done by village staff.
- Review, consolidate and update the *Documents > Forms and Applications* content.

- Denise to train Sally in basic WordPress website administration.
- Send an annual springtime e-mail to residents about the on-line availability of permits/applications.
- On the day of a trustee meeting, post the agenda as a News item.

3) Social media – Facebook

- Seek legal advice on village liability for comments posted to its Facebook page and on the level, if any, of comment monitoring.
- Seek legal advice on whether or not the Facebook page should be claimed as “official”.
- Determine whether or not to respond directly via Facebook to comments posted on the Facebook page.
- Ensure that Facebook posts are “teasers” to drive readers to the website for full information.
- Post photos of village events to enhance Facebook page ranking.
- Identify a second person to administer the village Facebook account, and make a succession plan.

4) Social media – Twitter, Instagram

- Take no action regarding Twitter and Instagram accounts at this time.

5) E-mail to residents

- Make every effort to sign up more residents for the village e-mails, for example during community events and using an autumnal postcard mailing.
- Keep a stack of postcards on hand in Village Hall for new residents and permit applicants.
- On the sign-up web page, add a tick box to opt out of newsletter mailed paper delivery.
- Consider the frequency of the Mayor’s Update e-mail: Weekly may not always be justified.
- Identify a village staff member to replace Alain as a Vertical Response administrator, and make a succession plan.
- Identify the reason why some residents on the list do not receive the village e-mails.

6) Newsletter

- Move away from paper towards more efficient, more frequent digital avenues of communication
- Decrease the frequency of a printed newsletter, perhaps to one a year
- Decrease the size of the printed newsletter, perhaps to one piece of 8 ½ x 11 paper
- Redesign the newsletter to reflect the website appearance, with only the bullets visible when it is folded – Diana Zolli offered to help.
- Consider taking on an intern to help with newsletter production.

7) Postal Mailings

- For short alerts, use a postcard to mail all residents.
- Mail a postcard to all residents in autumn 2014 pointing people to the e-mail sign-up page.

8) Press releases

- Create a workflow for approving and issuing a press release.
- Review the list of e-mail addresses of journalists to ensure that it is current.

9) Press interviews

- Ensure that village officials discuss content with board members before being interviewed.

10) Communication strategy

- Encourage residents to add their contact information to the village e-mail list.
- Make a decision about conveying externally-sourced information.

11) Emergency communications

- Formalise the compilation and dissemination of emergency information.
- Identify at least two administrators for the village website and Facebook page.
- Post emergency information to the website picture scrolling area and to Facebook. In addition, send e-mail alerts and use other village information notification channels (see section 14).

12) Board of Trustees meetings, Videotaping

- Advertise the board of trustees meetings and post the agenda on-line.
- Purchase a laptop dedicated to capturing video for the village Board meetings.
- Identify two village staff members to take over the video recording and posting procedures and ensure that a workflow exists.

13) Community Events

- Provide an information table and e-mail sign-up sheets at most events organized by the village.
- Request that block party organisers have their neighbours fill in the e-mail sign-up sheets.
- If a mailing is sent, it should include village e-mail sign-up information.
- Ensure that village officials wear their name badge at community events.

14) Village notification channels

- The list of notification channels should be made available to all village officials responsible for disseminating information

15) Contacting the village

- Advertise the new info@southnyack.ny.gov e-mail address and add it to the website directory.

16) Official e-mail accounts

- Ensure that village officials migrate from their personal e-mail account to the village account.

17) IT workflow and succession plans

- Ensure that workflows are generated for each IT task and that at least two village staff members have enough familiarity to perform them.
- Ensure that there is a succession plan to aid in IT continuity should village staff members leave.

18) Village logo

- Ask Denise to present the logo options for selection by the Board of Trustees. Once a choice has been made, use the village logo on all village communications.

Appendix: Draft text for Facebook Community Guidelines

Short:

Welcome to the official Village of South Nyack Facebook page where you can keep up-to-date with all of the latest news and events. Please direct all questions to info@southnyack.ny.gov.

Long:

Welcome to the Village of South Nyack's official Facebook page where you can keep up-to-date with all of the latest news and events. We hope this is a useful place for you to find information. The Village reserves the right to delete any posts or comments which, in its discretion, are deemed inappropriate. By posting to or commenting on the Facebook page, you agree to abide by these community guidelines. Please direct all questions to info@southnyack.ny.gov.

While this is an open forum, it's also a family-friendly one, so please keep your comments and wall posts clean. In addition to keeping it family-friendly, we ask that you follow our posting guidelines. Posts will be removed if they violate the guidelines listed below.

- No graphic, obscene, explicit or racial comments or submissions nor do we allow comments that are abusive, hateful or intended to defame anyone or any organization.
- No solicitations or advertisements. This includes promotion or endorsement of any financial, commercial or non-governmental agency. Similarly, we do not allow attempts to defame or defraud any financial, commercial or non-governmental agency.
- Details about an ongoing investigation or legal or administrative proceeding that could prejudice the processes or could interfere with an individual's rights will be deleted from this page.

- Apparent spamming or trolling will be removed and may cause the author(s) to be blocked from the page without notice.
- No copyrighted or trademarked images or graphics. Imagery posted on the Facebook wall should be owned by the user.
- No comments, photos or videos that suggest or encourage illegal activity.
- No documents of any kind should be posted on this page.
- You participate at your own risk, taking personal responsibility for your comments, your username and any information provided.
- All information posted to social media sites will be unclassified. No FOUO (for official use only), or classified information should ever be posted.

Also, the appearance of external links or the use of third-party applications on this site does not constitute official endorsement on behalf of the Village of South Nyack.

End of South Nyack Communications Advisory Committee report.