

# Communications Assessment & Preliminary Recommendations

*Ad Hoc Committee on Communications*

**Presentation to the Committee of the Whole**  
October 10, 2017



Village of  
**Scarsdale**  
WESTCHESTER COUNTY | NY

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# Committee Members

Trustee Jane Veron, Chair	Justin Hamill, Colby Lane
Deb Pekarek, Trustee Liaison	Barry Meiselman, Post Road
Robert Cole, Deputy Village Manager	ML Perlman, Carstensen Road
Justin Arest, Lakin Road	Scott Rompala, Horseguard Lane
Lee Fischman, Wildwood Road	Andrew Sereysky, Walworth Avenue
Dara Gruenberg, Hampton Road	Carol Silverman, Spier Road
Laura Halligan, Heathcote Road	

# Committee Purpose/Charge

On October 13, 2016, the Scarsdale Village Board of Trustees created the Ad-Hoc Committee on Communications to serve a one-year term.

## Purpose

To support the successful launch of website/communications platform; strengthen Village communications strategy and cultivate engagement opportunities with diversity of audiences.

## Charge

1. **Review new website** content, functionality and user-friendliness, making suggestions for enhancements;
2. Develop a plan to gain community usage, seeking widespread adoption. As ambassadors for the new communications platform, engage with community groups to both **increase awareness and usage of the website**, and to introduce website functionality; and,
3. Drawing on expertise and best practices, **provide strategies to improve Village communications**. Prepare written recommendations to the Village Board identifying important community segments or audiences, linking appropriate communication methods and channels to identified segments, and suggesting prioritization of associated programmatic and investment needs within the context of existing fiscal constraints.

# Goals

- Improve accessibility of information about Village issues;
- Improve efficiency and methods of communication;
- Fill communications void;
- Identify residents' preferred means of obtaining information;
- Regularly update residents with Village news and facts,
- Promote residents' involvement in issues that affect them daily.

# Process

*October 2016 - September 2017*

OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Goals</li><li>• New Website Overview (O'Brien)</li><li>• Current Comm. Matrix Overview (Cole)</li><li>• Discussion of New Website Launch</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Website Review (Content/Functionality)</li><li>• Website Edits</li><li>• Community Usage Plan/Tutorial Development</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Website Tutorial Filming</li><li>• Website Issue Tracking/Prioritization</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Website Tutorial Video Launch</li><li>• BOT/Community Presentation</li><li>• Press Release</li><li>• Interactive Tracking System</li><li>• Comm. Plan Draft</li><li>• Ongoing Advisory</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "Notify Me" Press Release</li><li>• <i>scarsdale10583</i> Article</li><li>• Recreation List Transition</li><li>• Village Department Head Survey (Cole)</li><li>• Current Communications Typography Overview (Cole)</li><li>• Comms Officer Job Description</li><li>• Trustee Survey</li><li>• Informal Neighbor Polling</li><li>• Ongoing Advisory</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comm. Survey Draft</li><li>• Library Tech Assistances</li><li>• Bugzilla Tool</li><li>• Revised Comm. Plan</li><li>• Ongoing Advisory</li></ul>

# Process (cont'd)

## April – September, 2017

APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Website Traffic Analytics</li> <li>Website Photos Press Release</li> <li>Photo Release Form</li> <li>Revised Comm. Survey Draft</li> <li>Comm. "Roadmap" Draft</li> <li>Ongoing Advisory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CivicSend Demo (O'Brien)</li> <li>BOT Meeting Restructure (Liaison Reports Precede Public Comment)</li> <li>Twitter Launch @TrusteeVeron</li> <li>Email Newsletter Plan/Discussion</li> <li>Final Comm. Survey</li> <li>Ongoing Advisory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey Approval/Distribution</li> <li>Revised Comm. Roadmap</li> <li>Revised Comm. Plan</li> <li>Cable Commission Video Proposal for Email Newsletter, Other Projects</li> <li>Ongoing Advisory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preliminary Survey Results</li> <li>Key Takeaways</li> <li>Research on Neighboring MunicipalitiesComm. Activities</li> <li>Ongoing Advisory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CivicPlus Modules Overview (Vendor)</li> <li>Discussions with CivicPlus Power Users/Best Practices</li> <li>Ongoing Advisory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comm. Plan/Final Report Discussion</li> <li>Meetings with Trustees, Department Heads and Village Staff</li> <li>Ongoing Advisory</li> </ul>

# Website Awareness and Usage

- Created video to introduce community to new website;
- Primary goals of video and related communication efforts were to
  - Illustrate usefulness and relevance of website to residents, Village staff and officials; and,
  - Promote CivicPlus functionality as important proactive and reactive tool in healthy, reliable and measureable municipal function;
- Promoted video through press release, BOT meeting, and community group screenings;
- Scarsdale Public Library offered website tutorials to residents.

# Scarsdale.com / Civic Plus Software

**We received a demonstration from CivicPlus and interviewed other municipality power users to identify untapped potential, avoid potential issues and learn best practices.**

## **Our learnings included:**

- Social media (Facebook, Twitter) & scarsdale.com are critical tools to reach stakeholders directly;
- Social media was used heavily for site promotion and continues to be used for ongoing communications, *even more than the website*;
- We should develop qualitative and quantitative conclusions on the efficacy of all communication vehicles (website, social media, comm. tools w/public);
- We need useful website analytics such as traffic, traffic sources, bounce rate, top pages, conversion rates, time spent on pages, exit pages;
- Better utilize Newsflash & Request Tracker to drive traffic to the website;
- Intranet capabilities for employees is an important feature ;
- We should consider decentralizing content additions to site by each department;
- Village administration should be active in the CP user group;
- Power users view websites as a resource for residents, staff and a marketing/communications tool in business development/promotion.



# Improving Communications

**In developing recommendations and prioritizing communications strategies, the committee:**

- Surveyed residents;
- Met with and interviewed Village Manager, department heads, staff and Village Trustees;
- Conducted research on neighboring municipalities;
- Referenced standard communications principles and tactics;
- Worked with Village Manager's Office and Village Trustees to help create Scarsdale Official.

# Looking at Our Neighbors

New Castle Community newsletter 11/18/18

New Castle Community Newsletter 11/18/18

eNewsletter

- [Community Calendar Services and more](#)
- [Chaqueque Childrens Book Festival Story Concert with Paul Drepper](#)
- [Pump and Apples Party - 11/21/18](#)
- [Christmas Dinner 12/12/18](#)
- [Homeless Shelter in New Castle - November 15th - 16th 2018](#)
- [Watch the Video: 2017 Men, Girls & Budget Forum](#)
- [Governors Fund PolioVirus Long Haulk](#)
- [New Castle Fire Truck at 2018 Firemen Meeting](#)
- [Merry Christmas](#)
- [Chaqueque Farmers Market Sale by Lake](#)
- [Christmas Tree Sale](#)
- [Adults Day for Men 11/11](#)
- [New Castle Launches My New Castle 311 Mobile App](#)
- [The Village of New Castle](#)
- [NASC 3rd Annual Holiday Art Show](#)
- [Millwood The District will have Two Open Seats to fill for 2017](#)
- [Country Square Reminds](#)
- [Board of Education Youth Liaison](#)
- [Chaqueque Farmers Market Sale by Lake](#)
- [Kader Goodwill Sign Program](#)
- [Town of New Castle Agenda](#)
- [Recent Photographs](#)
- [Contact Us Today](#)

# Westchester Municipalities' Digital Communications Programs

	Armonk (North Castle)	Bedford	Bronxville	Chappaqua (New Castle)	Greenwich	Larchmont
<b>Population</b>	1201 Households 4330 Residents	6326 Households 17906 Residents	2430 Households 6407 Residents	6037 Households 18100 Residents	22083 Households 62359 Residents	2215 Households 6118 Residents
<b>Website</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>E-News</b>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Facebook</b>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Twitter</b>	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Community Calendar</b>	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>E-Commerce Services</b>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
<b>Additional Comms</b>	No	Yes (monthly "Supervisor's Report)	Yes (monthly "Mayor's Column")	No	No	No

# Westchester Municipalities' Digital Communications Programs

	Mamaroneck	New Canaan	New Rochelle	Port Chester	Rye	SCARSDALE
<b>Population</b>	7175 Households 19356 Residents	7551 Households 20280 Residents	28279 Households 79557 Residents	9082 Households 29524 Residents	5559 Households 16000 Residents	<b>5657 Households 17909 Residents</b>
<b>Website</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	<b>Yes</b>
<b>E-News</b>	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Facebook</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	<b>No</b>
<b>Twitter</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	<b>No</b>
<b>Community Calendar</b>	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	<b>No</b>
<b>E-Commerce Services</b>	No	No	No	No	No	<b>No</b>
<b>Additional Comms</b>	No	No	No	No	No	<b>No</b>

# Westchester Municipalities’ Communications Staffing/Budgets

	Armonk (North Castle)	Bedford	Bronxville	Chappaqua (New Castle)	Greenwich	Larchmont
<b>Staffing</b>	Dedicated “Public Information” function, managed by part-time staff and outside consultant	Communications administered by existing staff; “information” contact is FTE (\$55K salary)	Communications appears to be managed by Village clerk’s office	Communications appears to be managed by supervisor and clerk’s offices, under “Special Events,” “Special Projects” and “Professional Services”	No obvious/specific communications line items in budget	Budget includes unspecified consultant/contract fees in various departments
<b>Budget</b>	2017 budget is \$72K, with \$50K allocated for “Consultant Fees”	“General Management Support” allocation of \$62K, some of which may cover communications	2017 budget is \$25K, including \$6K for “Advertising,” \$7.3K for “Website/E-Bulletin” and \$12.3K for “Consultant Fees”	Budget lists \$10K for “Special Events,” \$25K for “Special Projects,” \$3K for “Chamb of Comm Support,” \$6K for “Printing Town Info.” and \$12K for “Prof. Services”	Allocates hundreds of thousands for various, unspecified “Professional Services”	n/a

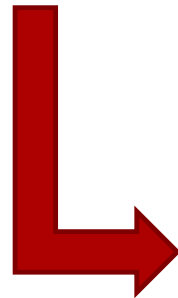
# Westchester Municipalities’ Communications Staffing/Budgets

	Mamaroneck	New Canaan	New Rochelle	Port Chester	Rye	SCARSDALE
<b>Staffing</b>	Employs a communications consultant	No communications allocations/staffing listed in budget	Dedicated “Public Information Office” that includes CTV, and is supervised by communications and marketing manager	Village manager’s office is responsible for all “Public Relations” activities	Communications activities coordinated by Village manager’s office	<b>No dedicated staff or function</b>
<b>Budget</b>	Budget lists \$48K for “Consultant Services” in “General Fund”	n/a	2017 budget is \$286K, \$133K of which is manager’s salary, with \$70K allocated for “Contracted Services”	One additional FTE has been budgeted for 2017-18	One additional FTE has been budgeted for 2017-18	<b>n/a</b>

# Takeaways from Interviews with Trustees and Department Heads

In order to determine a recommended course of action, the Committee:

- Ranked each of the recommendations based upon an assumption on VALUE to the Village and the EFFORT required to implement
- Each option with a High Value and Low Effort was perceived to be a shorter term priority
- Those with Low Value and High Effort was ranked a longer term priority



Recommendations	Category	Priority/Value	Effort/Cost
Create flyer(s) to include in water bill mailings to promote "Notify Me" and other important village services	Content Creation/Distribution	High	Low
Develop guidelines/criteria for what information is distributed to public, means, frequency and priority (e.g., emergencies, construction, seasonal reminders)	Policy	Medium	Medium
Publicize committee meetings more frequently and consistently	Meetings	Medium	Low
Create print/online brochure about village boards and councils to publicize activity and engage potential volunteers	Content Creation/Distribution	Medium	Medium
Encourage departments to communicate via social media (see fire department FB page/ police department Twitter page) OK if done via VMO	Policy	Medium	Medium
When scheduling monthly meetings with trustees, include experts and department heads to discuss specific topics and allow residents to raise related concerns	Meetings	Medium	Medium
Assess robocall capabilities and usage to improve efficiency	Communications Channels	High	Low

# Recommendations

## Immediate Priorities

The committee makes these recommendations based on its work and successes over the past 12 months, and urges the Village to build a formal communications function. Immediate priorities include:

- **IA. Continue to publish/distribute *Scarsdale Official*;**
- **IB. Establish a social media policy and utilize** (one way) via Facebook, Twitter, etc. to disseminate information;
- **IC. Continue promotion, evaluation and enhancement of *scarsdale.com*,** including direct mail marketing explaining features such as “NotifyMe”;
- **ID. Develop qualitative and quantitative data** on the efficacy of all communication vehicles (website, social media, communication tools with public, etc.) for ongoing assessment;
- **IE. Re-evaluate** all current communications channels.



# Recommendations

## Short Term Priorities

The following activities require additional preparation and effort, and should be considered once a formal communications policy is adopted and immediate priorities are addressed.

- **SA.** Digitize “New Resident Packet”
- **SB.** Expand content of *Scarsdale Official*
- **SC.** Publicize committee meetings more frequently and efficiently
- **SD.** Create online and print brochures to increase interest in serving on boards and councils
- **SE.** Renew the work of the Scarsdale Ad Hoc Committee on Communications.

# Recommendations

## Medium Term Priorities

- **MA. Create FAQs** for relevant Village departments;
- **MB. Publicize additional department calendars** and allow resident calendar syncing;
- **MC. Publicize department-specific services** that provide convenience but may not be widely known among residents;
- **MD. Revise and/or enhance structure** of board of trustees business meetings to allow for more meaningful dialogue with residents;
- **ME. Create more formal process** for documenting community group activities, information and feedback (e.g., Scarsdale Neighborhood Association meetings);
- **MF. Work with Scarsdale Cable Commission Office** to create/distribute boards, councils and department highlight videos.

# Recommendations

## Long Term Priorities

The committee has additional ideas that should be considered as Scarsdale continues to build its communications efforts

Scarsdale.com

- **LA.** Digitized applications (including graphics) for meetings to alert residents
- **LB.** Transactional features (property inquiry, payments, permit status, etc.)
- **LC.** RSS feeds or email alerts – for users needing very specific updates (e.g., meeting dates)
- **LD.** Specialized access to data, such as water fee prediction, for residents who want to check assessments
- **LE.** “Infographics” to enable deeper understanding of Village trends and metadata
- **LF.** Create quarterly newsletter that can be distributed electronically and via mail;
- **LG.** Ensure that institutional knowledge on communications is retained through key staff turnover by documenting policies and procedures for future employees;

Other

- **LH.** Decentralize social media use by department (e.g., recreation, police, fire, etc.);
- **LJ.** Review current staffing levels to determine if they meet communications needs/goals;

# Recommendations

## Long Term Priorities (continued)

### **LK. Improve media relations**

- Foster relationships with editors/reporters in and beyond Scarsdale, and respond to unsolicited inquiries in a timely manner. Routinely monitor what the media and residents say about Scarsdale policies and issues. Provide official responses;
- Get ahead of negative stories. Control the narrative by quickly releasing as much information as possible, along with clear explanations and frank commentary; and,
- Develop press kit that includes general information/history of Scarsdale, demographics, structure of government, summaries of key Village initiatives and achievements, staff bios/photos, etc.

### **LL. Publicize community activities** in Village communications and coordinate efforts when possible;

- Actively participate in community events to promote government initiatives (e.g., highlight sustainability efforts during annual Bronx River cleanup); and,
- **Install community bulletin boards** in select Scarsdale locations and consider producing high-quality signage for important recurring events/programs;

### **LM. Consider increased community engagement initiatives**, such as contests, surveys, youth activities and presence at community events;

### **LN. Develop a Scarsdale Boards and Councils “Round Robin” blog** featuring personal accounts to inform potential volunteers and **pierce the “veil”** of government.

# Laying the Groundwork

While focusing on specific needs and action items is helpful, it is important for Scarsdale Village to establish a strong foundation for future communications efforts and protocols. All messaging should accurately reflect the Village ideology and be consistent in content, look and feel. The committee urges the Village to develop and adopt a formal communications policy that:

- Cohesively brands all Village communications; an effective publicity plan that defines goals, outlines specific tactics/programs, and establishes approval processes and protocols;
- Executes all messaging activities and monitors effectiveness of initiatives;
- Creates a centralized, dedicated management of messaging programs; and,
- Supports Village management in improving efficiency and meeting organizational goals.