

Technology & Communications Commission
MINUTES
May 2, 2023

Commission Members Present: John Binkley, Chair
Richard Jackson, Vice Chair
Aaron Nadler
Brandon Garay

Absent Katherine Johnson
Chris Grandjean
Rob Fulcer

Council Liaison Present: Neil Steinberg

Staff Present: Jakub Jedrzejczak
John Callahan
Kara Rodriguez

1. Call to Order 7:00PM
2. Establish Quorum
 - a. Quorum present.
3. Pledge of Allegiance
4. Approval of Minutes – April 12, 2023
 - Motion to approve Jackson, 2nd Nadler Passes 4-0.
5. Petitioners - None
6. Old Business
 - a. Digital Town Hall Technology and Communications Commission Public Input – Discussion

Mr. Jedrzejczak thanked the Commission and provided a quick refresher of last meeting’s Digital Town Hall (DTH) discussion to include background information on how it all started. In specific, reminding the Commission that their assistance will be needed with public outreach to obtain valuable feedback before launching this initiative.

Before Mr. Jedrzejczak introduced the Town’s PIO, Mrs. Kara Rodriguez, he reviewed the files that contained some of the material that will be used to gauge the public’s interest in the creation of the survey for the implementation of DTH. Some included a heat map, the most visited pages, and advertised URLs. According to Mr. Jedrzejczak, these files had been shared with the Commission right before the meeting.

Mr. Jedrzejczak hopes that this information will help determine how IT should prioritize the content, discover which services may be buried too deep on the website, and maybe provide some new ways in which information can be presented.

Further pointing out that currently there are over 200 active, friendly URLs– too many for anyone to remember. Suggesting that instead, something like “leesburgva/road permit” would be easier for people to remember.

Mr. Binkley asked, “what definition is being used for ‘friendly URL’?”

Mr. Jedrzejczak explained that if you go to “leesburgva/” you can add “bid board” and it will take you to the Town’s procurement bid board site, further adding that this format is usually used on marketing materials for short access.

Mr. Jedrzejczak continued his elaboration of the files showing which websites were most visited. “I am not saying we are going to use it all, but [when] designing this future DTH, we want to make sure that...we provide easy access for residents, the stuff they frequently click on; cuz there are big differences between some of them, some are two-digit clicks, some are one-digit clicks.”

As another example of a popular website, **Mr. Jedrzejczak** introduced the payment system, Webtrac. Further adding that the entire presentation can be reviewed by the Commission in the upcoming week since currently he is only presenting the top 25 web searches.

Mr. Jedrzejczak stated that he finds inspiration in the fact that website users don’t think of departments, they think of services, what they need (i.e., pay for a parking ticket) or want (i.e., a pool). This “resident-centric approach” will be at the core of DTH. Further adding that it’s more than improving the Town’s website, it’s also streamlining some back-end processes and consolidating.

“What we would like to do on phase one for implementation of this DTH [is] make sure that residents do have this Amazon-like experience, one ID for Town resident, one ID for the Town business, and...on the back end we would like to tie some of those accounts that are very separate.”

Mr. Jedrzejczak introduced the Town’s PIO, Mrs. Kara Rodriguez, to answer some of the questions the Commission had during the last meeting: what our survey options are and how we can socialize and improve the public outreach.

Mrs. Rodriguez suggested that a different approach is needed; “we cannot put all our eggs in the press release basket, as a former journalist– I can definitely tell you that.”

Some of the options may include reaching out to local media, doing social media posts, and probably a “Live in Leesburg” with Ms. Leah Kosin, the Town’s assistant PIO. “Any video gets more engagement and it’s something that can bring a bit more life than a survey link,” said Mrs. Rodriguez.

Mrs. Rodriguez highlighted that with DTH and when it comes to residents “...it needs to be narrowly defined; and how we can make their experience better and how *they* think the Town can operate more efficiently.”

According to **Mrs. Rodriguez**, there are different modes to push out the survey. One is sharing it with the Commissions and asking them to push it out to their own base, their constituents. Still, surveys don't get a ton of participation, said Mrs. Rodriguez, so by pushing it in different ways some valuable insight may be obtained.

Mr. Binkley shared that there are two aspects they are considering: the survey because it's data, not anecdotes; and having some listening meetings. Further adding that given its prominence, the library and/or Ida Lee is a good place to start. Asking "what kind of infrastructure do we have to push out a survey?"

To which **Mrs. Rodriguez** answered, "Survey Monkey account, internally." Information is gathered from different departments and/or commissions; data is then input into the account, and a link is then shared.

Mrs. Rodriguez agreed with Mr. Binkley in that there is an opportunity with Ida Lee as a great venue to spread the word on DTH; however, "the message needs to be tailored, ... "How can we make your Parks & Recreation online experience better?" Likewise, the message at the Balch [Library] will also be customized...It can be very effective actually," said Mrs. Rodriguez.

Prompted by Mr. Binkley, **Mrs. Rodriguez** suggested keeping the survey questions at a maximum of 10, starting with multiple choice questions, followed by a combination of open-ended questions, fill-in questions, and/or short answer(s).

[multiple speakers at once, inaudible]

Mr. Binkley and **Mr. Nadler** inquired how specific each survey can be, department specific?

To which **Mrs. Rodriguez** answered that it could be done, preferably, if kept under five departments with special attention given to the Department of Parks and Recreation which also covers events. One option, she said, is having a general survey in the news release while a more specific one is developed for the departments. Further adding that the Department of Economic Development is very helpful with business outreach, and they can assist with survey distribution to their base. More specifically, Melanie Scoggins, the retention coordinator for the department, who was recently featured in the Town's "Meet Me Monday."

Mr. Binkley asked **Mrs. Rodriguez** if she had any other recommendation(s) apart from the survey, something along the lines of listening sessions and a possible soft launch.

"Same thing minus the survey; just again, news release push, social media push, 'Live in Leesburg' push, just blast it from all different angles...for the listening sessions...targeting specific groups...personally asking people to participate...it might end up being a personalized email...asking 50 and hoping to get 10, but you get a pretty solid group," said **Mrs. Rodriguez**.

Mrs. Rodriguez clarified to Mr. Binkley that she has ample experience with survey questionnaires among Town staff and government. “So far, I think I’ve only done one survey for a Commission; all the rest have been internal...the staff here is very engaged... even though this is an IT [initiated] project, there’s a lot of cross over; there’s a lot of collaboration,” she affirmed.

Mr. Jackson thanked Mrs. Rodriguez for her guidance and suggested that a sort of cardboard be posted at Ida Lee, the Tennis Center, and the Rust Library due to their heavy foot traffic. For the latter, although a county facility, he anticipates a significant turnover since they now provide passport services.

Mrs. Rodriguez suggested something by the finance counter in Town Hall since it too has heavy foot traffic and that’s one area DTH is looking to impact significantly.

Mr. Jackson agreed with Mrs. Rodriguez and added that Mr. Jedrzejczak and Mr. Callahan have big plans for this, that it can be accomplished although it won’t happen overnight. Acknowledging that getting the information out and back in is an arduous task; he expressed gratitude for having Mrs. Rodriguez’s help.

Mr. Garay asked if doing a paper survey could be an option for stakeholders with no computer access or capacity to navigate the system.

Mrs. Rodriguez affirmed the possibility of doing a paper survey for this specific group and suggested its distribution at the Senior Center in downtown Leesburg along with the possibility of a listening session.

Mr. Jedrzejczak concurred with Mrs. Rodriguez and acknowledged that heavy foot traffic in the library and the senior center are optimal for a DTH discussion despite these being county facilities.

Sharing his experience with chatGPT, **Mr. Jedrzejczak** encouraged those present to use chatGPT and ask the same questions: ‘how could you help Leesburg with DTH?’ and ‘how can you help with DTH and [the] police department?’ Further adding that having one consolidated place where people can make all their payments is as equally important as having easier access to government information.

Thinking of his experience with the Fidelity application, **Mr. Jedrzejczak** thought about what the Town is trying to accomplish in combination of the chatGPT as well as media. That is, “how do you envision your department potentially participating?” Are there any places you could see PIO being a part of this digital transformation...?” he asked.

To which **Mrs. Rodriguez** responded that it’s an intriguing thought, but she needs to make sure the person answering is real and not a chatGPT. Adding that Town’s staff is accessible, that it’s only a matter of guiding the residents/website users to the right place; of them knowing where they can start that quick inquiry. The Town’s website can improve in this area, concluded Mrs. Rodriguez.

Mr. Jedrzejczak thought that was a great answer and reminded himself that next time he will be asking utilities and the police department directors about their experience.

Mr. Jackson asked if the link to the survey can be posted via the Facebook page, Twitter, Instagram, and/or Next Door?

Mrs. Rodriguez replied, "Yes, absolutely."

Mr. Steinberg wondered if the order of the process is efficient. He expressed his observation that maybe postponing citizen participation for later in the DTH process is a better alternative. Especially, since "all the different departments know what they need and how vital it would be to coordinate all of this so that all the departments can communicate with each other. And we've also recognized that a few people really participate in these surveys."

He suggested the execution of a preliminary, DTH model first and then reaching out to the public, recognizing there will be limitations and further work needed on the website.

Mrs. Rodriguez replied that such an alternative should be considered, but cautioned that if this direction is taken, public input should be summoned while there's still time to change the course of action, at least before the halfway point. Stressing that, based on her experience, "the thing that the public hates the most is when the Town does a meeting where the outcome has already been determined, but we are just checking the box to show care about your opinion...the benefit of involving the public, is that they will see things we as Town employees do not see."

Mr. Binkley also envisions a significant value in citizen participation at the beginning of the process. Stating that by doing so, staff's questions are answered, awareness of what's to come is raised, and the public gets educated.

Mr. Jedrzejczak introduced another concept that heightens the need for public participation at the beginning of the process: learning about the needs of residents and businesses. According to Mr. Jedrzejczak, this knowledge becomes a key component of the project's methodology. Further suggesting that this approach fosters caution while preventing the misuse of resources given the expensive proposition.

"...we'll model some software, and then we do exactly what we said, we present it, and then we run with it again to do another irrigation of the software to present some processes; almost like shortcuts I would say to the beautiful stuff that Town provides," said Mr. Jedrzejczak.

Mr. Jedrzejczak presented another way DTH can help. Instead of carrying a little plastic ID card, Ida Lee patrons would be able to scan a picture of the card to gain access to the different activities in the facility. "...how easy it's to forget this little card that gets bent ...I think that reaching out with a survey may be with one question: 'hey, how you would improve access to these digital services that the Town provides today?'"

Mr. Binkley asked if the Commission is still working on the presentation IT is presenting on May 17.

Mr. Jedrzejczak pointed out that he is working on a presentation for the directors which will start with a short report about the Commission. Specifying that “it’s going to be basically a lot of questions for them and every time they will expect me to answer I am going to turn the table around and ask them how would they answer, how would they digitalize their departments...because I am there to help with technology, I am not there to change their processes; they know their business best, I don’t know... but I am there to help; so , it’s a first session, that’s what our town manager requested, that we define what this DTH is.”

Mr. Binkley stated there are three tasks at hand, the biggest one being the survey questionnaire with at least 7-9 multiple choice questions, and 1-3 more open – ended or short answers.

As an effective tool, **Mrs. Rodriguez** suggested using multiple choice questions and revamping the current website.

Mr. Binkley stated the need to coordinate with the Economic Development and Parks and Recreation Commissions, the two top priorities.

Mr. Garay agreed to take the lead with the Economic Development Commission after the question was prompted by Mr. Binkley.

Mr. Binkley will reach out to Rob [Fulcer] to see if he can reach out to the Parks and Recreation Commission.

[Mrs. Rodriguez left the Council Chamber since the Commission had no more questions]

Mr. Nadler asked if Granicus is the platform that’s used for the website.

Mr. Callahan replied “yes.”

Mr. Nadler suggested reaching out to Granicus to obtain information on trends, what they are seeing, and what other jurisdictions are asking about similar processes.

Mr. Jedrzejczak advised that it’s good research since they specialize in public interfaces.

Mr. Binkley commented that Granicus has decent online topics.

Mr. Jedrzejczak advised that Granicus is now a huge company specializing in streaming, not websites or services that people can access for payments. To them, a public meeting is what they refer to as “digital town hall.” Nonetheless, ...I think that “after doing a bit more research, it should definitely include this component of the media, we would like, I assume, the Town Council would like more resident participation online or in person during Town Council meetings or have easier access to this stream, having a different vehicle...”

In terms of survey questions formatting, **Mr. Jedrzejczak** suggested to have some “dependent choices.” That is, if someone chooses one answer, it will take them to another question nested in their original answer. This way, more specific and organized data is collected while maintaining a maximum of only ten survey questions.

Mr. Binkley, along with the Commission, came to a consensus to have survey questions ready by the next meeting.

7a. New Business

Mr. Jedrzejczak advised that Mr. Callahan will be presenting the recently launched land management system to the Commission at the next meeting. Being one of the largest Town projects impacting multiple departments. “...we have a full digital interface to perform all those services [e.g., request inspections, access public records, and pay for permit application fees]; for the first-time residents will be able to check the status of their application digitally...”

To this end, **Mr. Jedrzejczak** will invite Ms. Diana Witek to the next meeting. She is responsible for leading this effort, and she will be able to provide more information about the process, what’s possible, and how the project was implemented. “It’s completely in line with the DTH concept,” said Mr. Jedrzejczak.

In response to Mr. Binkley’s question, Mr. **Jedrzejczak** advised it’s a Central Square product that has been purchased and that it’s going to be presented a month from now by Ms. Witek.

7b. New Business

Mr. Binkley prompted the discussion of July’s meeting date since it conflicts with Independence Day (July 4th).

Mr. Callahan presented options for July’s meeting: 3rd, July 12, or 13, @ 7pm in this room and Mr. Binkley suggested moving the meeting to July 12. Motion Nadler, 2nd Jackson 4-0.

Mr. Callahan explained that the October 3rd meeting coincides with a Council meeting and thus rescheduling is necessary and suggested October 10th. Motion Jackson, 2nd Garay 4-0. An email with updates will follow along with the update of the public calendar.

8. Commissioner Comments – none.

9. Council Rep Comments – none.

10. IT Director Comments – Thanked the Commission for supporting the vision and expressed that it’s good to report to the directors that the Commission is aiding in the public outreach of the Town’s digital initiative.

11. Adjourn 8:06 PM Motion Jackson, 2nd Nadler Passes 4-0

Next Meeting, June 6, 2023, 7:00 pm.