STRATEGY FOR
#CITIZENENGAGEMENT
ASHLAND TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVES
MAY, 2016

Town of Ashland

Citizen Engagement Strategy With Campaign Action Plan

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For:
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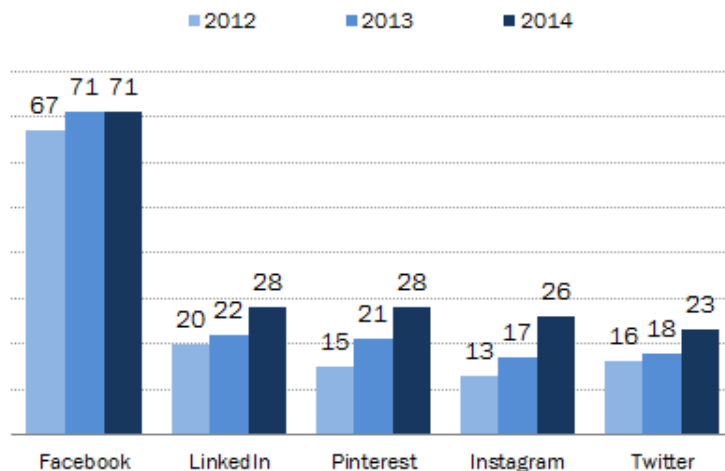Office of Municipal and School Technology MassIT

GOVNEXT

Introduction: Ashland's Citizen Engagement Initiative

In late 2015, the Town of Ashland entered into a Community Compact agreement for Citizen Engagement as an IT Best Practice. In the spring of 2016, a team from the Office of Municipal and School Technology and GovNext at the Massachusetts Office of Information Technology (MassIT) conducted several meetings with Ashland's Town Manager and Director of Technology to discuss the goals of the Compact and identify a project to use as a model for Citizen Engagement.

Social media sites, 2012-2014

% of online adults who use the following social media websites, by year

Legend: 2012, 2013, 2014

Facebook: 67, 71, 71
LinkedIn: 20, 22, 28
Pinterest: 15, 21, 28
Instagram: 13, 17, 26
Twitter: 16, 18, 23

Pew Research Center's Internet Project Surveys, 2012-2014. 2014 data collected September 11-14 & September 18-21, 2014. N=1,597 internet users ages 18+.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

As specified by the Community Compact agreement, the Citizen Engagement Best Practice includes a strategy for deploying technology solutions, including a public communication strategy and a professional development strategy. The end result should be that residents feel that town government is more responsive to their needs and concerns.

As this Pew Research Center graph shows, social media use is becoming almost ubiquitous among online adults. It's essential for public entities to take advantage of the widespread adoption of social media and use it as an easy way to get in touch with constituents.

Ashland Community Profile

Ashland is a MetroWest town with a population of about 17,000 residents. The median age of Ashland residents is 41.5, while the median household income is $95,296 (source: Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices).

Town Government

Ashland government is a combination of direct and representative democracy, as in many traditional New England towns. Government officials include the five-member Board of Selectmen, the Town Manager, who is appointed by the Board of Selectmen, and boards of assessors, health, and library trustees, and the five-member School Committee, who oversee the administration of the corresponding aspects of town governance.

An annual town election gives registered voters a chance to vote on the candidates for elected town office and on referendum questions. Town Meeting is a direct citizen legislative body in which all registered voters are eligible to participate. Town Meeting takes place over one or two nights, presided over by the Town Moderator. Town Meeting is like a session of Congress, where every registered voter is a participant. At Town Meeting, registered voters discuss and vote on town bylaws, the town budget, supplemental appropriations, and a range of articles sponsored by one or more of the elected and appointed town boards. Town Meeting affords voters a chance to participate in decisions involving fiscal policy, community preservation, education, and public services.
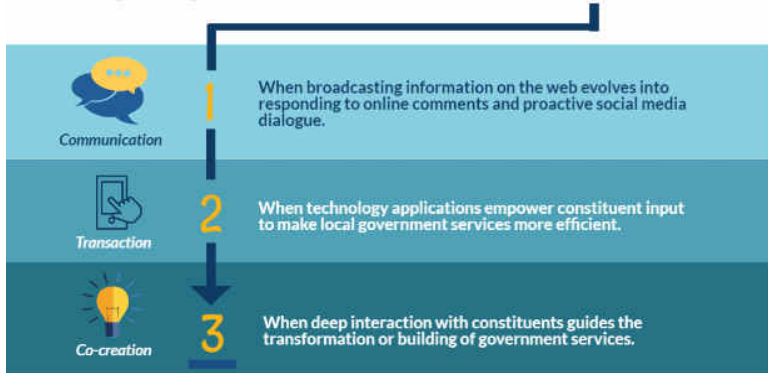
Schools

Ashland has a public high school (grades 9-12), a middle school (grades 6-8), two elementary schools, and a pre-K school. Ashland is also part of the Keefe Regional Technical School district; Keefe Tech is a technical high school serving Ashland, Framingham, Holliston, Hopkinton, and Natick.

Broadband and Mobile

In 2016, the interesting trend is that an increasing number of people use smartphones exclusively, with no fixed broadband or desktop/laptop computer in the household. Pew Research says that nationwide home broadband connectivity has actually gone down from 70% to 67% from 2013 to 2015, while the percentage of households using smartphones but no home broadband has risen dramatically, from 8% to 15% of all households during the same period. This means that mobile apps and responsive Web design are a high priority for any technology initiatives. Ashland's new Web site, developed using CivicPlus Web tools, uses responsive design principles and looks great on a smartphone. With the increasing number of mobile-only households, as mentioned above, future initiatives might include providing smartphone/tablet apps for making transactions with the town.

Citizen Engagement

3 WAYS TO ENGAGE

1 Communication — When broadcasting information on the web evolves into responding to online comments and proactive social media dialogue.

2 Transaction — When technology applications empower constituent input to make local government services more efficient.

3 Co-creation — When deep interaction with constituents guides the transformation or building of government services.

Do you have the following **TRIFECTA?**

1 Executive Support
2 Staff Capacity
3 Constituent Desire

+ DigitalMass Emails
- Social Media Best Practice Newsletter

+ Available Campaigns
- #StateWithoutStigMA
- Cyber Security
- Commonwealth Connect
- #MAsnow

+ Best Practice Cohort
(Meets the last Friday of every month)
- Social Media Analytics   - Meaningful Metrics
- Website Revamp   - MassGIS
- Search Engine Optimization   - Real Estate

How to Immediately **Walk the Talk**

To Access these Resources

Email
Amelia.Percentie@mass.gov

Brought to you by

GovNext
Mass.Gov/MassIT/GovNext
@MassachusettsIT

&

MassIT's Office of Municipal & School Technology
Michael Hamel, Director
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GovNext: Our Citizen Engagement Philosophy

This infographic was developed to illustrate the essential ingredients for successful citizen engagement. The big picture is that we see three levels of engagement within a city or town as it embarks on a program to get residents more closely involved in their government:

1. Communication
2. Transaction
3. Co-creation

Communication

The first, and broadest, level of engagement, is communication; this is the level we addressed with our social media campaign for Ashland. In this layer, the town is using a variety of media to "broadcast" information and is engaging in two-way communication (Facebook timelines, the ability to receive Twitter messages and replies, and other media).

An important aspect of this type of communication is that feedback from residents -- especially when it takes the form of complaints and service requests -- requires a fair amount of staff time to monitor and reply to. In the marketing world, companies with active Facebook pages often find that they need to devote a lot of staff time to this. For a smaller organization such as the Town of Ashland, this may not be a problem -- the existing Police and Fire Department pages do not appear to have major issues with negative feedback, "trolls," or otherwise difficult user comments.

Transaction

The next step, after establishing active communication with town residents, involves things like online payments and permit applications.

The Town of Ashland has an online payment system in place via City Hall Systems, which lets residents pay bills for property taxes, trash collection, water and sewer, motor vehicle excise taxes, dog license fees, and other town bills.

Co-creation

The ultimate goal of citizen engagement initiatives is to achieve a state where residents are so heavily "engaged" that they become actively involved in governing their town. With Ashland government being centered around Town Meeting, where voters act directly on legislation, this greatly amplifies the voices of individual residents, provided they participate! The power of a social media campaign lies in its ability to provide real-time information about town issues, so voters can get involved earlier and take a pro-active role. Citizens on all sides of the issues are more satisfied with local government when they're involved earlier, instead of finding out too late in the process and having to say, "Why didn't we hear about this sooner?"

Ongoing Citizen Engagement

The recommendations made here are intended to provide a straightforward roadmap for Ashland to follow when rolling out future public-facing technology initiatives. The basic idea is that the town's Web site is the main source of detailed information, while social media outreach is a way of broadcasting time-sensitive news items. Residents will be attracted by the town's social media presence, make their initial contact there, then go to the Web site to drill down for more information on such topics as public board meetings, real-estate development project documentation, online bill payment, or permitting.

One goal identified by Town Manager Michael Herbert and the town's executive team is to develop a multifaceted citizen engagement strategy, as well as increasing voter turnout and resident involvement in town government.

Once the initial campaign is complete, the idea is that Ashland will be able to reach increasing numbers of residents with a minimum of time and without having to add communications staff.

Social Media Audience Reach

The citizen engagement strategy recommended for Ashland involves a consistent social media campaign to get people following the town regularly, so they'll be aware of what's going on, whenever it's happening. It also involves being engaged through traditional local news media in encouraging residents to vote, to volunteer or run for positions in town government, and generally to get involved in serving the Town of Ashland.

According to the Pew Research Center, an increasing number of people use multiple social media sites regularly. In 2014, 52% of Internet users used two or more sites, compared with 42% in 2013. Social media audience reach is growing in all demographics -- the same Pew Report noted that 56% of online adults 65 and older were Facebook users; this translates to 31% of all seniors.

Despite the increasing audience reach of social media, it's still important to run a blended campaign, maintaining frequent contact with traditional media outlets such as the *MetroWest Daily News*. The advantage of social media, however, is the potential for tighter integration (via direct linking) with the town's Web-based information resources.

Social Media Usage: Current "As-Is" and Recommendations

The Town of Ashland currently has a Facebook page and a considerable Twitter presence. These resources can be used both to broadcast information about town events and to drive traffic to the information available on the Town's Web site.

The Town originally had a Facebook Profile, not a Page. What's the difference? A Profile is intended as a personal Facebook presence, while a Page is intended for a business or any multi-person organization.

We recommended that the town convert its Profile to a Page, for a couple of reasons:

1. Facebook's Terms of Service state that entities such as companies and governments should create a Page, rather than a Profile, which is really intended to represent a person.

2. A Page makes it easier for people to follow the town and engage in two-way communication. One of the reasons we recommended that Ashland convert the Town's Facebook Profile to a Page (similar to the ones the Ashland Police and Fire departments have), is that it is not possible to "pin" a post to the top of the Timeline in a personal Profile, while you can pin it to the top of a page. After we made our recommendation, the Profile was converted to a Page.

Facebook Disclaimer Requirement
Please note: Facebook's Government Terms state as follows: 'If you have an official website, your Page must contain, in a prominent location: "If you are looking for more information about the Town of Ashland, please visit www.ashlandmass.com."' Since Ashland has a great Web site, the Facebook page is an excellent way to drive traffic -- Facebook and other social media allow the town to keep in touch with residents and broadcast news updates on a day-to-day basis, while the Web site has the detailed information and is the more "official" source of information, documents, forms, etc.

Twitter Presence

When we began working with the Town of Ashland, there were several Twitter IDs ("handles") for public agencies (such as the Police and Fire departments) and individual public officials and other community leaders (teachers, school officials, members of the School Committee and Board of Selectmen, etc.), but none for the Town of Ashland itself. We recommended creating a Twitter ID for the "Town of Ashland" as a whole. The town has done so, by creating @ashlandmass as the "Town of Ashland" ID, and also @AshlandTwnMgr for Town Manager Michael Herbert. The Police and Fire Departments have well over a thousand followers each, and the goal is that the town IDs will eventually attract a comparable following.

Amplification email campaign

When we formulated the Annual Town Election campaign, we decided to tap this informal community networking resource as a means of helping the town amplify its outbound messaging effort. The goal was to generate re-tweets and re-posting of the social media content we sent out, so that a large portion of the town's population could be reached with a get-out-the-vote message stressing the opportunity to vote on the budget override questions and several contested town offices.

Ashland's coUrbanize Web site

The coUrbanize section of ashlandmass.com is one of the most valuable information resources available on the town Web site. Anyone who has lived in a growing suburban community knows that one of the most contentious issues is real-estate development and housing/commercial construction. The great benefit of coUrbanize is that it puts all of the pertinent documents related to a construction project online, where anyone with an interest in the community can examine them. This allows all segments of the community's socio-political spectrum -- pro-growth, anti-growth, preservationist, conservationist, etc. -- to stay up on what's going on with town development, while there's still time to have an impact on development projects, and without having to spend endless hours at Planning Board and Selectmen's meetings, waiting for the project of interest to be discussed.

Ashland Document Center

The Document Center is one of the most useful parts of the Web site, and one that can probably save town staff a lot of phone calls, if you use social media to promote it.

Here are a couple of example tweets that might be used to drive traffic:

Does your house need work? The Town of Ashland has a Home Improvement Sample Contract: bit.ly/1UhdWTL #AshlandMass

Starting a small business? Ashland's online Document Center has the application form for a Business Certificate: bit.ly/23guCuV #AshlandMass

These are examples of how a social media "drip" campaign of social media works. Posting tweets about the site on a regular basis -- at least a few times a week is recommended -- will gradually get residents to find the site, and to come back when they're looking for any kind of information about the town.

Drip campaigns take time -- content marketers generally say that it takes around six months to achieve a significant increase in site traffic. But a consistent flow of social media messaging will gradually increase the proportion of town residents who go to the Web site for information and to make transactions with the town.

Professional Development Plan

In conjunction with the citizen engagement strategy discussed in this document, we have developed a professional development plan, tailored to the staff Ashland has available for social media and citizen engagement initiatives. As with most cities and towns, citizen engagement is of necessity an "add-on" to existing staff members' duties, so our recommendations are designed to be as inexpensive as possible, in both money and time. The purpose is to help the town execute future campaigns similar to the one leading up to the 2016 Annual Town Election with a minimum of staff time and technology resources.

Our professional development recommendations are designed to expand on what we did with the "Project X" campaign for the May 17th town election (see the "Campaign Action Plan" document), and with the citizen engagement strategy described above.

There are two main components needed in order to stay current with citizen engagement:

- ➤ Day-to-day citizen outreach via social media
- ➤ The Town of Ashland Web site, where citizens go for detailed information

Social Media Training and Best Practices

The town's social media presence establishes a conversation between town government and the residents of Ashland.

The basics of social media posting are pretty well known at this point, but if you're new at it, here are a couple of excellent tutorial resources on Twitter and Facebook. The first one is called "Twitter for Business," but it's a good introduction to how to use Twitter for anyone who wants to use it to broadcast information. The second one is Facebook's help center, which covers just about every topic of interest to a new user:

https://business.twitter.com/en/basics/intro-twitter-for-business.html
https://www.facebook.com/help/

Once you're established as a social media user, there are some best practices to make sure that new employees are aware of:

➢ Keep Twitter posts short -- well under 140 characters, to allow for re-tweeting
➢ Facebook posts can be longer, and you can add images for more impact
➢ Shorten URLs using bit.ly or another URL-shortening service
➢ Voice -- being aware of town's "official" stance; be consistent

Probably the most important thing is just to spend time on social media regularly and keep up with what other cities and towns are doing. There are some municipal Web sites that set great examples for how to engage with the public on social media. For example:

Bangor, Maine Police Department. This public-safety agency sets new standards for compelling, fun, and informative citizen engagement. In a city of about 33,000 people, they have more than 154,000 Facebook followers -- an amazing level of interest for a remote city in Maine. The writer, "TC," posts on a daily basis, with amusing, philosophical, and practical observations based on real police calls and local incidents.

Ashland Web Site

There are a number of online resources available for learning how to create and maintain content using the tools provided by CivicPlus. The site is designed to allow you to change content easily, without changing design elements or having to perform any coding tasks.

CivicPlus University

CivicPlus University is an online resource that provides Webinars on the tools CivicPlus offers for creating and maintaining the information on the Town of Ashland Web site. Topics include:

➢ Intranet
➢ System Administration
➢ Creating Back-end Pages
➢ Live-Edit pages (front end)

CP Professor Facebook and Twitter presence

CP Professor is the CivicPlus trainers' Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/cpprofessor and Twitter handle (@cpprofessor).

The CivicPlus training staff use the page mostly announcements about new features of CivicPlus tools. On Twitter, the trainers frequently post tips about proofreading, editing Web pages, and best practices for publishing digital information. Both are definitely worth following!

GovNext Monthly Cohort

Last but not least: The last Friday of every month at noon, the GovNext citizen engagement group runs an hour-long video conference call, where cities and towns are invited to call in, watch or listen to a presentation on a timely topic, then trade questions and answers on how their towns deal with the issues at hand. The best way to experience the Cohort is, of course, to join in real-time, but if you can't make it, we record the proceedings and will send them to you.

Ashland's "Project X": the 2016 Annual Town Election

In each Community Compact city or town that has adopted citizen engagement as one of its best practices, GovNext consults with the town to develop and document a citizen engagement strategy and a professional development plan. We also work together with the city or town on one "Project X" initiative to serve as an example for future projects.

The MassIT team and the Town identified the May 17th Annual Town Election as a key citizen engagement campaign within the Community Compact timeframe; so the election awareness campaign became Ashland's "Project X." Conference calls with Michael Herbert and Director of Technology Paul Carpenter helped us identify their objectives coming into the town election, discuss what they felt could be accomplished given the time and resource constraints, and set about creating a communication timeline leading up to May 17th.

The team then provided Ashland with a set of social media content designed for easy distribution to community leaders in advance of the election, and a mailing list of people we had identified as likely to be helpful with the informational campaign we developed for Ashland.

The idea is that this campaign should produce immediate results in improved voter turnout, thereby serving as a model for future initiatives to get more Ashland citizens involved in public affairs via electronic communication, as well as electronic town services.

When the town of Ashland implements technology projects in the future, the type of social media campaign used in the May 17, 2016 Annual Town Election should help increase voter awareness -- and, in turn, public adoption and acceptance of the new technology being rolled out.

The Annual Town Election campaign centered around three methods of communication:

1. Social media messages aimed at the election were sent out via "amplification" emails sent to a list of local "influencers" such as town and school officials, business groups, parents, the Chamber of Commerce, and others with known social-media presence who would be likely to spread the word to their followers. We prepared some social media copy and sent it to Michael Herbert, Town Manager, and Paul Carpenter, Director of Technology, to get the ball rolling on the citizen engagement campaign for the May 17th election.

2. Traditional local media. The *MetroWest Daily News* is the biggest media player in this market, with important coverage also provided by the Ashland Town News, Ashland Directions, and other outlets. We provided a few ready-made Letters to the Editor with our campaign package for Ashland, to provide further public awareness -- these "old media" outlets are a way of reaching all segments of the Ashland voter base.

3. The Town of Ashland's own social media presence (Facebook, Twitter, and potentially any other social media the town might decide to use) were used to post the same messages that were sent out in the "amplification" emails. By getting a consistent message out to Ashland residents from a variety of sources, the goal of the campaign was to reach everyone, or almost everyone, with the same "get out the vote" voice.

In preparing the campaign materials, the largest task was research. Identifying local influencers took some doing, because it required not just finding people who were on social media, but assessing the quality of their social media presence as well, in terms of number of followers, types of information posted, types of posts they tended to re-tweet (or share), and evaluating the audience reach of each influencer, so as to ensure as much overall breadth as possible in getting the message out to Ashland.

One challenge involved finding local influencers across the political spectrum -- with a budget override, it's much easier to find advocates than opponents. With other town outreach, such as for a technology rollout, this should be less of an issue, since the goal is simply to get people to adopt a software app, visit the Website, and otherwise interact with town government and their community electronically.

Ready, Set, Go! We Sprint to May 17th

With the May 17th Annual Town Election identified as a good target for a short-term campaign to increase citizen engagement, we envisioned a goal of increased voter turnout compared to town override elections in previous years. This year's election features a couple of override questions and several contested seats, a scenario that is usually good for voter turnout. It also means voters need to be well-informed -- that's where a social media campaign can be invaluable.

The "Project X" campaign we designed in partnership with Ashland can be generalized to any public-information initiative, when the town is deploying a new public facing technology. The most important thing is to follow through, over a period of time.

In preparing a roadmap for the May 17th Annual Town Election, we wanted to build a groundswell of interest in the days and weeks leading up to Election Day. We started by identifying an audience for our amplification emails, then dividing that audience into segments.

The idea was to target a broad a spectrum as possible of the town -- from school officials, teachers, and parents, to public safety agencies, to business groups and local media. By doing this, we hope each of these audience segments will have a different set of social-media followers, hence "amplifying" our messaging by getting it out to as wide a range of Ashland residents as possible.

Besides social media, we also wrote several "letters to the editor" for the Town Manager to send to local media in the weeks before the election, to reinforce the message, as well as to reach still more people, especially those who aren't on social media. Included in the media segment of our amplification email list were the *MetroWest Daily News's* beat reporter for Ashland, as well as WACA-TV and other traditional media outlets.

In Ashland's Community Compact application, the town's Community Narrative emphasizes the importance of communication in achieving its goals: "Engaging with our citizens is a top priority and with the need to communicate with residents with all levels of proficiency. We need a plan to use those sources that today's generations are using to get information and to train staff in the use of these technologies and make it part of our culture."

To get things off to a flying start, we developed a package of ready-made social media content for the election. This involved gathering a mailing list of community leaders active on social media and creating a series of short announcements designed to be posted on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media in advance of the election. Our goal was to help the town broadcast information that would increase voter awareness of and interest in the election, so as to increase voter turnout.

For future initiatives, we are recommending similar "drip" campaigns involving coordinated social media with amplification email and outreach to traditional media to reach as wide an audience as possible in Ashland.

Project X-trapolation!

The steps involved in this type of campaign can be distilled down to the checklist below. Future initiatives will differ according to the time span and the type of campaign, however. With a longer time period than the several-week-long campaign toward the May 17th town election, it may not be possible to write a campaign's worth of content ahead of time -- you might have to write a week's worth at a time, or even just write and post.

You can maximize the effectiveness of tweets by sending them on a schedule, using a tool. Studies have shown that the time of day tweets are posted has a significant effect on how widely they're read, and that if you post each tweet three times during the day, this further increases your audience reach. We use Hootsuite; a free account lets you schedule tweets ahead of time, so you don't have to do it in real time, when you might be busy with other responsibilities. As reported by LifeHacker, the best time to post tweets, in terms of reader engagement, is between 2:00AM and 3:00AM -- if you don't want to stay up late, you can still get your tweets posted at this hour by using a scheduling tool.

Although the Town's current Facebook and Twitter presence do not tend to draw a large volume of complaints or negative feedback, it's important to be aware that such feedback may happen at times. When an angry resident posts a complaint, it's important to respond quickly and defuse potential disputes and misunderstandings. The upside is that negative feedback provides an opportunity for Town officials to show that they're responsive; social media are just the newest way for people to "petition the government for redress of grievances."

Town of Ashland: Campaign Checklist for Public-Facing Initiatives

Prepared By:

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Office of Municipal & School Technology

For:

Michael Herbert, Town Manager
Paul Carpenter, Director of Technology
Town of Ashland

Campaign Checklist for New Public-facing Initiatives

Follow these steps in any informational campaign, when trying to raise public awareness of a new Town of Ashland public-facing initiative -- this would include technology rollouts, new features on ashlandmass.com, or any other important town issue.

➢ Develop a timeline for the project.

➢ Identify the social media and traditional media outlets, and the audience segments to target with each.

➢ Write tweets and other social and traditional media content for each phase of the timeline. In each case, develop a timeline, and compose social media posts and letters to the editor designed to be sent on specific dates. Send the social media posts out to your "amplification" mailing list (see next step), and encourage them to post each item to their own social media accounts on the specified dates. Send the letters to the editor out to print media on their specified dates (approximately -- this is not an exact science!).

In our "Project X" campaign for the May 17th town election, we composed a whole set of Twitter/Facebook posts and put them together as one amplification email, with the suggested posting date for each tweet indicated, to make it as easy as possible for people to post the content on social media. See the "Ashland Project X" document for the text of the amplification email we created for the May 17th information campaign.

➢ Post the tweets to social media on the scheduled dates. Send letters to the editor as scheduled.

➢ Be prepared to respond to public feedback on social media!

➢ Maintain a consistent campaign of social media messaging: Twitter and Facebook, to gain gradual increase in traffic to ashlandmass.com. Marketing industry best practices show that posting consistently on social media leads to return viewership and increased Website traffic (gradually -- as noted above, it usually takes several months to notice a significant increase in Web site traffic; that's why it's important to post on social media regularly).

For more information on this type of campaign, see the "Citizen Engagement Strategy" and "Ashland Project X" documents. They discuss how MassIT's Office of Municipal & School Technology and GovNext, in cooperation with the Town of Ashland, developed a social media campaign for the May 17th, 2016 Annual Town Election.

Recommendations for Social Media Effectiveness

These are the Town's current digital channels:

- www.ashlandmass.com
- Ashland's Facebook Page
- Ashland's Twitter ID (@ashlandmass)

There are also many decentralized Ashland social media accounts -- police and fire, schools, and many individual public officials and other community leaders.

In general, the Town of Ashland social media (Facebook/Twitter) are for short-term/timely informational posts and for announcements designed to increase traffic to the Web site, where residents can find more detailed information about the town.

Convey the voice of the Town of Ashland to our key audiences through consistent messaging. Aim at showing all segments of the demographic and political spectrum that town government is responsive to their needs, viewpoints, and concerns.

Style and Tone

- Always use subject's handle (ID) if possible, in upper/lowercase; for example, @GovNextMA
- Use a smart, personal voice. Do not use chat-speak (abbreviations like "2day," "4eva")
- Be gracious but modest. Don't retweet kind words; just thank people!

Frequency and Dialogue

- Tweet when you have something to teach, or to announce timely news items.
- Conversations happen organically, but try to have the last word, even if it's "thx" (an exception to chat-speak rule)
- Make room for old-school RTs! Don't use all 140 characters; save 16 characters for someone else to "RT @GovNextMA"

➢ If you want to share info strategically, copy friends at the end of the tweet by adding their handles (for example, @AshlandClockers for Jim Adams)
➢ Use hashtags when tweeting during live events, for example, #BostonMarathon

Listening to the Conversation

➢ Use a robust app like Hootsuite or TweetDeck, to manage incoming streams. Twitter is more about listening than talking!
➢ Stay on top of what's being said about Ashland, by searching for hashtags such as #AshlandMA, #AshlandMass, #VoteAshland, #AshlandOverride, #BostonMarathon, or whatever's topical at the moment. Be proactive -- don't wait until someone sends you a re-tweet asking, "Why hasn't the town done something about this?"
➢ If possible, decentralize management of the town's Twitter ID ("handle"), so that more than one person can check message traffic and reply or take action when necessary. It's important to reply -- especially to negative feedback -- within 24 hours.

Town of Ashland: Campaign Action Plan
Town Election -- May 17, 2016

Prepared by: Sam Hammar, Michael Hamel, John Kafalas, and Amelia Percentie
Office of Municipal & School Technology

For: Michael Herbert and Paul Carpenter
Town of Ashland

Introduction: Rapid Citizen Engagement Campaign

This is an action plan for citizen engagement aimed at the May 17th Annual Town Election in Ashland. This plan centers around social media and generating an "amplified" get-out-the-vote message by reaching out to important local influencers, who will spread the word to their followers and increase citizen engagement and voter turnout.

In our research, we found a large number of Twitter users, some "official," such as @AshlandPD and @AshlandFD, Jim Adams (@AshlandClockers), many school administrators and teachers; and some personal accounts of public officials, e.g., @LaurieTosti, the School Committee chair. We tried to identify a variety of Ashland community leaders, who might represent all sides of the override and other issues in town.

In the Appendix, you'll find a list of all the social media contacts we found -- it's a cross-section of the community and includes parents, arts organizations, local news media, representatives of the Ashland business community and the MetroWest Chamber of Commerce, and others who are affected both by the override initiatives and by the election of town officials.

The social media content includes a few things that might be held off until after May 17th, because they're less directly related to the election. For example, the item about coUrbanize would be more of a general "come and visit the Web site" item rather than part of the Town Election campaign. With the amount of local news surrounding projects like Rail Transit District, we thought it might make sense to draw people's attention to the wealth of information available on the coUrbanize site.

We have also included three "letters to the editor," suggesting that they be sent from Michael to local papers, primarily the MetroWest Daily News. Local media usually publish letters from public officials, and these are designed to raise awareness of how important the Town Election is to voters on all sides. One of them is intended to be sent out before the May 4th Town Meeting, with the others designed for the period after Town Meeting but before the election itself.

Action Steps

To keep it simple, this document is organized chronologically, in two-week segments of the campaign. For the most part, you can just copy-and-paste text right from this document into emails and social media postings. Our recommended workflow for each segment looks like this:

1. Send out an "amplification" email to a list of contacts in Ashland (we have provided a list, but you'll probably have some people you want to add), with the tweets for that time period. *Make sure to attached a few images to each email for people to use.*

2. Send one of the Letters to the Editor, to the MetroWest Daily News (or your favorite media outlet). These letters are designed to be fairly straightforward get-out-and-vote messages.

3. Post messages on your own social media. The short ones are designed for Twitter, because they're all 140 characters or less, but they work just as well on Facebook or other social media, especially if you post an image along with them.

4. If there is a public meeting or town event and you would like to have print material, refer to the "print folder" to find an option.

If you have any questions about the workflow (or anything else in this document), please contact John Kafalas -- john.kafalas@state.ma.us.

Pinning a Post

When posting on the Town of Ashland's own social media, we recommend pinning a tweet and a Facebook post to your Page, if you have one. Pinning a post to Twitter and Facebook also enables your visitors to your page to share this important information easily. To "pin" a tweet, just go to the tweet, then click the "dots" icon at the bottom-right, and select "Pin to your profile page:"
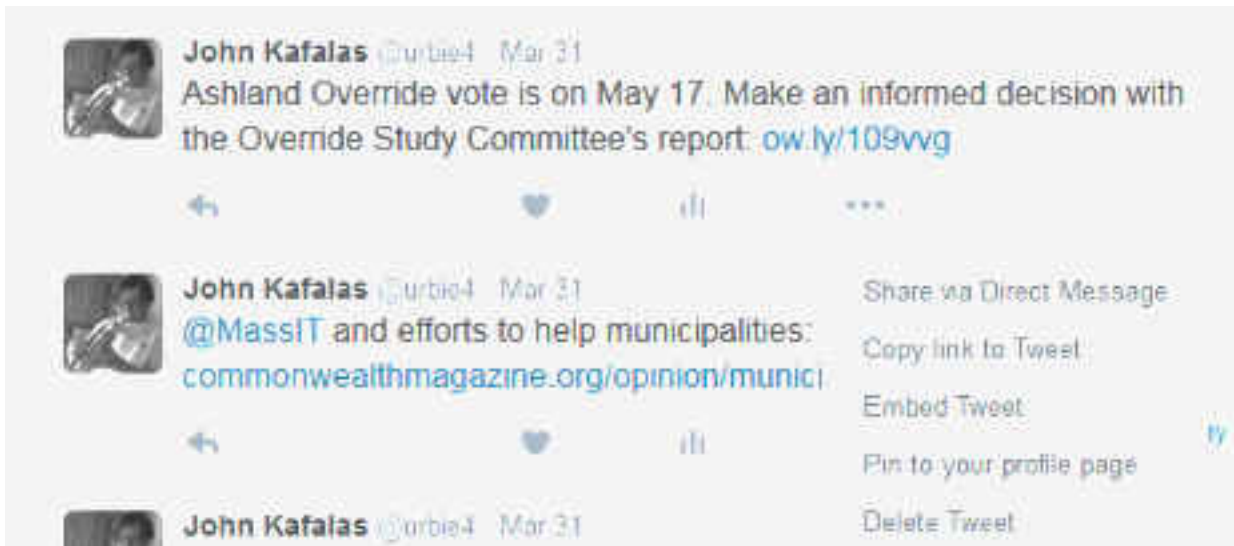
Note: it is not possible to "pin" a post to the top of the Timeline in a personal Profile, but you can pin it to the top of a Page. If you're trying to get information out to a large number of friends or followers, we recommend creating a Page and posting messages there, instead of on your personal Profile (yes, it's a little confusing!).

Facebook provides a procedure for converting a Profile to a Page: bit.ly/1T1G8HM It only takes a couple of minutes to convert a Profile to a Page. To pin a post to the top of a Facebook Page, follow these steps:

1. Go to the post on your Page's Timeline
2. Click the down-arrow icon at the top-right of the post (see illustration below)
3. Select Pin to Top
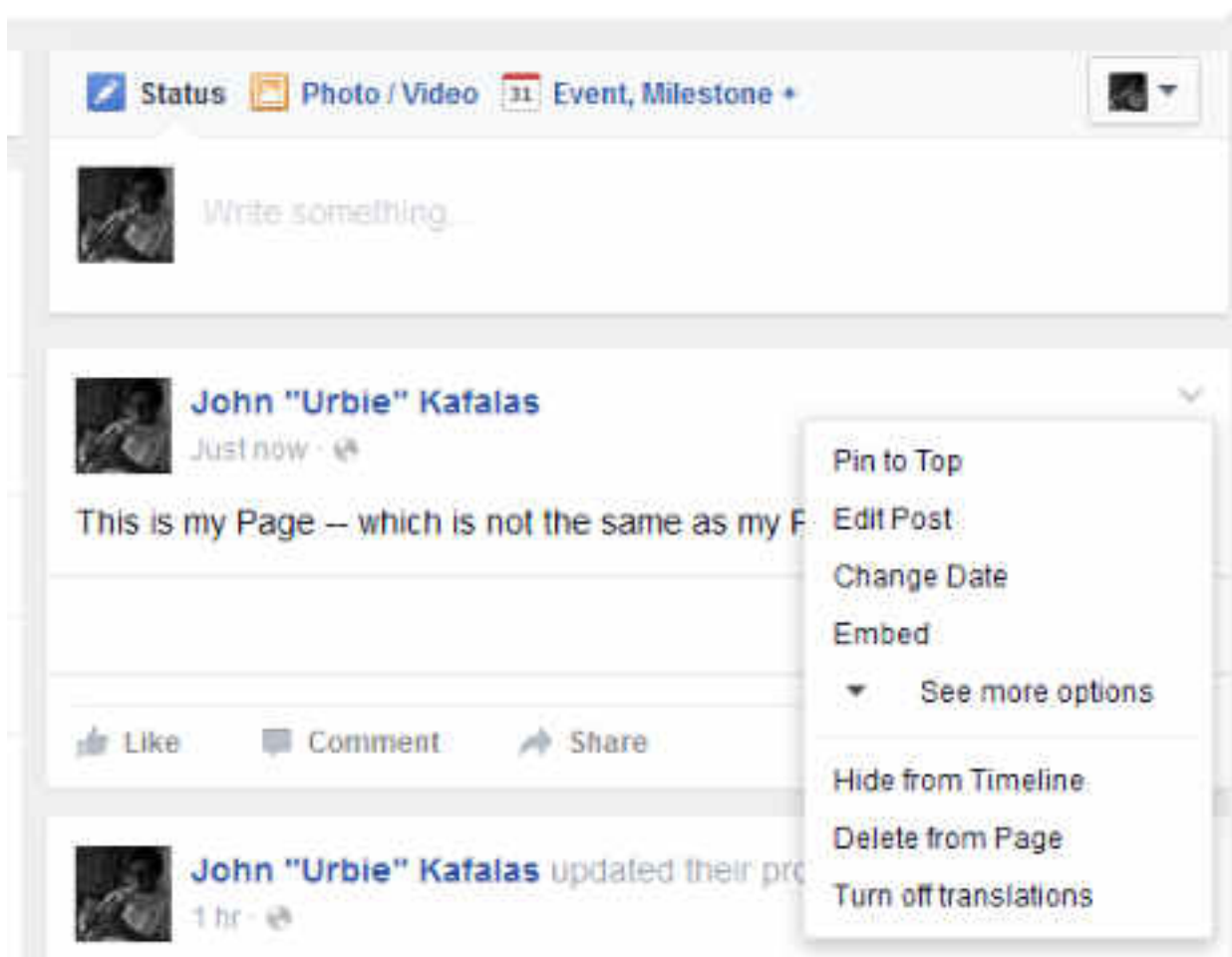
So let's get to it. The following sections give you our suggested campaign steps, in chronological order, between now and May 17. Please let us know if you have questions!

Campaign Action Items: April 19-29

1. Amplification email for Community Leaders: April 19-29

Dear Ashland Community Leaders,

We need your help in promoting awareness of the May 17th town election across social media. Our goal is that citizens on all sides of the issues will take advantage of the information on Ashland's Website and local news media, and that we can boost voter turnout to reflect an engaged public and a greater sense that town government is responsive to residents' needs and concerns.

To get the word out, please post these messages -- or write your own! -- on social media, using the suggested posting dates to generate a groundswell of voter interest in the days and weeks leading up to May 17th. If you write your own tweets, we recommend using the hashtag #VoteAshland so that anyone who searches for it will see your messages along with any others that have been posted with the same tag.

Attached to this email, you will find some images, intended to be used as profile pictures for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and well as cover photos for Twitter and Facebook. Consider using these images as your profile and cover photos to draw attention to this short-term campaign for May 17th.

Here are some suggested tweets for the next couple of weeks:

April 19

May 17th's Town Election features two override questions and contests for Selectmen, School Committee and others. #VoteAshland

What do tax overrides "override?" See this short video from the MA Department of Revenue: bit.ly/1Nl8acB #VoteAshland

April 21

May 17 Town Election steers Ashland's future. Polls at the High School will be open 7am-8pm. #VoteAshland

April 26

The Town Election is coming up on May 17th. Study up on the override questions: bit.ly/1V08ZzN #VoteAshland

April 28

Miss a public meeting? Catch up on what happened with Ashland's Agendas and Minutes Archive. #VoteAshland

2. Letter to the Editor for April 19-29

Ashland Town Meeting on May 4th gives voters a voice in our town's future. When you go to Town Meeting, you become a legislator, in a legislative session to vote on the town budget, capital purchases, and bylaws. Keep in mind that there are also two budget override questions, which will be voted on in the annual town election on May 17th. Town Meeting on May 4th gives you a chance to see the big picture and vote on a wider range of individual items in the budget, and also on annual articles related to town contracts, community preservation, and other issues that affect Ashland's character and quality of life.

Any registered voter can participate in Town Meeting. If you've never been before, try it. Town Meeting is a great way to learn about what's going on in Ashland, who the players are, and how the town is governed. Town Meeting is one of the great institutions of democracy -- it's how New Englanders come together to make decisions, and for centuries, it's how we've been making our communities better. The meeting starts at 7:00 on Wednesday, May 4th, at Ashland High School. Hope to see you there!

Sincerely,
Michael Herbert
Town Manager
Town of Ashland

3. Facebook posts for April 19-29

Take the postings from the amplification email above and post them on the Town of Ashland's own social media accounts, on or near the suggested dates. Where we give you more than one tweet for the same day, this is just intended to give different people a range of tweets to choose from -- you can post whichever one represents the message you want to convey; or just post them all! In addition, here are a couple of non-date-specific items to post on Facebook during April 19-29. One is a primer on the override questions; the other is an item on the Visual Budget.

A Primer on the Override Questions

There are two separate questions on the ballot in the May 17 Town Election: The first is a $1.9-million operational override, slated to pay for two new firefighters, a director of curriculum for the school system, part-time teachers of world languages, music, visual arts, and English, as well as guidance counselors and other staff positions, and additional funding for textbooks and supplies. A separate $500,000 item would go into the Community and Economic Development Infrastructure (CEDI) fund, a stabilization fund used to make strategic investments; these include the Downtown Sign Project; the Riverwalk project along the Sudbury River; matching funds for turning the Cadilac Paint site into a park; and several other civic improvement initiatives.

Do we need an override? If so, why? How much is it going to cost me? What are we getting for our tax money? You can find answers to these questions and anything else you might want to know about the override at our Override Information page: bit.ly/1V08ZzN

Stay tuned to this space for frequent updates as we approach the election date. Whether you're for or against the override (or even if you support one part of it but oppose the other!), please get out and vote on May 17th. Ashland's future depends on having engaged citizens taking an active role in decisions that affect us all.

For those new to the town, Ashland has both a Town Meeting and an annual Town Election. The Town Meeting is a legislative body in which all registered voters are eligible to participate -- it usually takes place over two nights; this year, the dates are May 4th and May 25th. The annual Town Election is May 17th. Town Meeting is for voting on bylaws, items to be placed on the ballot for the Town Election, the town budget, and other legislation. The Election itself is where voters elect local government officials (Board of Selectmen, School Committee, and others) and vote on budget override questions.

Visual Budget

The Ashland Town Election on May 17th features two override questions. But if you want the big picture on the town's fiscal fitness, the Ashland Visual Budget delivers. You can see numeric and visual representations of the town's revenues, expenses, funds and reserves, for the current year and for the previous four years. This information will help you put May's fiscal override vote in context.
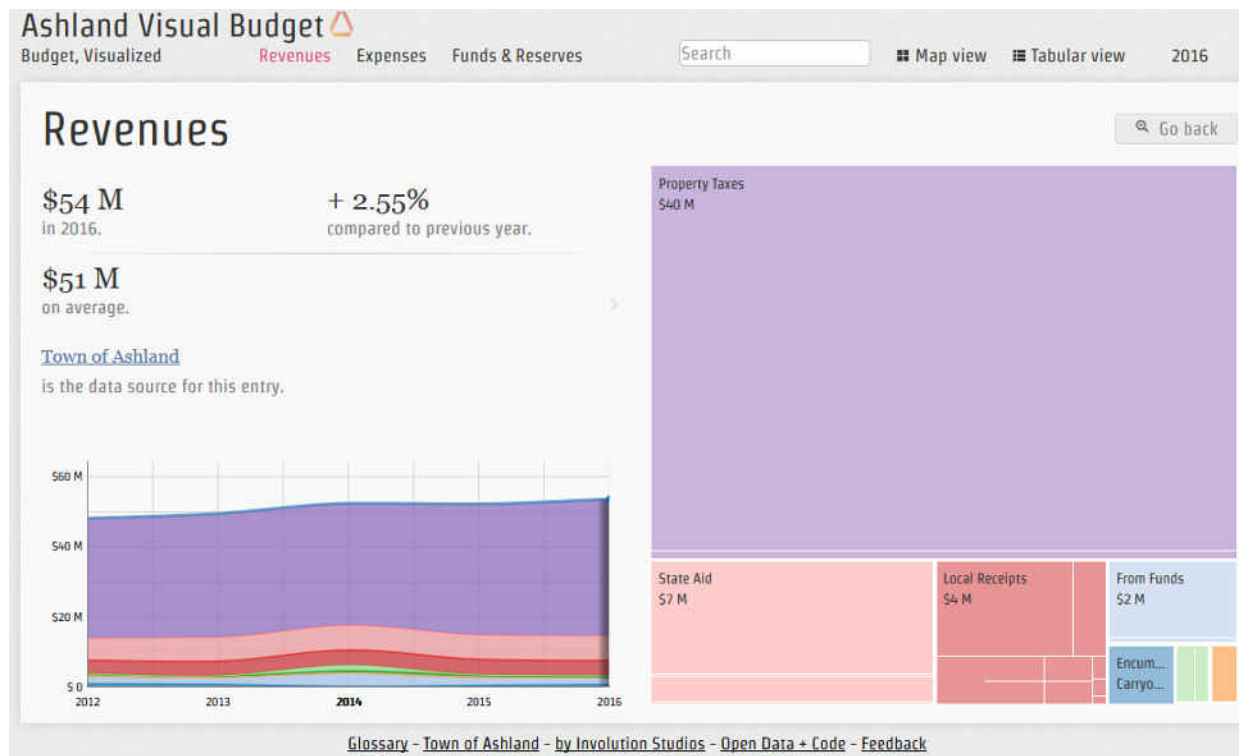
Campaign Action Items: May 2-15

1. Amplification email for Community Leaders: May 2-15

Dear Ashland Community Leaders,

As we get closer to Town Meeting and the annual Town Election, we need help raising voter awareness of the override questions and the town positions up for grabs on May 17th. Here are some suggested social media messages that will help us get the message to voters. Thanks for helping us reach out to Ashland voters!

You'll notice that the suggested dates include weekends -- that's because we designed it as a "countdown" with tweets for each day of the week leading up to the election. Tweeting on the weekend is strictly optional, but it does help keep voters engaged! Thanks again for your help. We'll send one more update on May 16th.

Thank you so much for your time and attention.

May 2

Questions about the override? Watch April 7 and March 17 Override Forums in the WACA-TV video archive: bit.ly/25PNd59 #VoteAshland

The April issue of Ashland Town News has a front-page article about May 17th's Ashland Town Election: bit.ly/1qKmuan #VoteAshland

May 4

Town Meeting tonight! 7pm sharp at Ashland High School, 65 East Union St. The 2nd night of Town Meeting will be May 25. #VoteAshland

How do Ashland's taxes compare with other MetroWest towns? Read the Override Study Committee report: bit.ly/1REHWai #VoteAshland

May 9

Ashland Live Candidates' Forum at Public Library, 6:30-9:00pm. Tonight: Selectman, Assessor, Housing Authority, Moderator. #VoteAshland

Ashland public meetings and other events are on WACA-TV! Video archives at: bit.ly/1PUDdfb #VoteAshland

For background on May 17th's budget override vote, see p. 1 piece from March's Ashland Town News: bit.ly/1YpYVhj #VoteAshland

May 10

Ashland Live Candidates' Forum at Public Library, 6:30-9:00pm. Tonight: Planning Board, Board of Health, School Committee. #VoteAshland

Vote on Ashland's future May 17th. Study the issues with the Override Study Committee report: bit.ly/1REHWai #VoteAshland

Ashland Override (vote May 17) would fund p/t Drama, Visual Arts, and Music teachers. Details at bit.ly/1UZ5BoU #VoteAshland

Ashland Override would fund 2 new firefighters. Details at bit.ly/1UZ5BoU #VoteAshland

May 11

Vote on Ashland's future May 17th. Try the Tax Calculator to estimate the Override's effect: bit.ly/1Wd4sZO #VoteAshland

Ashland override would add $90,000 funding for textbooks and school supplies. Details: bit.ly/1UZ5BoU #VoteAshland

Ashland CEDI override (Question 2) would help turn the old Cadilac Paint factory into a park: bit.ly/1WeVCe7 #VoteAshland

May 12

Vote on Ashland's future May 17th. Here's what the $1.9m operational override would pay for: bit.ly/1UZ5BoU #VoteAshland

Ashland override (town election on May 17th) will add $52,000 for a 5th-grade teacher: bit.ly/1UZ5BoU #VoteAshland

Ashland override will keep our roads in shape by restoring cuts in DPW Crew funding: bit.ly/1UZ5BoU #VoteAshland

Ashland seniors can get significant property tax relief if they own for 5 years and meet income limits: bit.ly/1XtRCF5 #VoteAshland

May 13

Vote on Ashland's future May 17th. Here's the text of the ballot questions: bit.ly/1oFddhE

#VoteAshland

Ashland override (the town election on May 17th!) would fund two part-time world language teachers: bit.ly/1UZ5BoU #VoteAshland

Ashland CEDI override (Question 2) would improve downtown sidewalks: bit.ly/1WeVCe7 #VoteAshland

May 14

Ashland override (vote May 17th) helps teens and tweens by adding guidance counselors: bit.ly/1UZ5BoU #VoteAshland

Override (vote May 17th) would fund Outreach Director for Health & Wellness, for our youth and seniors bit.ly/1UZ5BoU #VoteAshland

Vote on Ashland's future May 17th. The CEDI Fund invests in Ashland: bit.ly/1WeVCe7 #VoteAshland

May 15

2 days until we vote on Ashland's future. May 17 contests include Selectmen, School Committee, other officials: bit.ly/1S50vH1

2 days until we vote on Ashland's future. Override would keep the Public Library open longer: bit.ly/1UZ5BoU #VoteAshland

2 days until we vote on Ashland's future. Override would hire a Financial Analyst for grant reporting and greater transparency: bit.ly/1UZ5BoU #VoteAshland

2. Letter to the Editor for May 2-15

Ashland's town election on Tuesday, May 17th is an important chance for residents to vote on the town's future direction. We will put two override questions to a vote, as well as several contested seats on town boards.

There are two separate questions: The first is a $1.9-million operational override, slated to pay for two new firefighters, a director of curriculum for the school system, part-time teachers of world languages, music, visual arts, and English, as well as guidance counselors and other staff positions, and additional funding for textbooks and supplies. A separate $500,000 item would go into the Community and Economic Development Infrastructure (CEDI) fund, a stabilization fund used to make strategic investments; these include the Downtown Sign Project; the

Riverwalk project along the Sudbury River; matching funds for turning the Cadilac Paint site into a park; and several other civic improvement initiatives.

Besides the overrides, voters will elect several town officials. In the Board of Selectmen race, two incumbents and two challengers are running for two seats. In the School Committee election, one incumbent and two challengers are vying for two seats. There is also a contested race for a seat on the Board of Health.

The town Web site, www.ashlandmass.com, offers detailed information on the override questions. Please read up on the issues, then cast your vote on May 17th!

Sincerely,
Michael Herbert
Town Manager
Town of Ashland

3. Facebook Posts for May 2-15

Town Budget Documents

Our last post told you about the Ashland Visual Budget, which gives you a picture of how the town gets and spends money. If you want more detail, the Town Manager has a number of online documents, including the Budget Book, formally titled the Operating Budget and Capital Plan. This book has detailed financial statements, discussion of Ashland's fiscal condition, and information about how we compare with the 16 other communities that make up the MetroWest region. The book also has the Town Manager's discussion of long-term trends, such as the stabilization fund, and how housing market trends are affecting revenues. The Town Manager's budget page also has PowerPoint slides from budget presentations.

Average Single Family Tax Bill
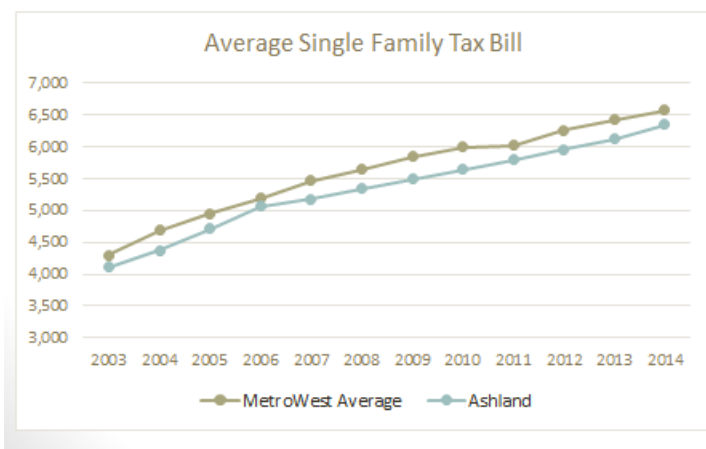
Campaign Action Items: May 16-17

1. Amplification email for Community Leaders: May 16-17

Dear Ashland Community Leaders,

The Town Election is almost here! Here are a couple of additional suggested messages that will help us get out the vote. Please post these on Twitter, Facebook, or other social media. Thanks for your help in increasing citizen engagement and voter turnout!

May 16

Tomorrow is Ashland town election! Voting takes place 7am-8pm at Ashland High School, 65 Union St. #VoteAshland

Tomorrow we vote on Ashland's future. Override would restore funding for Director of Curriculum: bit.ly/1UZ5BoU #VoteAshland

Tomorrow we vote on Ashland's future. The CEDI Fund helps beautify our downtown: bit.ly/1WeVCe7 #VoteAshland

May 17

Ashland town election today! Vote at Ashland High School, 65 Union St. 7am-8pm. Town clerk's page: bit.ly/23kUbwI #VoteAshland

2. Letter to the Editor for May 16

The Ashland Town Election is tomorrow, May 17th. This gives Ashland voters a chance to vote on a couple of budget overrides and several contested town offices, including seats on the Board of Selectmen, the School Committee, and the Board of Health. These officials regularly make important decisions affecting our daily life in Ashland. The town's Web site, ashlandmass.com, has an Override page that offers complete information about the proposed additions to public school, public safety, and local investment initiatives, as well as a calculator to estimate the overrides' effect on your tax bill.
Participatory democracy is one of our most basic rights -- don't miss this chance to have your voice heard. With the small number of voters in local elections, one vote can truly make a difference. Please vote tomorrow; polls are open from 7am until 8pm at Ashland High School.

Sincerely,
Michael Herbert
Town Manager
Town of Ashland

3. Facebook Posts for May 16-17

With the Town Election coming up on May 17th, the town's Web site has an Override Information page, with several links to detailed documents about what's in the budget override. But did you know that we've also got a directory of forms and documents from A to Z -- well actually, from A

to Y (Accountant's Office to Youth Family Services). If you want to apply for affordable housing, rent a room at the library, look at the Assessor Tax Maps, apply for a summer camp scholarship, or bid on a contract to power-wash the Town Hall, we've got the forms online!

There's also a wealth of financial and health information, newsletters, presentations from town boards, and all sorts of information about every aspect of Ashland town government. You can find such things as campaign financing -- candidates for town boards may not have huge SuperPACs supporting them, but they do have to file reports showing their campaign revenues and expenses, and you can look them up under Town Clerk, Campaign Finance Reports. It's all available in the Document Center!

Social Media postings for May 18 and Beyond

CoUrbanize

Have you tried Ashland's CoUrbanize Development Map? This interactive Web site gives you detailed information on development projects in town -- as of today, there are 25 projects. You can look at site plans, permit applications, maps, drawings, Street Views of project sites, zoning variance requests and determinations, environmental impact reports, stormwater reports, peer reviews, and other information. This lets you follow a project from the beginning -- long before the first bulldozer arrives at the construction site. CoUrbanize shows a complete project timeline, from the submission of a site plan through the review process, to the approval of a project by the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, and other town boards. This way, residents who have questions or concerns about developments being planned for Ashland can find out exactly what's being planned. When you know the specifics of a proposed development, you can ask informed questions at a public forum or hearing, and make sure your concerns are addressed.

Town of Ashland Development Map
For complete details on community development, visit the website

Projects with In-depth Information
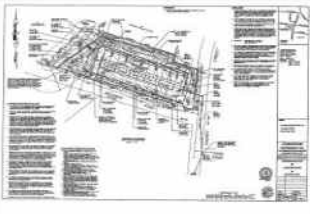Public Planning Initiatives
Zoning Initiatives

Search projects...   Follow

5 projects

<< 1 of 1 >>
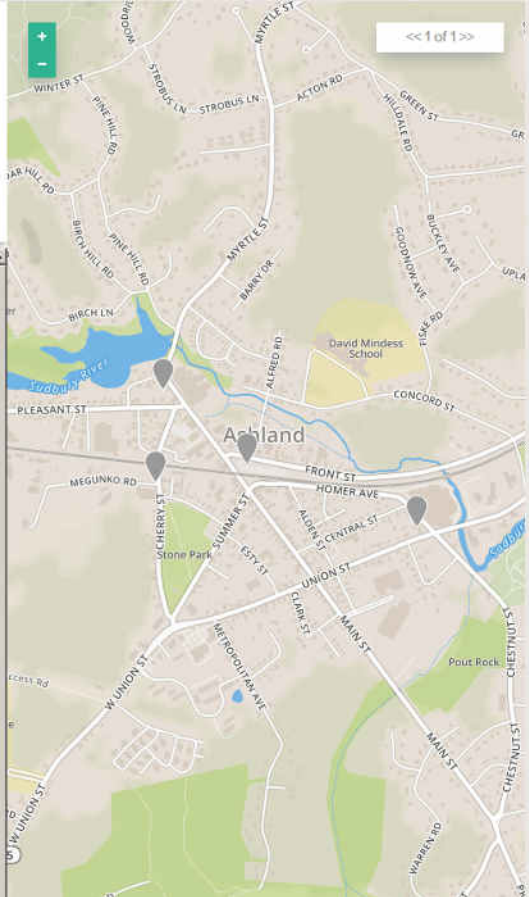
125 Union Street
Ashland, MA

0 Megunko Road
Ashland, MA

41 Front Street
Ashland, MA

21 Main Street
Ashland, MA

Volunteer Service Opportunities

Ashland has an online Talent Bank Form that lets you apply for a volunteer position serving the Town of Ashland on a committee appointed by the Board of Selectman. You can choose one or more committees you're interested in joining. For example, the Affordable Housing Committee, Council on Aging, Upper Charles Trails Committee, Town Forest Committee, Zoning Board of Appeals, Historical Commission, and many others. It's easy to sign up -- just go to the Talent Bank Form and provide your contact information. When a committee position opens up, you'll be contacted by a town staff member to see if you're still interested. Most committees meet once or twice a month in the evening. It's an excellent way to get involved in public service -- and it looks great on your resume, too!