Town of Foxborough

Citizen Engagement Best Practice

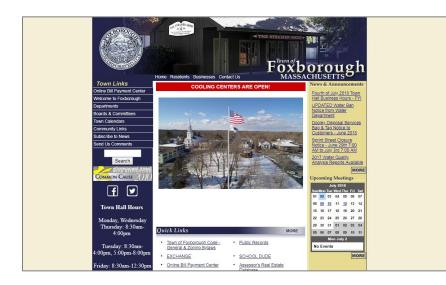Image: Memorial Hall[1]

Introduction

Known by residents as the "Gem of Norfolk County", the Town of Foxborough, Massachusetts, has a population of 16,865 and a Median Household Income of $95,665[2]. Foxborough is best known as the site of Gillette Stadium, home of the famed New England Patriots. The Town also houses many recreational facilities and conservation areas that are open to the public, such as the Orpheum Theatre, Harold B. Clark Town Forest, and Gilbert State Forest. Foxborough welcomes community involvement and believes an active citizenry is the key to town-wide appreciation. In support of their core values, the Town of Foxborough became a member of the Commonwealth's Community Compact Cabinet in February 2016. Through the Community Compact's Best Practice Program, the Town selected Citizen Engagement as an area of improvement. This report summarizes the Town's recent efforts around civic engagement through the use of technology.

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[1] Marcbela (Marc N. Belanger). "Memorial Hall, Foxborough, Massachusetts." *Wikimedia Commons*. Public Domain. Accessed on February 12, 2018. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Foxborough_Hall.jpg

[2] "Community Facts." U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census. *American Fact Finder*. Accessed on July 2,2018. https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml

Future Town Website

The Town of Foxborough made a commitment to improve citizen engagement in 2016 through the implementation of technology best practices. With the goal of accessibility, the Town of Foxborough has been actively working to update its website to provide improved access to information and news. With the end-user in mind, the Town of Foxborough has focused on a modern, user-friendly and responsive (mobile-friendly) design that will continue to encourage engagement. Each department in Town will continue to have a page where their news and updates can be more easily shared.

Screenshot:

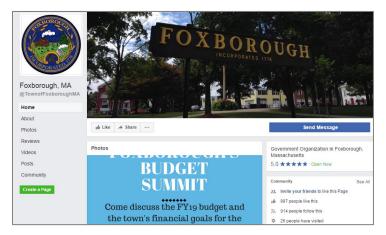Website Prior to Redesign

(Taken on July 2, 2018)

The new website will focus on improving access to online constituent services, including online bill pay and permitting programs. A key feature in the new website is an inquiry interface to triage and route questions/requests to a specific department. The inquiry will be routed to the pre-designated point of contact based on a workflow and can be tracked from the point of entry up to completion. Another key feature that will be included in the new website is self-registration for mass communications from the Town that will help facilitate news and updates, including storm-related information.

Social Media

Social media continues to be a popular and effective tool for fast and effective communication with residents and the community as a whole. This cost-effective approach offers an alternative method of sharing information outside of print, radio and cable media. The Town of Foxborough created social media accounts in 2015, on Facebook and Twitter, to connect more with residents and members of the community. Following the creation of social media accounts, the Town created a Social Media Policy in 2017, applicable to all Town employees, officials and volunteers that outlines acceptable online behavior and responsible representation of the Town. Questions submitted to the Town on social media platforms are answered in a timely manner by the Community Information Specialist, the primary accountholder for the Town social media accounts.

FACEBOOK

The Town of Foxborough Facebook page was created in 2015 and has since gained over 1,400 followers, as of June 2018. The page is maintained and updated by the Community Information Specialist who dedicates time each day to manage and update the page with useful information and announcements about the Town. Additionally, the content on the page includes information around how Town services and processes work, most recently focusing on the importance of registering to vote in Town elections and to attend the Annual Town Meeting.

Screenshot:
Town of Foxborough Facebook Page
(Taken June 27, 2017) *
*Engagement has near doubled since implementing citizen engagement best practices

Moving forward, the goals for the page include more creative and engaging content, as well as increasing the frequency of posts relative to current events and news in Town that direct followers to the information sources (i.e. Town website). Recently, the Town of Foxborough has been working to create posts that announce public meetings on the Town calendar, including Board of Selectmen meetings, to encourage citizen engagement. The Town frequently links to the Foxboro Cable Access coverage of public meetings as they are streamed online and via podcast for those who cannot attend in person.

The Town of Foxborough Fire Department, Police Department, Department of Public Works and Recreation Department have their own Facebook pages that are updated and managed by department staff. These pages and content also adhere to the Town Social Media Policy.

TWITTER

The Town of Foxborough Twitter account was created in 2015 and currently has over 1,000 followers. With the limited number of characters and photos allowed, the Town utilizes this social media platform to post brief updates, similar to headlines, with a link to more information. Through the continued use of Twitter, the Town of Foxborough is beginning to incorporate relevant hashtags to potentially boost engagement and increase the following of Twitter users in and around the community.

Screenshot:
Town of Foxborough Twitter Page (Taken June 27, 2017) *
*Engagement has near doubled since implementing citizen engagement best practices

The Town of Foxborough intends to create an Instagram and LinkedIn account for the Town to continue to encourage engagement through social media.

Conclusion

By branching out their communication strategy to include web based and social media platforms, the Town of Foxborough has extended their reach to members of their community that prefer online news to traditional sources. Foxborough showed their dedication to the citizen engagement best practices by hiring a Communications Specialist. In the past two years alone, the Town was able to significantly increase their social media following and plan for future improvement of their municipal website. It is an exciting time for Foxborough, as these implementations will help to establish a foundation for better two-way communication between the Town and its citizens going forward.