City of Methuen

Citizen Engagement Best Practice

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Office of Municipal & School Technology

EOTSS | Executive Office of Technology Services & Security

Image: Methuen City Hall[1]

Introduction

Located in Essex County, Massachusetts, the City of Methuen has a population of approximately 47,000 residents and a median household income of $72,631[2]. Methuen was originally incorporated as a town in 1726 and went through a series of Charters until it eventually became a city in 1993. Some historical locations in Methuen include Spicket River Falls, Nevins Memorial Library, and the City's Civil War Monument. Today, Methuen aims to provide technologically robust and convenient services to residents while remaining within budget confines. In January 2016, the City joined the Community Compact Program where they requested State assistance to implement IT best practices in the area of Citizen Engagement. Through the Community Compact, the City leveraged State resources to implement a citizen request software from QScend Technologies, Inc. in their Department of Public Works to better engage residents using a modern technology platform.

[1] EraserGirl. "Methuen City Hall". *Wikimedia Commons*. Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic. Accessed on January 24, 2018. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Methuen_City_Hall_-_2006.jpg

[2] 2010 Census. "Community Facts". *United States Census Bureau. American Factfinder.* Accessed on January 24, 2018. https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml

Project Purpose and Process

Prior to applying to the Community Compact Program, The City of Methuen had already made some great IT improvements. For instance, in March 2015, Methuen launched a new website with Virtual Towns and Schools in order to better engage residents online. The City has also made great strides via social media, particularly on Facebook[3] and Twitter[4]. The Police Department[5] has done especially well on Twitter with approximately 11,000 users following their content. In an effort to build upon these successes, the City searched for a citizen request tool that would simplify and automate their public works workflow and further enhance their ability to communicate with the public. The tool would allow them to be more transparent with residents and to collect and store data centrally.

In early 2016, the Office of Municipal and School Technology visited the City to gain a better understanding of their engagement goals and to help them identify and implement a new citizen request solution. In June 2016, the City of Methuen contracted with QScend Technologies, Inc. to implement their Citizen Request Management software, QAlert. The following services were included in their deployment package:

- Software installation
- On-site kick off meeting
- Basic branded app design (1-3 buttons)
- Submission to iTunes and Google Play
- Business Intelligence gathering/Configuration of service request types

- Setup routes and escalations for service requests configuration on-board mapping
- Configuration citizen data
- Project management conference calls
- 1 (2) Hour Webinar Training Sessions

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[3] City of Methuen Massachusetts – Government. https://www.facebook.com/methuenmassgovt/
[4] City of Methuen Official Twitter. https://twitter.com/cityofmethuen?lang=en
[5] Methuen Police Official Twitter. https://twitter.com/methuenpolice?lang=en

Today, Methuen's Department of Public Works is utilizing the QAlert software to track incoming requests using the 3-step process listed below:

1. *Requested* – Citizens place service request via mobile app, phone call, or web form, etc.
2. *Processed* – The software stores, processes, and routes the request automatically to the appropriate department.
3. *Notified* – When the issue is resolved, citizen will be notified via text, email or phone call.

With QAlert, the City also has access to the following amenities. They are looking to expand the platform city-wide sometime in the near future.

- Unlimited users
- Web intake form
- Internal call intake screen
- Knowledgebase
- Internal management access

- Reporting
- 24/7 support
- Maintenance and upgrades
- Hosting

Conclusion

The City of Methuen has pursued several technology initiatives in the past few years. The progression of their website and social media platforms have helped the City pave the way for yet another communication avenue residents can use to connect with local officials. These projects are clear examples of Methuen's commitment to the citizen engagement best practice and to their community. With a possible city-wide implementation under consideration, the City is well-prepared to take on citizen engagement on a much larger scale.