Town of Sandwich
Citizen Engagement Strategy

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MassIT | Office of Municipal & School Technology

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Image: Boardwalk at Sandwich, MA[1]

Introduction

The Town of Sandwich, Massachusetts, has a population of roughly 20,000 residents[2]. Located in the northwest region of Barnstable, Sandwich is the oldest town on Cape Cod dating back to the year 1639 when it was incorporated as a municipality. It is a great historical, cultural and beach destination for visitors and locals alike. Like many New England cities and towns, The Town of Sandwich does their best to handle community concerns during the winter months and continues to seek new ways to establish two-way communication with constituents.

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[1] Author: Andrewrabbott
   License: Creative Commons, Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported
[2] U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

THE COMMUNITY COMPACT CABINET

In early 2016, the Town of Sandwich entered into a Community Compact agreement for Citizen Engagement as an Information Technology Best Practice. In the summer of 2016, the Office of Municipal and School Technology (OMST) contacted Town leadership, to discuss the goals of the Compact in detail and identify a project that can be used as a model for Citizen Engagement.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY & PLANS FOR IMPROVEMENT

In response to the unpredictable weather patterns of the Northeast, the Town of Sandwich searched for a citizen request tool that would simplify and automate their citizen request workflow. Citizens of Sandwich submit their requests to the Department of Public Works (DPW), Police Department, Town Hall, Fire Department and individual members of the Board of Selectmen via phone call, text or email. Public Works engineers fulfill the requests; however, the ability to track requests or share the status with residents is limited. The Town has both Facebook and Twitter social media accounts where they occasionally post Public Works notifications. This method, while cost-effective, provides information to social media users who have either liked or followed the Town's page.
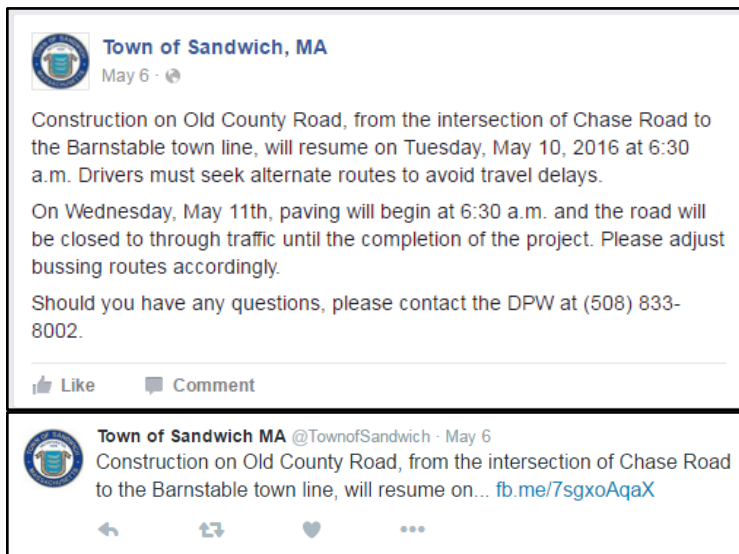
Examples: Town of Sandwich Facebook and Twitter DPW posts

One way Town leadership has been supporting residents outside of social media is through an email newsletter, which is available through the Town website. With approximately 1,300 subscribers, the Select Board shares information through this channel at least every other week. Updates on the agenda for Board of Selectmen meetings and voting information are distributed this way. DPW updates are occasionally included in the newsletter; however, Town staff can only send details about projects that have been scheduled ahead of time.
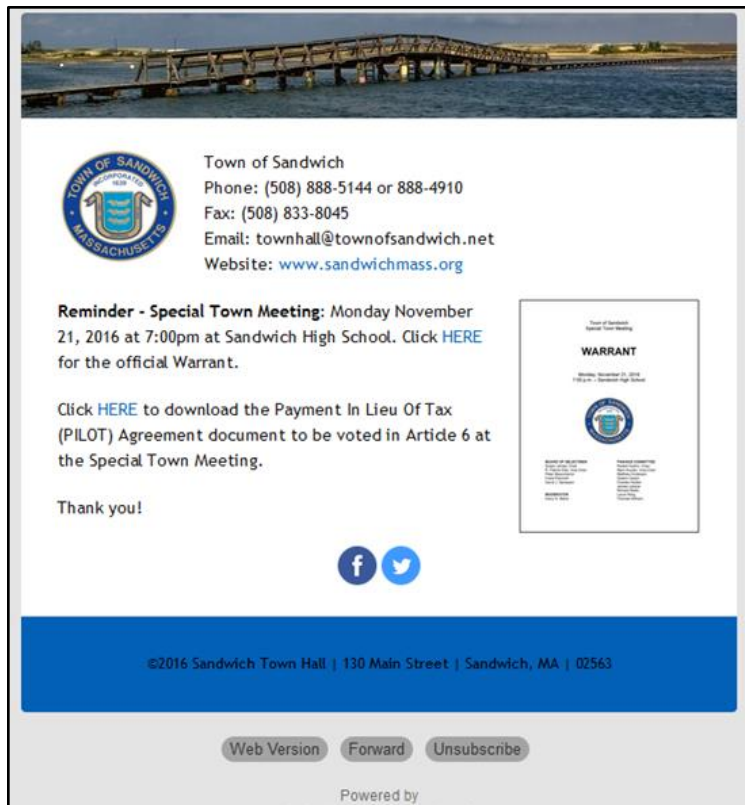
Example: Town of Sandwich Email Newsletter

The Town of Sandwich devised a plan to improve two-way communication with its citizens by adopting a technology solution that opens up a dialog between citizens and DPW staff. In an ideal scenario, citizens receive updates about their request in real-time up until the moment the submitted issue is resolved. The new solution would centralize the department's incoming requests, creating a queue, and created opportunities for prioritization and expectation setting.

To implement this plan, the Town of Sandwich has chosen to deploy SeeClickFix, a citizen request and work order management platform. The tool is built specifically to increase engagement and boost the efficiency of municipal services.

Recommendations

To help the Town of Sandwich transition to the new citizen request system, MassIT has prepared several recommendations based on our assessment of their existing digital communication platforms. The following suggestions highlight potential areas of improvement to prepare the Town for the implementation of their new tool, as well as future technology deployments.

The recommendations are divided into 4 sections: (1) Monday Morning Actions, which are simple recommendations that can be executed right away to quickly boost engagement. (2) Social Media Best Practices, (3) A Professional Development Plan, and (4) Measuring Success.

MONDAY MORNING ACTIONS

Make FAQ page for popular Public Works and Public Safety snow/ice related requests more visible.
Also known as a knowledge base, a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) page can provide answers to popular questions upfront and greatly reduce the number of inquiries a town receives regarding DPW services. At the moment, details of these offerings are available on the Town website; however, the information is buried within the public works page, potentially reducing the number of views. Making this information easier to access during the winter months might reduce inquiries and increase public knowledge around snow and ice issues.

Create a web form on Town website for online submissions.
Based on experience with other communities across the Commonwealth, we find that a significant number of citizen requests come through the town's website. One way to encourage the use of citizen request tools is to ensure that they are easy to access from the Town's homepage. For example, the City of Chicopee includes a prominent "Submit a Concern" button on their homepage. From there, it is very easy for residents to submit a request, and see what else is happening in the community.

Communicate private vs. public roadway rules and regulations.
According to the "Information – 2017 Private Road Winter Maintenance Status" document provided in the Winter Maintenance segment of the Town website, there are more private roads in Sandwich than public roads, which is a challenge for Town staff and residents alike. Out of the one hundred forty-five private roads in Sandwich, roughly ninety-six of them are not authorized to be plowed by the DPW. During the winter months, the DPW can provide suggestions around snow removal best practices through various communication channels. For example, Town staff can write about proper snow removal in the e-mail newsletter, post details to the Town website's home page, or provide tips through social media accounts.

SOCIAL MEDIA BEST PRACTICES

Focus on one platform at a time.
Presently, Sandwich has one staff member managing the Town's Facebook and Twitter accounts. Given the limited human resources, and the maturity of the Town's Facebook presence, we recommend that Sandwich continue to enhance the Facebook presence, before investing significant effort in further developing the Twitter presence. In the meantime, some residents will likely benefit from the Town's continued use of Facebook's Twitter Auto-Update feature to link Facebook posts to Twitter. Once a more mature overall social media strategy is in place, you will want to re-evaluate the use of Twitter.

Take advantage of Facebook's event creation tool.
We suggest the Town of Sandwich look into creating Facebook event pages for the various projects and events happening in town, such as Town Meetings. Adopting this practice would allow Sandwich's Facebook followers to save event information to their Facebook calendars, such as the date and time of an event, and automatically be notified of any changes or updates the event creator makes to the event page. Event pages look similar to regular Facebook pages, however, they offer much more in terms of functionality and are a great way to manage and store event information. In addition to receiving updates in real time from the event creator, constituents can also RSVP to an event, giving the Town insight into the level of resident interest for an event or project, and data, which may inform future decisions at Town Hall.

Putting a face to Town Hall.
Putting a face to public works engineers and other Town staff may help constituents relate to their local government even more. When engaging with the community, it's important to display the Town's human side so that citizens feel connected to all the impactful work the Town is doing. For example, posting photos of municipal staff working on various projects within the community, on social media or the Town website, provides a reminder that real people are working to maintain the community. The Sandwich Police Department currently serves as a good example of incorporating pictures of residents and community organizations in their Facebook posts.

Dealing with negative responses on social media.
Negative comments are a serious concern for municipalities. If an inappropriate comment should appear on Sandwich's social media feed, one way the Town can address the situation, and alleviate tension in the online community, is to simply thank the commenter for their response and put them in contact with the appropriate department in Town Hall that can resolve their issue by phone. By transforming the situation into a person-to-person interaction, Town staff has an opportunity to address the issue in a less public space and can better control the tone of the conversation. Town leadership should come to a consensus over how they want to address negative comments, applying different methods to public responses can add to pre-existing frustrations.

Add a link to Sandwich's Twitter on Town website.
Having a direct link from the website to the Town's twitter page provides easier access for constituents who use social media and are interested in receiving community updates from the Town via the Twitter platform. To apply this recommendation, simply add an icon, similar to the one that already exists for Facebook, in the upper right-hand corner. This way, users can conveniently follow both accounts, potentially increasing the number of followers.

Screenshot: Sandwichmass.org - Home Page (Taken August 16th, 2016)

Strengthen Twitter presence.

Today, Sandwich uses Twitter to connect citizens to content located on other platforms. However, as the Town builds its capacity to manage additional social media accounts, they may want to consider enhancing their Twitter presence. When Town staff is ready to embark on this journey, the following suggestions are provided to help get things started:

● **Validate what new purpose the Town of Sandwich Twitter page will serve**. Town leadership should take a moment to brainstorm the types of news they would like to share through Twitter. The social network is especially popular with municipalities for the purpose of posting emergency updates, due to its swift upload process. Posts can even be embedded directly onto the homepage of the Town website so constituents who don't have social media accounts of their own can still access real-time updates.

● **Identify your audience.** Since Sandwich will be creating content for an entirely different platform, other than Facebook, Town staff will have to gauge which issues or topics constituents might react to. To help with that process, here is a list of topics that were previously posted to the Town Twitter page and have either been liked or retweeted:

  ○ Liked -
    ■ Picture of Lower Shawme Dam construction (Nov. 1, 2016)
    ■ Available Architect/Builder Appointed Position for King's Highway Historic District Committee (May 16, 2016)

  ○ Retweeted -
    ■ Adult Flu Clinic Post on Flu Shots (Sep 13, 2016)
    ■ Town Neck beach Bathhouse & Concessions Building Feasibility Study Public Forum (Jun 3, 2016)
    ■ Official Warrant for 2016 Annual Town Meeting (Apr 15, 2016)
    ■ Summary of Revised Public Safety Improvement Plan (Mar 25, 2016)
    ■ Multi-Hazard Mitigation Planning Process Survey (Jan 29, 2016),
    ■ 1/9 - 1/13 Beach Reconstruction Photos (Jan 14, 2016),

■ Town Meeting Information (Nov 13, 2015)
■ Grant Announcement for Town Neck Beach Reconstruction Project (Sept 21, 2015)

● **Leverage Twitter's features to boost engagement.** Twitter recently updated their 140 character limitation to exclude photos, videos, GIFs, polls and quoted tweets[3]. The Town of Sandwich can take advantage of this opportunity by varying the types of content they post. It is now possible to upload more verbal content and include a visual aid to generate interest among followers. The traditional approach of incorporating popular hashtags into your posts is still a very effective way to engage followers today; doing so may also attract new viewers to your page.

● **Develop a posting schedule.** Developing a routine for Twitter will help the Town remain consistent with their postings. According to Entrepreneur Magazine, the most popular time to tweet for engagement is anywhere between noon and 1pm, when the average person takes their lunch break[4]. Town staff should initially adopt a slow routine with a goal of creating one post per day, then increasing that number over time as they become more comfortable with the platform.

● **Swap out Twitter profile header with a higher resolution image.** While it's appropriate to have the Town's Twitter page align with the information available on the website, using the same header image for both platforms is not recommended unless the picture's resolution is at least 1500px x 500px. An image that is smaller than this suggested size will appear stretched out and overly pixelated on Twitter. See screenshot below:

Screenshot: Image Pixelation - Sandwich Twitter (Taken December 9th, 2016)

Share Public Works notifications by leveraging other departments' social media.
The Town of Sandwich is very consistent with posting DPW updates on Facebook and Twitter. However, with 1,747 page likes on Facebook and 93 followers on Twitter (*Taken: August 22nd, 2016*), the Town's social media content may only be reaching roughly 9% of the town's residential population, which also varies throughout the year. The Town can amplify emergency and nonemergency posts, and reach more constituents, by leveraging the social media accounts of other departments and organizations in the community whose audiences would also benefit from the information. For example, Sandwich Police and Fire departments have several thousand followers between their Facebook and Twitter pages. Sandwich High School and their athletics department also have a large following, most likely consisting of parents and friends of the students attending the school. Consider reaching out to the following organizations about re-posting DPW updates, to inform as many citizens as possible of snow/ice issues this winter.

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[3] Fortune, [Twitter Is Finally Loosening Its 140-Character Limit](), September 19, 2016
[4] Entrepreneur, [The Best Time to Tweet](), June 25, 2015

Twitter Profiles
- Sandwich Fire Department: http://bit.ly/2aJbYxl
- Sandwich High School: http://bit.ly/2bbLGjZ
- Sandwich Athletics: http://bit.ly/2b3OzF7
- Sandwich High School Boosters: http://bit.ly/2axSiLH

Facebook Profiles
- Sandwich Fire Department: http://bit.ly/2aJyOkq
- Sandwich Police Department: http://bit.ly/2b3PhSO
- Sandwich High School Boosters: http://bit.ly/2aI5WXM
- Sandwich Elementary PTA: http://bit.ly/2aJmFgB
- Sandwich High School PTSA: http://bit.ly/2aJdmQL

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Finding a solution that will satisfy Town staff and citizen interests.
Before procuring any type of new technology, first, determine if a new system is essential for the improvement of daily operations. Survey Town employees and citizens to gauge if current processes and procedures are working effectively for the community and among staff. If both parties are satisfied with the current workflow, the Town may not need a new solution right now. However, if Town staff is receiving consistent negative responses from citizens in a specific area, a change in operations may be necessary to maintain a positive relationship with the public. The earlier you can get a buy-in from stakeholders, the easier the implementation process will be. To find a technology solution that caters to both Town staff and citizen interests, involve both parties early on in the process. Solicit their input regarding their functional needs and expectations and take them into consideration when selecting new technology. By doing so, you are likely to adopt a solution that is intuitive for them. They will feel valued and will reciprocate your efforts by supporting your initiative.

After it's been validated that there is a demand for better technology in the community, and have chosen to implement it, do a trial run of the tool with one or more constituent focus groups to get user feedback. Any positive or negative feedback you receive in these controlled environments can help inform future purchases and provide ideas for outreach campaigns.

Implement the S.M.A.R.T. method.
If employees wish to identify areas that could be improved through technology, encourage them to think S.M.A.R.T. When choosing the right technology solutions for your organization, pursue projects that are *Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-Bound (SMART).* The SMART table below can help prioritize projects and simplify the communication of benefits to the public:

Specific - Identify why the solution is needed for your community, what purpose does it serve? If the goal is to simplify an internal process or reach more citizens, document how it should happen.

Thoughts:

Measurable - Does the proposed solution come with metrics? Will the data be quantitative, qualitative, or a combination of the two? Do you have someone on staff that can perform an analysis of the information you receive?

Thoughts:

Attainable - Develop a sustainability plan for each technology project you wish to pursue. Consider if your municipality is financially prepared to support the new tool/service long term.

Thoughts:

Relevant - Ensure that the objective of your project is also aligned with community's wants/needs and that it stays consistent even after the initial launch phase.

Thoughts:

Time-Bound - Set a soft deadline for when you hope to achieve citizen engagement goals. (For example: Getting X number of citizens signed up for citizen request tool by January 2017)

Thoughts:

Prepare internal staff for changes related to the new technology.
Notify every department, and user, that will be impacted by the new technology. Be clear about how they're work will change and ensure that internal staff is trained and well equipped to handle the new workload. Consider the following strategies[5]:

1. **Frequently communicate how the new technology solution will improve daily processes and procedures.**
   This is the foundation for your new communication strategy. Employees want to know what changes are being made and wish to understand how transformative decisions will impact them. Ultimately, the more clearly you can explain your vision of how the selected technology will improve daily routines, the more likely you are to have a positive response from your employees. It may be good to emphasize that the technology will provide an added convenience, for instance, the geolocation capabilities of the tool available in SeeClickFix will allow workers to go to the exact location of the issue. Additional information provided by citizens, such as photos and a description of the issue, make finding and resolving the problem a much more efficient process.

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[5] Harvard Business Review, Convincing Skeptical Employees to Adopt New Technology, March 19, 2015

2. **Standardize new system.**
   Incorporate parts of the new system into everyday work routines so that internal staff become familiar with the updated procedures and are not caught off guard using the technology after it's been launched.

3. **Invest in quality staff training.**
   Before going live with a new technology product, thoroughly train your employees. Empathize with them, understand that they are coming from different technology backgrounds and have various learning styles. Your staff's comfort levels will increase with time and dedication from town leadership.

4. **Offer meaningful rewards or acknowledgement to encourage interest.**
   Reward systems can potentially motivate employees to look past their comfort zone and become more open to working with new technology. For example, organizing a lighthearted competition around using new tools, may shift negative perceptions and persuade staff members to rethink their approach. The reward, on a case-by-case basis, should be something that you know your employees will value.

5. **Have leadership/influencers lead by example.**
   Town leadership should pave the way for the new technology to enter the workplace. They can do this by showing the rest of the staff, how they have personally benefited from using the solution. Community influencers should be given the opportunity to test out the new technology for themselves so they can publicly advocate for the tool.

6. **Determine consequences for cases of non-cooperation.**
   At this point, hopefully, most of your employees have bought into the idea of having an updated technology solution; however, there may be situations where you need to identify and follow through with consequences. Failure to address ongoing resistance can result in reduced morale and failure to fully leverage the solution[6].

Be prepared for Town-wide deployment.
Although there are many benefits in enhancing business processes, no technology is perfect. For any new product, it is important to have a test phase and backup plan, before widespread deployment. Town staff should work to identify process issues that might arise before the implementation phase. Communicate to your team, who the point of contact is, should they encounter a technical problem.

First impressions are created quickly and can determine whether a constituent will use the product or service in the future. Therefore, it is imperative that the Town delivers on the expectations set by the outreach campaign. Citizens will expect a new level of efficiency to accompany the new technology, and if the ability to interact has not improved, they may disregard the tool.

Tactfully introduce new technology to the community.
Before releasing a new product to the public, develop a small campaign to get the public excited about using the product. Here are some ideas to get you started:

● Introduce the features and functionality of the new citizen request tool to the public using all available digital communication channels such as social media, official government

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[6] Harvard Business Review, Convincing Skeptical Employees to Adopt New Technology, March 19, 2015

website and email. Educate the public on how they can access and utilize the technology once it's launched so that they can use the new system right away if they need to. Be prepared for both negative and positive reactions from the community. Most people are not comfortable with change; however, if the new system provides an added convenience for them, they will slowly start to accept it into their lifestyle.

● Print media is still an effective, relatively low-cost, way to share information and promote new services to citizens. Placing promotional materials in Town newsletters, utility bills, banners and flyers will help spread news of the new citizen request product to residents who aren't as tech-savvy.

MEASURING SUCCESS

As stated in the Professional Development section of this report, implementing the SMART method while making transformative decisions can improve the odds of a successful outcome. Being able to measure results can help determine whether anticipated outcomes have been achieved. In the case of citizen engagement, metrics can vary. Fortunately, there are tools available today that can enhance an organization's ability to collect and analyze website, social media and citizen request data -- some at low or no cost.

In preparation for winter, Sandwich's DPW provides varying levels of service based on the Town's Winter Maintenance Policy. The document lists the many tasks that take place in preparation for potential snowstorms and describes the various responsibilities and operations the Town must uphold before the snow even hits the ground. By categorizing public and private roads into three classes: (1) Arterials and Collectors, (2) Bus Routes and Steep Vertical Alignments and (3) Local Roads, Town engineers are able to immediately prioritize snow and ice issues, using the standards given in the policy. Below are some additional ways Sandwich can optimize internal operations going forward.

Create monthly performance reports.
To take the professional development process a step further, we recommend the Town of Sandwich measure the success of their internal operations by compiling and analyzing data from the new citizen request tool. The new solution includes a built-in feature that can place citizen request data into a report on a recurring schedule, which can later be reviewed by town leadership. The report will provide an up-to-date status of staff achievements and serves as a tool to identify areas for improvement.

Develop Service Level Agreement for winter maintenance tasks.
A Service Level Agreement (SLA) establishes specific standards within an organization and with its stakeholders that should be fulfilled, in order to measure varying levels of quality service. Some benefits of creating SLA's include:

● Clearly stated work related goals which avoid misunderstanding between citizens and town staff.

● Staff gains insights that help improve operational efficiencies.

● Better documentation and tracking of work orders and staff time.

A basic SLA statement can be summarized by the following equation containing 4 main components: (1) the service being measured, (2) an action, (3) a comparison factor and (4) a time limit.

- [Potholes] = <Pothole Filling> must be <filled> in <less than> <48 hours>

Fortunately, the new SeeClickFix solution makes it easy to create and track SLA's. By configuring the solution's SLA feature, the Town can run reports to identify problem areas. Go to SeeClickFix's online Partner Support Center and follow the steps provided in their tutorial titled, Adding Service Request Types, to learn more about adding SLA's to existing, or new, service request types. Before you know it, you will be on your way to having more quantified, measurable data.

Town leadership should determine the level of performance they want to achieve with the new tool. Determine which winter maintenance services need improvement based on data that's collected. Identify the key factors causing operations to be successful or unsuccessful and document your findings. We've provided a few questions to help you brainstorm.

- Through which communication channels are we receiving the most requests? (Phone call/text/email/social media/website/mobile app/etc.)

- How many requests is each department getting per week/month/year?

- What percentage of requests is fulfilled/left unresolved?

- Which neighborhoods/areas of Sandwich are we receiving the most requests from?

The Town may also benefit from a side-by-side comparison of old data collected prior to the implementation of SeeClickFix and new data collected from the citizen request tool. Take note of any progress that's been made with the adoption of the new technology. Determine if it has hindered or helped the Town's two-way communication with constituents.

Develop a survey.
Develop a brief survey for users to complete after submitting a request so that constituents can provide feedback about their experience. Here are some sample survey questions:

1. How did you learn about [Insert Product Name]?
2. Did you find this product useful? (Yes/No)
3. How can we improve to better your experience? (Open ended)

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Below are examples of what a social media campaign might look like. The Twitter examples might be of interest as the Town's social media presence matures.

Tip: Use the Bit.ly website to shorten long URL addresses to satisfy character limits

Sample Facebook Posts:

- It's almost winter time! Let's make sure school routes stay safe for our kids. Report your snow and ice issues or public safety concerns to the Town on the SeeClickFix app or online at [Insert Link to Online Web Form]

- Does your street have a dangerous snow bank? Be sure to let us know! Report it on your phone using the SeeClickFix app or online at [Insert Link to Online Web Form]

Sample Twitter Posts:

- Did you know you can use SeeClickFix to submit reports about snow and ice issues? [Insert Link to Online Web Form]

- Sandwich is one of over 70 MA municipalities using the SeeClickFix app! Learn more: [Insert Link to Online Web Form]

- Report SNOW and ICE issues around Sandwich with ease. Download the SeeClickFix app for iPhone today! [Insert Link to Online Web Form]

- Report SNOW and ICE issues around Sandwich with ease. Download the SeeClickFix app for Android today! [Insert Link to Online Web Form]

- Everything you need to know about SeeClickFix: [Insert Link to Online Web Form]

- Help Sandwich prepare for winter! Download the SeeClickFix app for iPhone or Android and submit a report today: [Insert Link to Online Web Form]

- Unplowed snow? Black ice? There's an app for that: [Insert Link to Online Web Form]

Conclusion

The Town of Sandwich demonstrated a strong interest in better serving constituents and has taken very positive steps to improve engagement. By taking additional incremental steps, we believe the Town will see improved internal efficiency, as well as increased satisfaction from residents. We hope this report will serve the Town well in developing a long-term engagement strategy.

UPDATE: RECENT IMPROVEMENTS FROM THE TOWN

The Town of Sandwich launched Commonwealth Connect, their new SeeClickFix solution, in December of 2016. The Town promoted the citizen request tool by disseminating information about the platform on their social media pages and through other communication channels. With the technology solution in place today, DPW requests are now centralized and placed into a queue making them easier for the DPW to track and resolve. Sandwich's DPW finds the new and improved request intake process to be much more streamlined.

Screenshot: SeeClickFix promotional post taken from the Town of Sandwich Facebook page.

Update: Sandwich added a link to Twitter on the Town website. It is conveniently located next to the Facebook icon, in the upper right-hand corner.

(Screenshot: Taken December 14th, 2016)

It has become quite clear that members of the community approve of the Town's new technology solution, because of the level of convenience it provides them. Citizens can now submit DPW requests through a web form on the Town website, under the "Commonwealth Connect" tab or by downloading and submitting through the Commonwealth Connect mobile app. Some residents are so impressed by the new tool that they've asked about incorporating other departmental services in the near future.

In regards to social media, the Town immediately implemented one of the recommendations listed above and added a link to Twitter on the Town website. The Town of Sandwich is making great strides in their DPW processes and overall communication with citizens.