

Adopted: July 12, 2010

The Town Council, seeking to enhance more effective citizen participation in local government, will implement a communications strategy to more effectively provide information to citizens on municipal services and on local issues.

**Town of Cape Elizabeth, Maine
Communications Strategy
July 2010**

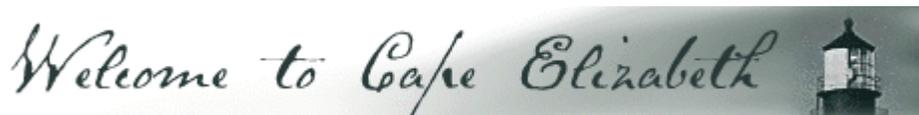
This communications strategy, adopted by the Cape Elizabeth Town Council on July 12, 2010 is intended to serve as a springboard for the local government to improve effective communication with citizens on municipal services and on local issues. It also provides specific recommendations on how the local government could enhance communications with other parties including the media.

Desired Outcomes

The desired outcomes of this strategy are as follows:

- Citizens will know where to find information on their local government and will be able to complete routine transactions with the government 24/7.
- Meeting rooms and meeting procedures will enhance public engagement.
- Citizens will have opportunities to impact local decision making.
- Municipal information, both online and in print, will have a clearly recognized identity.
- Municipal officials and staff will understand opportunities to disseminate information of interest to citizens and other parties.

I. Citizens Finding Information



A primary source of official information for citizens of Cape Elizabeth is www.capeelizabeth.com. It received 83,000 visits in March 2010 and nearly 300,000 page views. The website is utilized by the press to access information written by our webmaster and it is a resource for staff and others for searchable reference material on the Town. It has been recognized as one of the best municipal websites in Maine.

The website is staffed by a part-time webmaster who undertakes all of the website design, 99% of the website posting and writes nearly all of the news stories on the homepage. The FY 2011 stipend for the position is \$22,000 which is an exceptional value for the time and talent devoted to the site.

The website guidelines provide: *The Town of Cape Elizabeth homepage is not intended to be a forum for expressive activity by members of the public or by government officials; instead it should provide neutral information and data and links which do not espouse specific views.*

A. Website Recommendations

1. The website should remain as the primary source of official municipal information, both current and historical. It should be neutral in focus, should archive agendas, minutes and related documents of official meetings, streaming video of taped meetings, and the website should continue to be updated on a daily basis.
2. The website will not serve as a vehicle for commenting on municipal issues and services. The website shall contain links to easily enable e-mails to municipal officials.
3. Other websites provided by the Town of Cape Elizabeth such as the sites for Portland Head Light and the Thomas Memorial Library shall contain numerous prominent links to www.capeelizabeth.com. The main website will contain links to other websites maintained by the Town.
4. The website should be reorganized to better categorize information with drop down menus and shall utilize more color and more video.
5. Municipally produced short videos describing local services or outlining municipal issues should be available on the website and in social media.
6. The staff shall advertise the availability of RSS feeds as an option for citizens to receive website updates.

B. Other Opportunities for Citizens to Find Information

1. The Town of Cape Elizabeth should regularly issue press releases regarding municipal issues and activities. Press releases should be sent to print media, radio, television and online content providers.
2. The Town Manager shall provide several updates each month on municipal activities that may be of interest to the public. These shall be sent to the same list as press releases.

3. The Town should consider the placement of an electronic message sign on town property at the recycling center to provide important official messages.
4. CETV should continue to broadcast regular meetings of the Town Council, School Board, Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals. Programming on CETV shall be expanded to include programs focusing on the activities of municipal departments.
5. The tax bill should contain an insert each time that outlines current municipal information.
6. The Town Council shall annually invite public input on citizen priorities prior to the annual goal setting process.
7. The Town Council will seek opportunities to speak to local groups on topics of interest to citizens.

II. Meeting Rooms and Meeting Procedures Should Enable Public Engagement

The three major meeting rooms at the Town Hall need updating. The Town Council chamber has poor acoustics, and the seating is crowded for many meetings. The Council dais takes up more than half of the room with its ramp, its angle, and the need to have space between its elevated position and the first row of seating.

The William H. Jordan Conference Room is often overcrowded, is not easy to find for new visitors and has heating challenges. Its accessibility through a wheel chair lift does not meet current standards.

The 2nd floor conference room near the ACP office also has little room for the public and is difficult to reach.

A. Meeting Space

A study should be undertaken to see if meeting spaces at the Town Hall could be changed to add public seating, to improve sound projection, and to enhance the opportunity for public engagement at meetings. As part of this study, surplus space at the Cape Elizabeth Police Department should be reviewed to potentially free up additional space for meetings at the Town Hall.

B. Participation at Meetings

All Town Council meetings and meetings of advisory boards and commissions should provide an opportunity for members of the public to speak. Each board shall develop procedural rules in accordance with Maine law that enable this participation to occur while still ensuring there is an opportunity for the board to conduct its deliberations.

III. Citizens will Have Opportunities to Impact Local Decision Making

- A. Except for emergency special meetings, at least 72 hours notice of any municipal meeting shall be provided. The notice shall include a copy of the agenda for the meeting posted on the calendar section of the municipal website.
- B. The Town should continue to expand the online availability of documents related to agenda items.
- C. Every agenda shall contain a brief summary of the procedures for public participation at a meeting.
- D. The procedural rules for each board and commission shall be posted on the website.
- E. The Town will continue to provide an opportunity to e-mail boards and commissions directly via the municipal website.

IV. Municipal Information, Both Online and in Print, Will Have a Clearly Recognized Identity.

The Town does not have a uniform logo or mark identifying itself. There are different versions of the Town seal and municipal departments have developed their own identity marks.

- A. It is recommended that the Town update its Town logo to a single identifying mark for all municipal departments. This mark or logo should be created utilizing volunteer talent within the community.
- B. The new mark shall be utilized on municipal vehicles, on letterheads, on agendas, on municipal publications, on the website and on signage when appropriate.
- C. The new mark shall convey a positive image and identity for the Town of Cape Elizabeth.

V. Communications Training

- A. The Town Council will include as part of its own orientation process and as part of the training process for boards and commissions, a discussion of communications strategy and the importance of providing the public timely information and meaningful input into policy deliberations. This shall include specific training on Maine's statutes relating to access to public meetings and public information.
- B. The Town Manager should include as part of the professional development and training opportunities for all employees workshops and seminars related to effective communication.