



# COMMUNICATING AND COPING WITH CITIZENS

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NWMC PRESIDENT - HIGHLAND PARK MAYOR NANCY ROTERING

# THE CITIZENS OF HIGHLAND PARK

Mayor and City Council

Corporation  
Counsel

City Manager

City Commissions, Boards, Advisory Groups, and Task Forces

Business and Economic  
Development Advisory Group  
Board of Fire and Police  
Commissioners  
Cultural Arts Advisory Group  
Firefighters Pension Board  
Highland Park H.S. Advisory Grp.  
Historic Preservation Commission  
Housing Commission  
Human Relations Advisory Group

Library Board of Trustees  
Liquor Control Commission  
Plan and Design Commission  
Sustainability Advisory Group  
Police Pension Board  
Ravinia Neighborhood Meetings  
Senior Services Advisory Group  
Transportation Advisory Group  
Wolters Field Advisory Group  
Zoning Board of Appeals

Two-way  
communication  
is vital in local  
government

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Need to instill trust

Objectively and transparently  
convey information

Follow required processes (e.g.,  
public hearings, public comment)

## Outward-Facing Communication

Benefit – an informed citizenry can support your efforts on their behalf.

A misinformed or uninformed citizenry can make your efforts to serve them much harder and create magnitudes of extra work for your staff – wasting city resources.

# Good Communication

Good communication is short and clear, with options for more info if desired, e.g., links to webpages, external websites, etc.

- We do two eblasts a week about general city news and one a week about business.

Mail a periodic city-wide paper newsletter in conjunction with school districts, park district, township, library.

- Efficient, shared costs of production and gives the message that we are one community.

# Multiple Modes of Communicating Needed

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- Vacuum of little to no local press makes it much harder to communicate well, let alone comprehensively.
- Take the time to build electronic access, but recognize that there are barriers, whether through ability (age, physical ability), language, lack of access to wi-fi, etc.
  - The Mom Test
    - Access
    - Understand
    - Act
- If it is really important, send a hard copy.



# Clear Language

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1

Avoid abbreviations and muni-speak.

2

Keep it brief and concise  
– people have short attention spans.

3

Vary the modes –  
Twitter, Facebook, PSA  
Videos, Podcasts,  
Instagram, refer back to  
website for more info.

# Social Media (or – Why I Hate NextDoor)

Social media is great for conveying short bits of info and encouraging public engagement.

Avoid getting into dialogues on social media.

- Time-suck
- You and your city do not have the resources to keep up with dialogues on multiple pages.

Be aware of the legal requirements on official pages. No deletions unless within the realm permitted by law or stated page policy.

Choose your approach and stand by it.

- Do you announce certain good news? Promote local charities? Shows? Only repeat official announcements? Do you want public access to your personal page or do you need to create an official page? Different rules apply.



# Haters are gonna hate – be like Karen May

- Some people are insane online or via email.
  - Call them. Most just want to be heard. They may not agree with you, but they appreciate your time and the ability to be heard. Include staff as needed both for professional input and to serve as a witness.
- People get cranky at “the mayor” or “trustee” or “councilmember” without realizing you are an actual person, with family members and friends who get upset if you are attacked. Let your loved ones know that they don’t need to jump to your rescue.
- When people tag me personally about city stuff, I read it, but generally don’t respond to the post because I don’t want to encourage this type of communication. I contact them separately to discuss and urge them to email me in the future with the promise of a faster response.
- Convert Facebook messages to email – easier to manage if staff needs to get involved and for FOIA purposes. Creates a record for people who say “no one ever responds!”

# Use Email As Much As Possible

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- Creates a record for you and staff – texts and Facebook or Instagram messages are hard to keep track of. Include a disclaimer at the bottom of all emails that they are public and can be FOIAed.
- Two rounds rule – two interactions should address the issue. More than that – it's an exercise in entertainment.
- Look at the timestamp for the crazy emails – usually indicates if people are inebriated.
- Set your parameters now – you cannot please everyone. Do you answer emails within 24 hours? Three business days? Weekends? Vacation?
- Let staff do their job – e.g., let Public Works explain public works, etc.

# Public Meeting Exchange

- Set rules at the beginning and apply them equally.
  - 2-minutes – set your phone or have a public timer
  - One bite at the apple per meeting
  - No applause
  - No shouting out. Very important for mobs
- Don't let the vocal minority silence the majority. E.g., library meetings.
- Hold periodic neighborhood meetings with all governments present.
  - Shows collaboration – builds public confidence in government
- Listen, but don't let your agenda be driven by activists if you disagree.
  - Purple dog
  - Large groups – ask who agrees with speaker, raise your hands (versus repeat testimony)

# Be Creative



Coffee with the Mayor/Trustee/Councilmember



Knock on doors after campaign season – leave post-its with a message about how you value their opinion with info about how to reach you

# Ask: Does This Benefit The Community?

- Remind everyone – we are here for the benefit of the entire community.
  - The public appreciates and has better trust in electeds who work together civilly.
  - Be an ambassador. Don't bash your colleagues, organization, staff publicly.
- No personal agendas by electeds.
- Respectful disagreement. Keep comments to the issue.
- Showboating benefits no one, gets people riled up, and wastes resources like staff time.





# QTIP

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QUIT TAKING IT PERSONALLY

# DISCUSSION

The slide features a dark blue background. The word "DISCUSSION" is centered in the upper half in a white, sans-serif font. At the bottom, there are two horizontal blue bars. The first bar is a solid blue rectangle. The second bar is a 3D-style blue rectangle that appears to be floating above the first one, starting from the right edge of the first bar and extending to the right edge of the slide.

# Mayor Nancy Rotering – [nrotering@cityhpil.com](mailto:nrotering@cityhpil.com)



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