Island News

Social Media Advisory Board starts brainstorming

By: KELLY JOSEPHSEN
kjosephsen@islandernews.com

Even as Social Media Advisory Board members looked to the Village Council earlier this month to better define their mission, they started brainstorming plenty of ideas to help the city use tools like Twitter and Facebook to improve public outreach.

At a Wednesday, May 7, committee meeting, group members asked the Council to clarify what aspects of social media it should explore; local leaders would do so at their May 13 meeting.

That said, Council member Theo Holloway, the group's Council liaison, said the overriding goal is already clear: finding a way to use a communication method that is increasingly part of day-to-day life for many people to get the Village's message across.

"My hope was we could look for where people are today," Holloway said, and use it to get more people involved in civic life.

Holloway suggested a two-pronged approach: following a suggestion from committee member Matt Bramson to conduct an all-out push to get people to follow the Village on existing social media channels like Twitter and Facebook, while also "elevating the content" so it reaches more residents with information that is relevant to their lives.

On the 7th, Social Media Advisory Board members had plenty of suggestions on both fronts.

The message

To decide what information to provide, committee chair Paula Carreiro asked Holloway to reach out to the Council and administration to find out what type of content the Village wants on its social media channels. "We know social media is a way to communicate, but what kind of things are we trying to communicate?" she asked. "We need to define that."

Holloway applauded the suggestion, but asked to flip it around: he said the government needs to find out what the public wants out of Key Biscayne's social media.

Bramson, meanwhile, suggested to start with, the Village may not even need to create new content: there's plenty of information on its website.

Committee member Monique Nunez agreed, but noted the flow of information through social media "can't be an avalanche," as that causes users to be overwhelmed and ignore the content. She suggested some sort of central control that assures messages go out in a logical manner that the recipients can truly use.

Committee member Karina Besprosvan suggested segmenting the community so people only get the information they want, which Ana Colls, Key Biscayne Community Center Manager, said is a good idea: she said each department in the Village has a different audience, but currently news from every department goes out to every social media recipient, which isn't always effective.

Bramson said the problem could easily be solved by letting the audience tell the Village which types of alerts they want to receive.

Meanwhile, Holloway said there are other matters to consider when it comes to reaching different audiences, age and language among them. He said he feels most English speakers who have lived on the island for a long time are well-served by *The Islander News* and Village outreach, but Spanish-speaking newcomers often don't find many sources of information.

Board member Carolyn Koslen agreed, noting there's definitely a need to reach residents in all demographic groups – however, group members said they need to guard against creating two networks, one in English and one in Spanish, while still making social media accessible to all.

Holloway suggested looking into technological solutions, like software Facebook already employs to allow users to translate posts and comments with the click of a mouse.

Interaction

Along with what type of information to provide, board members are looking into whether Village social media should be more than a one-way street – i.e. not only allowing the Village to put out its message, but letting the public discuss the issues.

As Bramson noted, "If you just want command and control communication, you probably don't want social media."

In other words, social media is a conversation, and the Village needs to decide if it wants to let its sites host that conversation – with parameters, of course. As Besprosvan noted, discussions on social media can get heated: "We know what can happen, and we need to plan for it."

Bramson said part of the planning could involve requiring users to comment under their real identities: something Facebook demands, but Twitter doesn't. That way, he said, participants will realize their comments have consequences, as their friends and neighbors will see what they post.

"What do we want to create?" he asked. "A community of real people, or a free-for-all?"

Holloway said it's the former, noting anonymity removes a crucial element of control. He said he also would suggest people using Village-sponsored social media have to have a real link to the Village: residents, people who work for or in the Village, tourists, etc.

"Those are the only people I would like to hear from and engage with," he said.

Nunez suggested the policy could be something like a newspaper employs for letters to the editor – requiring users to confirm their name and address before they can comment. Of course, she said, that gets tricky when tourists join the conversation: they come from all over the world.

Still, committee members said interaction is worth exploring, as it can be valuable both in terms of people feeling invested in the Village and providing practical feedback.

As Bramson asked, "Should someone be able to tweet, 'There's a pothole in front of my house' and expect something to happen?"

Committee members indicated the answer is yes.

Involvement

Of course, none of the committee's suggestions will work without public involvement in Village social media. As Holloway remarked, "My concern is that right now, in order to get the information, you have to go

See SOCIAL MEDIA p.12

Village embarks on ways to fund earth-friendly retrofits

By: KELLY JOSEPHSEN
kjosephsen@islandernews.com

Local residents and business owners now have a new ally to turn to when it comes to retrofitting their properties with environmentally-friendly features: the Village government.

At a Tuesday, April 22, meeting, Village Council members agreed to join the Green Corridor PACE District, a collaboration of South Florida municipalities that work through an innovative program to provide the upfront financing for clean energy and efficiency improvements.

Mayor Frank Caplan said, "I hope we can move this forward and make our Village part of the Green Corridor. The time is now to not only do it, but to promote it and explain it and allow it to be useful for our community."

PACE, or Property Assessed Clean Energy, programs were approved by the Florida Legislature in 2010. They allow local governments to enter a partnership – at no risk to the municipality – to provide more affordable financing for a variety of "green" retrofits.

Examples include efficient heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems; renewable energy projects like solar panels; and wind resistance features like impact windows.

According to a memo to the Council, "PACE programs not only assist residents and business owners in reducing their carbon footprint and energy costs, but also stimulate the local economy by the needed creation of construction jobs."

Council members first heard about the PACE program in late 2012.

Organizers explained the Village would enter an Interlocal Agreement to join a district – the Green Corridor, which includes Miami, Coral Gables, Pinecrest, Cutler Bay, Palmetto Bay, South Miami and Miami Shores, which Caplan noted are similarly situated communities with demographics in some ways akin to Key Biscayne's – which would act as the legal entity to sign off on financing agreements for qualifying projects.

Therefore, municipalities bear no risk or costs, something Council member Mayra Pena Lindsay stressed at last month's meeting:

"It does not expose us to liability or any kind of exposure. It's just an option," she said.

And Caplan noted it isn't the only option – residents and business owners can still get traditional loans for earth-friendly retrofits.

Those who opt for PACE can apply online to see if their project qualifies for a loan with a term of five, 10 or 20 years, with interest rates based on the prime rate. Loans are paid off via a special assessment on an individual's property tax bill, and the cost stays with the property – so if an owner sells a home or business, the new buyer will take over the assessment.

PACE also offers a list of contractors who trained to be qualified under its program.

Qualifying projects vary greatly – wind resistance measures, raising properties in flood-prone areas, more efficient HVAC systems, energy-saving landscaping, better windows, solar panels, etc. are examples – although anything that is not affixed to the property, including appliances like refrigerators or washers and dryers, don't count.

Council members expressed interest after the initial presentation, directing Village Manager John Gilbert to come back with a formal proposal; and on April 22 said they liked what they heard.

Now, with the Council's approval, Caplan said all that is left is for the Green Corridor to accept Key Biscayne as a member – he said the Village will "be welcomed with open arms."

Caplan added, "This program fits very well with these communities and with ours. I can't think of anything negative."

SOCIAL MEDIA

continued from pg 10

and seek it out."

Group members discussed several ideas for how to urge residents to use social media to connect with their community.

Nunez suggested seminars aimed at different age groups to educate the public – and get feedback as to what type of information people want and which social media channels they use.

Bramson looked to an all-out push – billboards, a media blitz, etc. – to get people to sign up for the Village's existing social media; and Besprosvan suggested an integrated approach – using not only social media, but the Village website and apps, in an interconnected fashion.

Finally, Nunez said there are infrastructure improvements that can help, such as creating better WiFi access through hotspots throughout the community. "There are basic things that need to be addressed before we create a social media platform," she said.

Holloway said the ideas are all worth exploring as the Village strives to add social media to its public outreach arsenal as a valuable addition to other efforts. Indeed, as Colls noted, no matter how important social media becomes, she doubts the Village will ever lose the personal touch.

"People do like the face-to-face interaction a lot here," she remarked. "There's a real value to that, and we have to be cognizant of it."

Council action

Meanwhile, the Council also took action regarding the Social Media Advisory Board at its Tuesday, May 13, meeting, signing off on the first reading of a new ordinance to formally create the committee. The final hearing will be May 27.

The measure looks to more clearly define the group's mission, stating it will study, evaluate and then make recommendations to the Council on the Village's use of all aspects of social media and online communication. According to the ordinance, that includes use of social media by Village employees; community outreach through blogs, Twitter, Facebook, etc.; and how social media can help in branding and marketing the Village.

Village Attorney Steve Helfman asked the Council to consider other topics it would like to add to the list prior to the May 27 second hearing.

"It's almost unlimited as to what they could embark on," Helfman said.

Local leaders offered some ideas: for example, Council member Michael Kelly suggested stating the board should look at best practices in other communities, noting, "There are a lot of communities wrestling with this issue, and we can learn from them."

Ultimately, the Council agreed to a suggestion from Helfman that the board should take a two-step process: issue an interim report to the Council on appropriate social media use for the government and what they intend to explore, and then get the Council's input and go from there.

Helfman added even after issuing a final report, the board could continue offering advice to the city. "I anticipate there may be an ongoing purpose for this committee. It may continue as an advisory board to the Council," he said.

Council members agreed to give the committee leeway for now, with Vice Mayor Michael Davey noting the board should be allowed to think creatively, and then the Council can hone in on areas of focus.