

Work Session of the Sandy Springs City Council was held on February 7, 2023, following the PFA Meeting. Mayor Rusty Paul presiding.

I. Staff Discussion Items

Mayor Rusty Paul called the meeting to order at 6:19 p.m.

A. 2023-029 Customer Service and Citizen Engagement

Kristin Byars Smith, Assistant City Manager, and Andrew Allison, Communications Director presented the Customer Service and Community Engagement Strategies.

Customer Service and Citizen Engagement is a top priority for the City of Sandy Springs. Staff introduced a Customer Service Survey in 2022 and wish to provide City Council with an overview of the results to-date. Staff will also provide an update on plans to further enhance community outreach.

Assistant City Manager Smith said this was to be discussed at the City Retreat on January 30th but due to time constraints, is presented tonight. The goal is to walk through some customer service and community engagement strategies for the upcoming year. Customer service is at the heart of everything the City of Sandy Springs does. To track customer experience, a customer service survey was created last year. The first criteria was an easy and quick design and would take about two minutes to complete. People were asked about the type of assistance utilized, if they were satisfied with the service received, who assisted them, and whether they would recommend that staff person. Space was also provided for any additional comments, questions, and contact information. It was important the survey be promoted through mechanisms people engage with staff the most. A QR code with handouts and signage was created. Signage is posted at the entrance of the City's Permitting and Revenue lobby. Additionally, an automatically generating signature was created. When staff sends an email, a link at the of their signature will allow people to participate in our customer service survey. The survey was rolled out Fall 2022 and 95 of responses to date have been positive with kind notes about staff knowledge, professionalism, and responsiveness. Examples of comments to the Public Works and Permitting teams are models for the level of customer service that should be mirrored by all municipalities. We are proud of the survey results.

Communications Director Allison provided an overview of citizen engagement tactics in the City of Sandy Springs. The three key audiences are Sandy Springs residents, the media and internal stakeholders. Strategies to grow engagement and tell the City's story to residents include:

- Revamping the "City News" on the City's website
- Rolling out the Week in Review video (Inside Sandy Springs)
- Implement a social media strategic plan
- Monthly newsletter

The City News page is currently not what it should be for hard City News updates. We want to be the in-house newsroom for the City of Sandy Springs. It is in the early stages of the design to better layout the page and inform the citizens. We want to implement video updates where a press release may not be appropriate. We are finding ways to differentiate city news, hard news and city or community updates.

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Social media strategy is part of the broader Communications Plan as follows:

- Social Media Strategic Plan
 - Adoption of a Social Plan that includes strategic goals
 - Plan to increase unified branding across City department social media pages
 - Implementing social media posting calendar
 - Providing social media training to departments
- City Council meetings
 - Increasing transparency by announcing meetings on social media
 - Pushing out newsworthy Council items via press release/social media
- Inside Sandy Springs (video week in review)
 - Posted to all social platforms

The purpose of the Inside Sandy Springs (Video Week in Review) is to provide brief weekly highlights of what the City has been up to. This launched January 13th, 2023, and since then had a lot of engagement across social media platforms. Some videos shared information on pothole refilling, sidewalk improvements, city event recaps, important City Council actions, and more ideas to come. These figures are slightly outdated because they're prepared for the Retreat, but Instagram had a 105% increase, Twitter and YouTube both had and 11% increase in engagement. This has a compounding effect and will get better as more people are involved and informed.

The City's monthly newsletter is a big part of how residents know what the city is doing. The current subscriber list is approximately 5,000 with an aggressive goal of increasing by 10% which is achievable utilizing social media tactics to drive people back to the newsletter.

During 2022 the Communications team helped to facilitate public meetings to solicit citizen feedback on projects, including:

- Roswell Road Access Management Plan
- City Springs Master Plan Update
- North End Traffic Safety Analysis
- Old Riverside Park Master Plan
- Windsor Meadows Park Enhancements

This year Xanthe Tilden became part of the City of Sandy Springs Communications team. She will assist with the bilingual outreach strategies in tailoring audience-specific messages and video updates in Spanish and providing translation services to neighborhood meetings.

For the media audience, to inform them what the City of Springs is doing:

- Forge direct relationships
- Press releases
- Providing background information
- Facilitating interview/statement requests
- Proactive pitching of newsworthy events
- Utilization of public relations firm to expand media coverage

Communications recently partnered with Visit Sandy Springs to engage public relations services from TK Public Relations. This partnership will secure earned media coverage and clients see an average of 52 national earned media placements annually. Currently in Phase I of development of 12-month strategic PR plan to take the City of Sandy Springs to the next level of national publications and magazines.

The internal stakeholders audience is very active in supporting other departments across the City. The Communications Departments also serves as an in-house creative marketing agency and assists other City departments with artwork, signage, and other printed and digital collateral. This includes the work with Get Active Sandy Springs. In 2022, 1,150 tasks were completed. Currently in 2023, more than 246 tasks have been completed.

SandySpringsGA.gov and other affiliate websites all operate under Unified Platform. There are some upgrades in the works and have been segmented.

Improvements coming to SandySpringsGA.gov:

- Improved search functionality
 - Phase 1: Redesign search interface (currently underway)
 - Phase 2: Search integration with Civic Clerk
- Embedding live video for public meetings
 - SandySpringsGA.gov/stream

Internal goals for the year:

- 12-month strategic communication plan (Q1)
- Phase 1 of website search project completed (Q1)
- Rollout social media and website training for staff (Q1)
- Increase monthly newsletter subscriptions by 10% (Q2)
- Identify target areas and develop public relations campaign strategy with TKPR (Q2)
- Increase social media following across all platforms by 10% (Q4)

Mayor Rusty Paul congratulated Communications Director Allison on his first month at the City of Sandy Springs. Following City Facebook and City Springs page but do not see much gets pushed to me. Is this my fault?

Communications Director Allison said the algorithm for Facebook can be tricky. The response is better for pictures and videos compared to text. We tried to increase pictures and videos over text. Going through verification process for both Instagram and Facebook. The algorithm likes this, and more content will be pushed to the top.

Mayor Paul said he does not see much. Occasionally receive theatre information from City Springs but does not recall when last received information on what is happening with our city.

Communications Director Allison said if the algorithm sees we have not gotten a lot of engagement on posts, it won't push us up. Since we have done more videos and pictures that receive likes and impressions, you will see more going forward.

Mayor Paul asked what he and others can do to stay in the loop.

Communications Director Allison replied people should follow all the City's platforms-Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn, and share.

Councilmember Melissa Mular stated her excitement for the Strategic Communications Plan. Regarding the newsletter, have you reached out to residents for feedback on what they want to see?

Communications Director Allison replied they have not, but it is something they would like to do within the newsletter. Plan to embed a survey in the posted newsletter to learn what the audience wants. Hopefully more people will be drawn to it.

Councilmember Tibby DeJulio said he is not technologically knowledgeable. Can we receive instructions for connecting to the different platforms?

Communications Director Allison replied we can do that.

Councilmember John Paulson asked if Xanthe Tilden, Senior Public Relations Specialist, is doing the Weekend Review in both Spanish and English?

Communications Director Allison confirmed Xanthe Tilden is responsible for the Weekend Review but has not yet produced in two languages. We are strategic about this. Certain issues or stories considered priority, we want to do that, but it is a tight timeline to produce stories in a single language. There are opportunities and we want to engage on those.

Councilmember Paulson asked how can people watch the meeting with the camera on the speaker, opposed to the picture in corner?

Communications Director Allison replied this is not his expertise and asked Raquel Gonzalez, City Clerk, to explain.

Raquel Gonzalez, City Clerk said we have two feeds running. The Zoom feed is what we are pulling from the tiny camera in the corner. Caroline Galvin, Executive Project Manager, is sharing the screen so people see the presentations. The tiny window you mentioned is the camera view of councilmembers sitting here throughout the discussion. Additionally, over the past six months larger cameras were mounted in the Studio Theatre which is pushing to the YouTube feed. This is being tested. The plan is for YouTube to be a spot where people can watch the City's content during live meetings by pushing the YouTube feed, with the better camera views, to our website. When people visit the website, they may see a live event happening. This is to be a one-stop shop versus sorting through many videos on YouTube.

Councilmember Paulson said it would be good for people to know that. What is a good benchmark for newsletter subscribers? 5,000 subscribers are not much in a city of 110,000.

Communications Director Allison replied he is not sure what's a good benchmark, but they have an ambitious plan of 20% growth. Strategies in social media which includes engaging video content will compound on the number of people. May be slow at first but we will get better than 5000 if we follow our strategy.

Councilmember Jody Reichel asked if staff will be at the farmer's market and special events to educate people on what the City has to offer.

Communications Director Allison replied that is part of the plan. We will speak with various departments for innovative ways to funnel people to our newsletter.

Councilmember Melissa Mular asked Kristin Smith, Assistant City Manager, if staff is setting goals for different departments for customer engagement. What are the metrics?

Assistant City Manager Smith replied they are working on a good metric for different departments as more departments are receiving survey results. Approximately 65% of all comments so far are for Community Development. We want to expand that footprint to other departments in new ways and expand the survey in the City.

Councilmember Mular remarked about the 95 responses in customer satisfaction. What are the common themes among the five unsatisfied responses and what plans does the City have to address them?

Assistant City Manager Smith replied two or three responses were not great. One was resolved the following day. They were unable to reach another individual, but feedback is optional. Once the City receives feedback, they review to see if immediate action can be taken.

Councilmember Melody Kelley asked if there is a specific option for the public to comment on experiences with Code Enforcement?

Assistant City Manager Smith said you can choose which department to engage with in the survey. Code Enforcement is an option along with other general options.

Councilmember Kelley replied that the screenshot does not have it. Do you have to go through Planning and Zoning to get to Code Enforcement? Can this be made more transparent?

Assistant City Manager Smith said there is drop down menu to choose the team you engage with. It is general but most teams are listed. Code Enforcement can be added as an option.

B. 2023-030 Review the Draft Roswell Road Access Management Plan

Kristen Wescott, Traffic/Transportation Unit Manager, Nithin Gomez, Project Manager, Gresham Smith, and Caitlin Shankle, Senior Transportation Planner presented an overview of the draft Roswell Road Access Management Plan in advance of recommending the adoption of the Roswell Road Access Management Plan.

The City of Sandy Springs adopted the Roswell Road Small Area Plan in 2016, which established a vision for Roswell Road as a "boulevard" with safer access for motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists. The Small Area Plan proposed several ideas to better manage access along Roswell Road, including new cross and parallel streets with redevelopment, installing medians, filling sidewalk gaps, and improving connectivity.

In August 2021, the City undertook a planning effort, the Roswell Road Access Management Plan, to advance these ideas by completing a comprehensive analysis of safety deficiencies and developing a sample configuration of the improvements. The final plan includes a list of priority projects and implementation guidance to help the City of Sandy Springs achieve its long-term vision for the Roswell Road corridor.

Roswell Road serves as the principal north/south roadway for the City of Sandy Springs. It is regionally significant, touches all six council districts, and is served by two of the most utilized MARTA routes, 5 and 87. Roswell Road also experiences the highest number of crashes and highest crashes/mile rate compared to all other City roadways.

During the existing conditions review, the City's consultant performed a crash analysis, driveway inventory, review of existing plans, and traffic operations analysis. The City held stakeholder meetings, hosted a virtual public meeting (with interactive poll), and utilized an online mapping tool to collect public input on safety and mobility concerns along Roswell Road that supplemented the data analyzed in the existing conditions report.

Following the existing conditions assessment, an access management alternative was developed to lay out how the corridor could look when applying treatments, including a raised median, midblock crossings, traffic signals, and pedestrian/bicycle infrastructure. The alternative was evaluated to understand the safety need/benefit, operational impact, standard compliance, equity, and multimodal impacts.

The community was invited to provide feedback on the alternative at the public meeting held in June 2022 and through an online tool that was open for comments three weeks after the meeting. While there were several comments in support of improving the safety of Roswell Road, there were concerns about impacting access to businesses and increased U-turns on the corridor.

To address public concerns, there was additional scrutiny for the top projects that were recommended based on the highest safety need and benefit. In addition, the implementation guidance provides different treatment options to consider during the design stage, and the trade-offs involved. The top priority projects that are recommended to be started over the next 10 years include:

Raised Median and Complete Streets Projects:

1. Peruca Place/Prado to I-285 Eastbound Ramps and Meadowbrook Drive to Windsor Parkway – To be completed with T0019
2. I-285 Westbound Ramps to Hammond Drive
3. Johnson Ferry Road to north of Chaseland Drive
4. Northridge Road to Hightower Trail

Standalone Midblock Crossing Projects:

1. Between Lake Placid and Northwood Drive – To be completed with T0019
2. Between Trowbridge Road and Cimarron Parkway
3. Near Mystic Place
4. Between Northridge Parkway and Hellenic Tower Driveway
5. Between Huntcliff and Dunwoody Place

Given the scope of this plan outside of the priority projects, the majority of the improvements would need to be completed in conjunction with redevelopment. The City's Development Code already includes several requirements for driveway spacing, interparcel connections, and deceleration lanes. The Roswell Road Access Management Plan reinforces the importance of these standards and includes additional recommendations to strengthen interparcel connectivity requirements on Roswell Road and reconciling the desired cross section with current requirements.

Statewide average crash rate for the roadway classification based on the GDOT Statewide Mileage, Travel & Crash Data report for 2017.

The approval of the Roswell Road Access Management Plan does not have any direct financial impacts. The plan is intended to provide guidance for future implementation of access management treatments, but the City is not bound by the plan recommendations.

Council member Melody Kelley asked what went into the safety benefit ranking category for these projects?

Project Manager Gomez said crashes have been happening throughout the corridor. Each treatment came from research and has been documented to have a certain level of crash reduction potential. For instance, installing a raised median at a segment instead of a two-way left turn lane has X percentage of potential to reduce overall crashes. We use the percentages for safety analysis to understand how many crashes can be reduced if such a treatment were to be installed. We can also understand how those crash improvements and crash reductions can be converted into a monetary benefit. These calculations follow guidance from the Federal Highway Administration (FHA) put in place for transportation projects.

Senior Transportation Planner Shankle said it is more than just car damage. Emphasis is on the value of life. Preventing a fatal crash is a higher benefit and is calculated into the safety benefit.

Councilmember Kelley asked if there is any precedent for a priority category where an intersection has a significant crash rate, and is the only way in or out of a residential neighborhood.

Project Manager Gresham replied we are considering access along Roswell Road in developing the plan and doing the analysis. During the design phase, any of the projects we recommend can be revised. If the City decides to further a priority project, initial design activities will include its own public, stakeholder, and property owner engagement. The main thing that would have to be worked out is the operations of the corridor and access for those parcels adjacent to Roswell Road. The precedent is these need to happen for all transportation projects.

Councilmember Kelley said she is encouraging staff and everyone to include the economic impact to the businesses when the effectiveness of these measures is assessed.

Councilmember John Paulson said looking at history, data from 2019 is being analyzed. We redid the intersection at Carpenter Drive. Has the improvement resulted in lower car crashes? We also extended the island on North Ridge Road and Roswell Road. Coming south you can't turn where the Goodwill is now. The mall looks like it's struggling. Is this because of our island? Interested in safety and economic impact. Also interested in data near the QT, south of Grogans Ferry as this is currently happening. These are all good targets for opportunity and improvement. The City should review how well some have done in safety and economic impact because it doesn't serve us well if we drive businesses out of business.

Senior Transportation Planner Shankle said with the economic impact, they will reach out to Economic Development for insight on the businesses. The implementation guidance recommends having before and after studies for that same reason and will provide information for other projects.

Mayor Rusty Paul said if you turn left, you cannot go into the shopping center where the Goodwill is, but if you turn left on Northridge you can turn into the shopping center. Signage may be needed for people to get to some of these places. These medians have been a concern from the beginning. The example of Memorial Drive in Stone Mountain killed a thriving economic area over a three-year period and, as of today it has not recovered. We want to make the City of Sandy Springs as safe as possible, but we must be thoughtful about the impacts of these traffic decisions on our already struggling economic centers while balancing the value of human life.

Councilmember Jody Reichel said the Grogans Ferry Road intersection where the QT is concerns her. Heard complaints about the U-turn that people must make there. It is worrisome that there are several U-turns in the plan.

Senior Transportation Planner Shankle said she is not familiar but will check with the project manager on the project design standards and for any variances involved. Once the signal is in place it may help with the U-turns.

Councilmember Tibby DeJulio asked of the people killed along Roswell Road south of 285, what percentage are jaywalkers versus drivers? There is no cross-walking apparatus there. Going home on Roswell Road, someone in dark colors may be crossing and that must be one of our big problems. This is the reason we put a hawk by Fountain Oaks. This is not included in the plan. All we are concerned about are car turns and what percentage of our fatalities and injuries are pedestrians.

Project Manager Gresham stated all pedestrian crashes because of jaywalking were reviewed. Percentage data is not available tonight. Decisions were not influenced by that. The analysis is specifically related to pedestrian crossing opportunities in transit service and preponderance of land uses where people need to cross. We want to give people opportunities to cross frequently, and traffic signals allow for this. When the spacing between traffic signals is more than a thousand feet, we are looking at opportunities to provide a hawk, pedestrian hybrid beacon or crosswalk with traffic signal. Of the prioritized mid-block crossings identified, the top five are based on the number of transit usage nearby the surrounding land use. For some crossing locations without any crossing imperatives, some of those things went into identifying those locations. The reason this specific graphic is not showing a crosswalk across Roswell Road is typically to allow a safe crossing of a multi-lane highway which has speeds of 35 or more. To make that crossing safe we need a signalized mechanism. Most of these intersections which are designed as restricted crossing U-turns are unsignalized. If they were signalized, they will have a crossing. All signalized intersections have crossings. Beyond that we have identified those locations for signalized mid-block crossings based on the need.

Senior Transportation Planner Shankle referenced an example of median opening for a vehicle to demonstrate the pedestrian crossing where the signal for the pedestrian is.

Councilmember DeJulio said that is the exact area where many people walk across. The other image where the concrete island was in the middle seems to be a place for people to rest as they go halfway across and jaywalked the other half. We need to look at this more. Would like crash and injury data of intersection improvements completed at Roswell Road and Windsor Parkway and Roswell Road and Glen Ridge. We have put a lot of time and money in but not much study. Have improvements helped?

Senior Transportation Planner Shankle replied before and after studies can be done but depends on when the improvement went in. If it's less than a year, we might want to wait but we can discuss internally for the data. Information is easy to pull using GDOT online database.

Councilmember Melissa Mular said it is important we improve safety with these redesigned projects, but we need to keep in mind our communities along Roswell Road to not impact trip time and mileage. Many of the communities from Abernathy Road going northbound to Dalrymple Road, on either side, are in districts 3 and 4. We want to ensure it's going to be a smart design.

Senior Transportation Planner Shankle said with the concept a smaller project, people will focus on one thing versus an 8.9-mile corridor. There will be more engagement along the way. There is a general recommendation for having a raised median throughout the corridor because having a two-way left turn lane is a risk factor as left turning crashes with high speeds could be a fatal crash.

Councilmember Mular said there is much discussion about the business access but interparcel

connectivity is out of the City's hands. Whatever the City can do to facilitate is going to help if changing the curb cuts. We must be mindful.

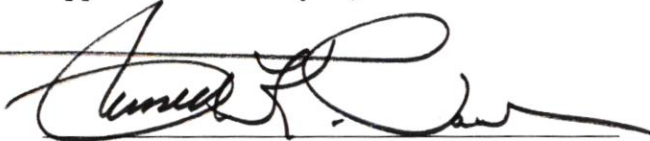
Senior Transportation Planner Shankle said the other element for longer term projects will depend on redevelopment. Without the interparcel connectivity, the meeting doesn't always work and this is a key element we are going to re-emphasize with Community Development too.

II. City Council Discussion Items

Mayor Rusty Paul reported the City of Sandy Springs was approved for the Safe Streets grant from Senator Jon Ossoff. Some funds may be used towards the topics presented here. A very good conversation. We appreciate Senator Ossoff and praise to staff for a great job on setting up for the grant. Thank you staff for all your efforts.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:19 p.m.

Approved: February 21, 2023



Russell K. Paul, Mayor



Raquel D. González, City Clerk