



Las Vegas

Agenda Item No.: 5.

**AGENDA SUMMARY PAGE**  
**CITY COUNCIL MEETING OF DECEMBER 11, 2006**

**DEPARTMENT:** ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES  
**DIRECTOR:** CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT

Consent  Discussion

**SUBJECT:**  
Discussion and possible action regarding communication efforts within the City of Las Vegas  
Leadership - All Wards

**Fiscal Impact:**

No Impact  Augmentation Required  
 Budget Funds Available

**Amount:**  
**Funding Source:**  
**Dept./Division:**

**PURPOSE/BACKGROUND:**

Since the October 18 Council Meeting, members of City Council and the Executive Team have participated in discussions and interviews with Business and Development Consultant, Ron Portaro to help determine the most successful methods of communication within the City of Las Vegas. This session will provide a forum for further discussion to improve communications within city government.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Receive presentations and direct staff accordingly

**BACKUP DOCUMENTATION:**

Submitted at meeting - PowerPoint presentation and report on Communications Assessment

Motion made by GARY REESE to Approve Staff's recommendations, including the City Manager to follow up on the 10 recommendations as discussed and to implement a communication protocol, the City Attorney to provide the City Council with the latest version of the Open Meeting Law, and incorporate all discussion held by City Council.

Passed For: 7; Against: 0; Abstain: 0; Did Not Vote: 0; Excused: 0

GARY REESE, LARRY BROWN, LAWRENCE WEEKLY, LOIS TARKANIAN, OSCAR B. GOODMAN, STEVE WOLFSON, STEVEN D. ROSS; (Against-None); (Abstain-None); (Did Not Vote-None); (Excused-None)

**Minutes:**

MR. PORTARO gave a PowerPoint presentation which was made a part of the final minutes, in which he abreasted Council and staff members on a report dealing with communications within the City of Las Vegas. This report was an attempt by the Council and staff to identify areas for improvement and implementing strategies that bring about enhanced communications. Respondents almost unanimously agreed that as a whole, communications within the City of Las

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Vegas are very good, yet there is room for improvement. Some of the key points regarding communication and information in need of further review included joint briefings; give information regardless if the information is good, bad or ugly; timeliness and consistency of information; handling hot items; timeliness of Council involvement on issues; and the roles and activities of Council liaisons. In addition, a key factor was perception versus reality, as Council has different experiences, diverse work histories and backgrounds. The goal now is to review the findings from the report, receive Council input, and for staff to receive direction from Council on implementing any changes.

Regarding communication on issues, including agenda items, amongst Council members, COUNCILMAN REESE pointed out that it is unclear on what can be discussed and what the boundaries are; he has often hesitated in speaking for fear of accusations of being unethical.

The recommendation is to implement strategies concerning the following: joint briefings by January 2007; briefings conducted by the same individual; ward specific briefings; City Manager/City Attorney briefing policies; Council-staff communication policies; coordination of interdepartmental communication; Council communication policies; information delivery timelines; chain of command; and Council liaison policies and procedures. In addition, implement strategies developed by the City Manager's Office and other offices; educate staff and Council regarding changes to or adoption of communication policies; receive buy-in from Council regarding changes; and develop written policies and procedures that are clear, consistent and easy to understand. MR. PORTARO closed by emphasizing that the keys to success is commitment, follow through on commitments and accountability - "no lip service".

MAYOR GOODMAN pointed out that this discussion emanated from the Royal Links matter where Council members were not given the same messages being delivered by different parties. Often times, the Council has felt that the messenger relates a message in which they believe is pleasing to Council. So, it is very important to have a common message, a common messenger and a truthful message in order for Council to make decisions that are trustworthy for the public. He has made it clear as to what his office may or may not say as liaisons to the public. It was his position that his liaisons cannot speak for him, and he believes it would be a dangerous policy having the liaisons speak for Council members.

MR. PORTARO confirmed for COUNCILMAN ROSS that the issue with messages given, whether good, bad or ugly was inclusive of the report and is something that needs improvement. The Councilman felt that Council cannot be good public servants if the members do not have all the information to make decisions necessary for this community. COUNCILMAN ROSS acknowledged that he has begun utilizing some of the recommendations, in that he has approached department heads and opposed to department members, as that is where the line of authority exists. His main concern is that information is given to Council sometimes minutes prior to Council meetings, which does not allow for time to review the information.

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DR. SELBY explained to MAYOR GOODMAN that there are times that he is out of the loop, as someone below the director receives the information and then he is not aware of that information until a briefing. The Mayor then suggested if a Council member would like action from a particular department, the individual must go through the department head first or the individual below the department head has the information, it must be passed on to the department head immediately. The Mayor stressed it is critical that the City Manager's Office and each Council member are aware of what is going on at each department level. In addition, he believed Council should receive a report, perhaps in writing, of what is happening in the City to stay informed and it will serve as a moral booster.

COUNCILWOMAN TARKANIAN empathized for some departments, such as Neighborhood Services, where many things are happening and the department head is buried and may not be able to meet with Council at various times. She suggested establishing a policy within the departments whereby a staff member is selected and would meet with Council. DR. SELBY injected that there has to be more protocol and institutionalization so that he can be accountable for the departments. MAYOR GOODMAN confirmed that the protocol has to be within each department with the understanding that the accountability will be with the department head and staff. Dr. Selby, as City Manager, is entitled to be fully advised as to how each of us are interacting.

COUNCILMAN WOLFSON indicated that his liaisons know to a certain extent the policies and procedures he has for his office. They have his permission to state to a constituent that the decision is up to the Council or speak on his behalf on a general sense relative to his policies, and then communicate to him what was said. He does not think it is inappropriate for his liaisons to speak on his behalf.

COUNCILMAN ROSS was in agreement with both MAYOR GOODMAN and COUNCILMAN WOLFSON, in that his staff knows his policies in the office; however, nothing officially leaves his office without his review. He was disturbed by one of the points in the report regarding liaisons contributing to a certain amount of element of distrust with Council. MR. PORTARO responded that the statement was included as it was made by several individuals. The liaisons work at the direction of each Council member, and each Council member may not be aware of what other Council liaisons are doing. This can lead to gaps and the unknown, which is when fear and distrust creeps in. He also confirmed for the Mayor that the liaisons were not interviewed.

COUNCILMAN REESE stated he met with his liaisons from the beginning and shared his position and do not feel that his liaisons have ever misrepresented him. He supported having this forum and is comfortable in that his liaisons, after speaking with constituents, share that they will have to follow up with him first. He also commented on his displeasure of a recent suggestion in utilizing timecards for liaisons, as they are salaried employees and sometimes meetings are held in the early mornings or late evenings and there's no compensation for that.

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MAYOR GOODMAN agreed with COUNCILMAN REESE'S comments relative to the Council being unsure of the boundaries and reiterated his concerns. CITY ATTORNEY JERBIC agreed that much of it deals with perception versus reality. He explained that a general rule of thumb is that if the issue is something that Council should vote on, then the members cannot build consensus on it. An agenda item can be discussed, as there is not a violation because a decision has not been made. He emphasized that a consensus cannot be made; however, Council can state how they stand on an item.

CITY ATTORNEY JERBIC clarified for COUNCILMAN BROWN that a consensus dealt with a quorum. He added that Council should be briefed every few years to inform Council of any changes relative to consensus, as it is an evolving area of law.

COUNCILWOMAN TARKANIAN referenced a past experience for her dealing with a consensus when she was on the school board. She emphasized that caution has to be taken when speaking on issues one feels strongly about, as in past training, she was advised that you cannot meet with more than two other individuals. CITY ATTORNEY JERBIC reiterated that a Council member would not be in violation if he or she stated his or her position on an item.

COUNCILMAN WOLFSON felt that there should be additional education relative to the Open Meeting Law, as it can be subject to interpretation. He added that the rule of thumb is just the opposite in the attorney arena, as it is encouraged and sometimes ordered to meet and discuss things amongst each other with the goal of a solution. He found the Open Meeting Law to be an inhibition in some way, as Council members can learn from each other. He is in favor of the joint briefings, as long as an understanding is received as to what Council can and cannot do. CITY ATTORNEY JERBIC pointed out that the Attorney General's Office publishes a book regarding the Open Meeting Law, which includes a question and answer section on approximately 30 hypothetical issues and offered to provide each Council member with a copy of the most current version and at the Council's convenience, schedule a briefing.

COUNCILMAN REESE confirmed with CITY ATTORNEY JERBIC the fact that there will be a new Attorney General at the first of the year, whose opinions and ideas can be different and may respond to complaints in a different manner.

Relative to the discussed issues, MS. FRETWELL explained to MAYOR GOODMAN that the effort is to take the information given from Council and compose presentations that will change our culture and create opportunities for candor. Sometimes what is important to the City Manager's Office (CMO) may not capture the essence of what's important to Council or relative to political ramifications. In addition, some departments may receive information that is not passed on to the CMO. As a result, staff is trying to create a different type of briefing process, for example have Ward briefings, to help Council become more informed in what the City is engaging in. The CMO's goal is to support Council while doing the job they have been appointed to do. She believed it was time to dust off their protocol and not be bureaucratic and create a different type of briefing process to inform Council so that they can make the best decision on various issues that the City is facing.

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COUNCILMAN ROSS thanked MR. PORTARO for the discussion and thanked MS. FRETWELL for her comments.

MR. HOUCHENS noted there appears to be two levels of communication, formal and informal. The challenge is to build a structure that accommodates both levels of communication to alleviate individuals making commitments that cannot be kept. He agreed with MS. FRETWELL'S comments and supported having Ward briefings.

ORLANDO SANCHEZ, Deputy City Manager, commented that this discussion has been educational for him. He agreed with having joint briefings, which will render a full understanding and Council will have the opportunity to hear the other's perspectives which will improve our communication. Part of the process is working with the City Attorney's Office and Internal Audit Office, as the more the CMO knows, the better equipped they will be in assisting the Council.

DR. SELBY felt that the discussion was enlightening and very productive. The fact that everyone wants to improve their communication skills is a sign of an organization that wants to excel. With the diversity of this organization, there is so much information that needs to be shared but sometimes selectiveness takes place in what is being shared, due to an eagerness to please. As a result, it does not serve the City if the information, good or bad, is not fully disclosed. With that, he suggested Council request from his office a protocol on communication, one that is not bureaucratic and does not hinder the ability to communicate. In addition, one that he can be accountable to Council on those critical communications needed for Council to do their job.

COUNCILMAN BROWN appreciated DR. SELBY'S recommendation regarding a communication protocol but did not believe the process would be pure. The freedom to meet, sometimes on demand when needed, is important to keep within the protocol. In addition, questions that are asked get related differently, as each Council member speaks in their own way. In the past, he has found it very productive to be able to sit down with DR. SELBY and others, as it has helped him do his job better. He would like to see a protocol in which impurity is recognized and does not stifle the diversity of the Council. As stated before, the goal is to develop a trust and a culture at the staff level so that everyone can feel comfortable in doing their job.

MR. PORTARO noted that the recommendations set forth deal with policy, protocol and procedures. There has to be implementation and everyone's commitment to buy in. He emphasized all can agree to disagree and respect and value the other person's opinion. He ended by emphasizing that there has to be commitment, follow through and accountability. He was privileged to serve the City and be a part of the City moving forward.

MAYOR GOODMAN confirmed for COUNCILWOMAN TARKANIAN that additional meetings will take place, as she was eager to have more and believed these meetings are a way to get to one another better. The Mayor added that upon completion, the issue will be placed on the agenda as a presentation from DR. SELBY. The Councilwoman suggested having a meeting

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aside from the Council meeting, whereby the focus can be on one item and there is room for flexibility to address each other's concerns. The Mayor concurred. MR. PORTARO noted that he would be available for any assistance as well, as there may be concerns that can be addressed prior to another meeting.

COUNCILMAN WOLFSON complimented KAREN COYNE on a recent briefing she gave. She had a detailed agenda with a list of topics and was prepared for the briefing. He encouraged this type of preparation and having advance notice with an agenda of what will be discussed allows Council to be prepared for the meetings. He would like to have this matter explored more on having an agenda or itemized bullets and if it would hinder Council, as there is fear that the list or notes become subject to a public records request.

COUNCILMAN WEEKLY asked if the next meeting would entail a follow-up on the directives from this meeting, as his main concern was accountability and more consistency. He added that he preferred to have had more discussion at this meeting dealing with the liaisons. In all fairness to the liaisons, COUNCILMAN WEEKLY noted that there is not an existing handbook or manual relative to their roles but there needs to be one. Having been a liaison before, the dynamics have changed tremendously. He pointed out that he advised his liaisons that although they work for him, they are devoted to the Council in general. He believed the liaisons should have an understanding on what is expected of them and what their true roles are, so the issue needs to be addressed further.

COUNCILWOMAN TARKANIAN noted that the liaisons' roles vary, and if there is an issue with any liaison speaking for a Council person, the Councilmember should be made aware of this immediately so it can be handled on specifics and not generality. MAYOR GOODMAN agreed and encouraged any one to contact him if there are issues on this matter or any others.

MAYOR GOODMAN thanked all for attending and looked forward to becoming a better City.

COUNCILMAN BROWN requested that CITY ATTORNEY JERBIC'S suggestion to provide Council with the latest version on the Open Meeting Law be included with the recommendations.

MR. PORTARO thanked Council for the opportunity to serve them. He also expressed appreciation to DR. SELBY and his staff, BRAD JERBIC, RADFORD SNELDING, CHARLES KAJWOSKI, SCOTT ADAMS, MARGO WHEELER and others for all of their support, hard work and willingness to be frank on addressing these issues.