

**CITY OF ALBANY
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda date: March 5, 2012
Reviewed by: BP

SUBJECT: Community Engagement Programs

FROM: Penelope Leach, Assistant City Manager/Community Services Director
Chelle Putzer, Recreation & Community Services Manager

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That Council endorse two new Community Engagement Programs: (1) *Nextdoor*; and (2) Albany Government 101.

BACKGROUND

Community engagement has become common terminology in many areas, particularly local government. The simplest definition of community engagement is the process of involving people in decisions that affect them. The challenge, however, is finding ways to reach community members and encourage them to get involved. Albany has done much over the last several years to involve residents in the decision making process; however, community engagement methods and approaches continue to evolve.

Staff has recently developed a working group to evaluate current offerings as well as explore new ways in which staff can continually improve and enhance Albany's community engagement process and programs. Staff includes Penelope Leach, Assistant City Manager/Community Services Director; Chelle Putzer, Recreation & Community Services Manager; Karina Tindol, Community Engagement Specialist; Anne Hsu, Administrative Secretary; Nicole Almaguer, City Clerk; and Jeremy Allen, KALB/Teen Services Supervisor.

Most recently staff has added social media to the line-up of community engagement methods with Twitter and Facebook pages. Staff also developed the *Around Your Block* program which allows residents to receive special announcements via email regarding public meeting agendas, mandated public notices, and emergency alerts that pertain to their immediate neighborhood. However, like any successful portfolio, having a diverse set of programs allows for a more diverse group of people who may potentially want to get involved.

As the working group has collected information over the last few months, two programs have emerged that will be beneficial in expanding the City's community engagement portfolio: (1) *Nextdoor*; and (2) Albany Government 101.

DISCUSSION

Nextdoor

Nextdoor permits communities to easily create private and secure websites to facilitate communication among neighbors and build stronger neighborhoods. *Nextdoor* was created based on the idea that the neighborhood is one of the most important and useful communities in a person's life. *Nextdoor's* mission is to use technology to help neighbors build stronger and safer neighborhoods.

Each neighborhood creates a private *Nextdoor* website that is accessible only to the residents of that neighborhood. Once neighbors join their neighborhood website, they can find neighbors in the resident directory, view a neighborhood map, ask for advice, exchange local recommendations, and share neighborhood information with each other. Residents can choose to see and respond to updates via email, or only on the website. The *Nextdoor* program combines other programs such as social media, Yahoo/Google groups, and City Share and puts them in one easy location. Additionally, *Nextdoor* has an option urgent alert program should neighbors need to reach each other in the case of emergency.

By the end of March 2012, *Nextdoor* will have launched in more than 30 cities ranging in population from 3,000 to 300,000. Here are some examples of how people are using *Nextdoor*:

- Find a new home for an outgrown bike
- Track down a trustworthy babysitter
- Quickly get the word out about a break-in
- Find out who does the best paint job in town
- Organize a garage sale
- Ask for help keeping an eye out for a lost dog
- Finally call that nice man down the street by his first name.

Attached are the Frequently Asked Questions for the *Nextdoor* program. More information is also available at [https://nextdoor.com/about us/](https://nextdoor.com/about_us/).

Albany Government 101

The idea for this program was included in the City Council's objectives for 2010-12. The Albany Government 101 Class will provide a perspective into the workings of the city and engage participants in a hands-on overview of City government. Over the course of the seven-week program, participants will learn about how decisions are made, where funds are allocated and have an enhanced understanding of the organizational structure and operations of the various city departments that impact the quality of life in Albany.

Residents who are interested in joining the class will be required to fill out an online application by April 7, 2012. The fee for the program is \$10. Priority is given to Albany

residents 17 years or older. Albany business people will be accepted space permitting. The class is particularly targeted toward those residents who are not normally involved in local government. The class will be limited to 22 participants. Participants are required to attend the first session and may only miss one session to graduate. The sessions are Thursday evenings from April 19 – May 31, and the program concludes with a graduation ceremony at a City Council Meeting tentatively scheduled for June 4, 2012.

Other cities offering a Government 101 class have discovered that when residents are better informed about how their city operates, how decisions are made and how funds are allocated residents make more informed decisions about the future of their city. Therefore the objectives of Government 101 are:

1. To involve and engage residents in learning about and understanding the operation of City government, and to improve communication between the City and those who live and work here.
2. To provide insight into how decisions are made, how City funds are allocated, and how City departments operate.
3. To empower and encourage a larger number of residents to become more civically engaged in the future decisions effecting Albany's quality of life.

The seven week course has been broken into the following classes (not necessary in this order):

- “From the Top”: Administration
 - City Council, City Manager, City Attorney, City Clerk
- “Something for Everyone”: Recreation & Community Services
 - Community Center, Senior Center, Teen Center, Friendship Club, KALB, IT
- “Serving with Pride”: Police
- “Who Ya Gonna Call”: Fire
- “Building for Tomorrow”: Community Development
 - Planning, Building, Environmental Resources, Transportation
- “We Build this City”: Public Works
- “Dollars & Sense”: Finance & Human Resources
 - Treasurer, Finance, HR,

Additional details regarding registration, time, and location of the classes will be available on the City's website, www.albanyca.org, no later than March 15, and in the next Activity Guide to be mailed to residents the first week of April 2012.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT

Nextdoor and Government 101 programs benefits the immediate neighborhood and community by increasing community awareness and involvement.

FISCAL IMPACT

The *Nextdoor* program is free to the City and to the residents choosing to participate.

For the Government 101 class, the \$10 collected from participants will cover the cost of handouts and printed materials for the participants to keep. An additional \$500 is budgeted to cover the cost of food and beverages for each of the classes.

Attachments

Nextdoor Frequently Asked Questions