

October 13, 2018

Dear Mayor Hochvert and Village Manager Pappalardo,

On October 13, 2016, the Scarsdale Village Board of Trustees created the Ad Hoc Committee on Communications (“Committee”) to serve a one-year term with the following purpose and charge:

**Purpose**

*“To support the successful launch of website/communications platform; strengthen Village communications strategy and cultivate engagement opportunities with diversity of audiences.”*

**2017 Charge**

1. *“**Review new website** content, functionality and user-friendliness, making suggestions for enhancements;*
2. *Develop a plan to gain community usage, seeking widespread adoption. As ambassadors for the new communications platform, engage with community groups to both **increase awareness and usage of the website**, and to introduce website functionality; and,*
3. *Drawing on expertise and best practices, **provide strategies to improve Village communications**. Prepare written recommendations to the Village Board identifying important community segments or audiences, linking appropriate communication methods and channels to identified segments, and suggesting prioritization of associated programmatic and investment needs within the context of existing fiscal constraints.”*

On October 10, 2017, the Committee substantially fulfilled its 2017 charge in the form of a 64 page report presented to the Village staff and board “[Scarsdale Village: Communications Assessment and Preliminary Recommendations](#)” (“2017 Report”). The Committee’s recommendations contained in the 2017 report were organized into immediate, near term, and long term goals with a general understanding that a communications strategy is an investment over time with important considerations and milestones at each phase. One of the immediate term recommendations was that the Committee’s work be extended for a year in order to assist the Village staff and board in the process of implementing its recommendations.

On November 28 of 2017, the Village Board extended the period of service for the Ad-Hoc Committee on Communications for one year to facilitate the implementation of selected recommendations contained in the 2017 Report with the following charge:

**2018 Charge**

- 1. Maintain and increase resident subscription rates to NotifyMe, the online automated Village of Scarsdale press release and meeting notification system;*
- 2. Update the “New Resident Packet” and develop a version for electronic distribution;*
- 3. Develop resident boards and councils recruitment materials, as well as new member packets, suitable for print and electronic distribution;*
- 4. Collaborate with staff to update and standardize departmental forms, applications, and handouts, as requested;*
- 5. Review and suggest updates to online department overviews, potentially including creation of staff profiles; and*
- 6. Share with staff any ideas or suggestions for continued website enhancements that may be discovered through execution of the above responsibilities.*

The Committee’s experience over the last year has yielded some additional observations and recommendations that the Committee believes are valuable for Village staff and the Board to consider as it once again assesses the state of Village-wide communications.

- 1. Establish a Communications Policy:** the Village does not currently have a written communications policy with a statement of values, goals, objectives, and methods. The absence of such a policy has at times hindered the Committee’s pursuit of all six components of its current charge.
- 2. Appoint a Public Information Officer:** The Committee has noted the benefit of having a clearly stated and set agenda from year to year, along with the added benefit of having immediate feedback and guidance during discussions. The Committee recommends that the responsibilities typically assigned to a PIO could be added to an existing staff member’s responsibilities. This staff member should manage the development and implementation of the communications strategy. A job description should be created with the Committee’s input as well as research into other municipalities’ PIO job descriptions.

The Committee recommends that the Village's newly appointed PIO participate in ongoing professional development.

3. **Social Media Communications Policy:** As noted in the Committee's 2017 Report, Scarsdale Village is the only example of comparable municipalities that does not have a Social Media presence of any kind. We have heard arguments over lack of control, however, the fact is that this albeit private utility has become an important source of news for many residents. Efforts to encourage the widespread use of scarsdale.com – a digital communications platform – can include a social media communications component. The Committee would like to explore the use and controls of social media further. Like any municipality, the Village would need to establish guidelines, access, permissions, and content supervision to ensure conformity with administrative and legal considerations should the committee advise, and the Village agree, to move forward with the use of social media.
4. **Development of Staff Generated Content:** The Committee was asked to facilitate the development of specific content: standard forms and FAQs for relevant departments. The Committee recommends that staff begin to work on this content with input and assistance from the Committee. Most pertinent information lies with staff and should be part of staff's responsibility to generate.
5. **Development of Committee Generated Content:** The Committee was asked to facilitate the development of specific content; new resident's packet and department profiles (written and video). The Committee recommends that its members begin to focus their attention on these tasks in due course.
6. **Visual Identity:** The Committee continues to observe a wide range of logos, typefaces, colors, fonts, and formats across all communications tools (print & digital). The Committee recommends that the Village continues to refine and clarify its graphic visual language in order to make "official" correspondence more recognizable and consistent to the public.
7. **Scarsdale Public TV:** SPTV is an under-utilized resource for the Village and the public. The Village should disseminate notices and helpful reminders between programs and as chyrons across the bottom of broadcasts. Budget allowing, the Village can explore the creation of programming that reinforces its communications goals. The 2017 Report notes that the committee produced an instructional video for the new scarsdale.com.

8. Media Relations: The Village should establish a regular calendar year of proactive media outreach; quarterly “Letter from the Mayor” or “Letter from the Manager” updates are examples of useful tools that embellish and deepen existing “Scarsdale Official” bi-weekly news.

To the extent the Village considers extending the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on Communications, these observations are intended to provide some guidance as to the circumstances under which the Committee will experience success – and potential challenges.

1. Village Staff Participation: The Committee feels that the involvement of Robert Cole, Deputy Village Manager, has been an invaluable resource for the Committee’s work. The Committee encourages continuing Mr. Cole’s membership on the Committee.
2. Member Composition: Unlike other boards and councils, the Ad Hoc Committee benefits from the service of members who serve on other boards and councils concurrently. The Committee has observed that this inter-committee communication has been invaluable to discussions and accomplishments as committee members provide insight and knowledge from various aspects of the Village that are extremely additive in the Committee’s work . At the same time, since its charter is to provide and facilitate resident feedback, the composition of the Committee should be partially refreshed on a yearly basis.
3. Goal-Oriented Mandate: Committee acknowledges the benefit of having a specific charge as an outline for its work from year to year. If the Committee were to continue from year to year, it is recommended that the board and staff annually review and determine the Committee’s specific charge and evaluate its work.
4. Long Term Goals Now: The Village staff and board selected near-and-medium term goals from the 2017 Report for its 2018 charge. The Committee encourages the board and Village staff to consider that long term goals still require the development of timeframes, tasks and responsibilities, irrespective of the implementation dates that might be proposed for such goals.
5. Use of 2017 Report: Committee has observed that its 2017 Report continues to accurately reflect the state of Village communications. The 2017 Report should be reviewed annually – and updated when necessary - to assess both changes that may impact the activities described in the report and the Committee’s progress from year to year.

6. Should the Committee be transitioned to a permanent role, we strongly suggest its best role would be advisory in nature, in direct coordination with whichever senior Village Staff member (formally or not) assumes the role of PIO. The Committee feels strongly that it cannot continue its work effectively without coordination with a senior member of the Village Manager's Office.

In closing, the Committee would like to acknowledge and extend recognition to Trustee Jane Veron and Deputy Village Manager Robert Cole. The contributions of these individuals cannot be understated. As residents, we have been impressed by their unwavering commitment toward our shared goal of improving the communication between our municipality and the public it serves. Additionally, the Committee would like to thank Trustee Justin Arest and former Trustee Deb Pekarek for their invaluable perspective, guidance and work in furthering the charge of this committee.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ad Hoc Committee on Communications

Lee Fischman  
Dara Gruenberg  
Laura Halligan  
Barry Meiselman

Mary Louise (ML) Perlman  
Scott Rompala  
Andrew Sereysky  
Carol Silverman

Cc: Trustee Veron, Trustee Arest, Deputy Village Manager Rob Cole