From: Patrick Conant <patrick@prcapps.com>
Sent: 2/16/2017 7:05:14 PM
To: gwenwisler@avlcouncil.com
Cc: esthermanheimer@avlcouncil.com, cecil@braveulysses.com, brianhaynes@avlcouncil.com, juliemayfield@avlcouncil.com, gordonsmith@avlcouncil.com, keithyoung@avlcouncil.com, dhitch@ashevillenc.gov, gjackson@ashevillenc.gov
Subject: Re: [#65542] Re: City Council Retreat

Gary,Â

Thank you for your response. I do want to clarify that my comments were made by myself, as a citizen, not on behalf of Code for Asheville. While I remain a member of the group, I am no longer a Co-Captain, having passed the torch to Eric Jackson and Jesse Michel.Â

While I am still actively involved with and support the work of Code for Asheville, many of the initiatives I listed, including the proposal to lead a community-driven effort to record public meetings, are created by my personal volunteer efforts or with the support of my team at PRC Applications, my small business.Â

My request is not really related to Open Data in general; while City IT may assist with the posting of meeting minutes and related materials ahead of time, that task should probably be handled by the boards and committees themselves.Â

More than anything, I am asking City Council to consider processes and policies that will provide people who can not attend committee and other City meetings with opportunities to give input. That starts with making agendas, minutes, and presentation materials available ahead of time. The critical missing component is that the City, as an organization, needs to set some clear guidelines on how citizens who can not physically attend meetings can have their voices heard. I feel that a local government that builds "with," not just "for" the people, works better for everyone.

I appreciate your service to our City, and am encouraged by the efforts from yourself and many others on City Staff to improve the transparency and accessibility of our local government.Â

Thank you,

Patrick Conant

> On Thu, 16 Feb at 4:32 PM , Gary Jackson <GJackson@ashevillenc.gov> wrote:
> Gwen:
>
> Thanks for forwarding the communication.
>
> Our leader in open data and primary liaison with Code for Asheville is Jonathan Feldman. Jonathan and his team are expanding their support of the open data movement.
>
> We always appreciate receiving community engagement suggestions. We are continually improving and updating the processes based upon community input and direction from Council.
>
> Gary
>
>> -----Original Message-----
>> From: Gwen Wisler AVL City Council [mailto:gwenwisler@avlcouncil.com]
>> Sent: Thursday, February 16, 2017 4:18 PM
>> To: Patrick Conant <patrick@prcapps.com>
>> Cc: Esther Manheimer <esthermanheimer@avlcouncil.com>; Cecil Bothwell - Email <cecil@braveulysses.com>; Brian Haynes <brianhaynes@avlcouncil.com>; Julie Mayfield <juliemayfield@avlcouncil.com>; Gordon Smith <gordonsmith@avlcouncil.com>; Keith Young <KeithYoung@avlcouncil.com>; Dawa Hitch <DHitch@ashevillenc.gov>; Gary Jackson <GJackson@ashevillenc.gov>
>> Subject: Re: City Council Retreat
>>
>> Thank you, Patrick. I'm copying Dawa Hitch and the City Manager for input on your suggestions.
>> Best,
>> Gw n
>>
>> > On Feb 16, 2017, at 9:34 AM, Patrick Conant <patrick@prcapps.com> wrote:
>> >
>> > Hi Asheville City Council,
>> >
>> > My name is Patrick Conant, and I am a resident of the City of Asheville and a small business owner. I also volunteer my time on civic technology and open data projects in Asheville, including AVLPark, NC Megaphone, Housing not Handcuffs, and Open Data Policing - and we have more planned for 2017!
>> >
>> > I have been reading the agenda for the City Council Retreat, and it doesnâ€™t appear that thereâ€™s opportunities for public participation as part of the retreat. For some reason I seem to remember that past retreats did include a component of community collaboration, but perhaps Iâ€™m thinking of a different event.
>> >
>> > In any case, Iâ€™d ask that council consider making the annual retreats more of an inclusive event, and provide at least a segment of time for feedback and discussion of issues with members of the community.
>> >
>> > In lieu of a session at the event, Iâ€™d like to share something Iâ€™m personally trying to prioritize this year - increasing community engagement with local government. We have citizens in our city who want to have their voices heard, and it is clear to me that a City built with, not just for, the people is one that works better for everyone.
>> >
>> > Itâ€™s not hard to imagine the barriers to participation that our current processes create. Many Committee meetings are held downtown, at times such as 3:30 PM. That immediately excludes anyone who works a 9 - 5 job, and those who are available need transportation to downtown.
>> >
>> > Most committee meetings are not recorded, and while processes to publish minutes and agendas have improved, it varies by committee. I would request that all agendas are posted at a predetermined period before the meeting, and all presentation materials are also posted at this time. Citizens who can not attend meetings in person are not given a clear way to participate - that could be as simple as asking they email committee members, or using the â€œOpen City Hallâ€ feedback tool more consistently - but if they canâ€™t access all meeting materials digitally, that makes their task even harder.
>> >
>> > I am discussing a community-led initiative to record more City and County committee meetings and post them online, so that those not present can view what was discussed at a later time. Thatâ€™s going to require a significant amount of resources for the equipment necessary, but I think we can make it happen - if Council is interested in supporting those efforts, please let me know!
>> >
>> > I also encourage council to consider developing processes for community engagement that allow citizens to become involved in the decision making process early on. For example, if there is a proposal to renovate a public park, there should be a public input session in that very park, and that should occur at the start of the process, before plans are set.
>> >
>> > For example, with Prichard Park, the developer and city staff met with the tree commission and several downtown business associations. After presented to council, they held a public input session at the Housing Authority. They didnâ€™t meet with people in the park - which seems common sense to meet when youâ€™re trying to visualize changes in a public space.
>> >
>> > That left the community feeling left out, City staff were defending a proposal that was revealed to have some unexpected flaws, and the developer faced the possibility of wasting work on a project that didnâ€™t work for all Asheville residents.

>
> I believe that a different process would eliminate a lot of these tensions. By involving the community early on, it builds a partnership between citizens, staff, and the developer and allows different perspectives to be heard. It helps both city staff and developers make decisions regarding the project that are known to have community support, and it allows citizens to feel involved in the process.
>
> This will be an exciting year for our City and the community - I thank you all for your service in our local government!
>
> Thank you,
>
> Patrick Conant
>
>