



Mayor – Sandy Sanders

City Administrator – Ray Gosack

City Clerk – Sherri Gard

**Board of Directors**

Ward 1 – Steve Tyler

Ward 2 – Andre’ Good

Ward 3 – Don Hutchings

Ward 4 – George Catsavis

At Large Position 5 – Pam Weber

At Large Position 6 – Kevin Settle

At Large Position 7 – Philip H. Merry Jr.

# **AGENDA**

**Fort Smith Board of Directors**

**Study Session**

**June 26, 2012 ~ 12:00 Noon**

**Fort Smith Public Library Community Room**

**3201 Rogers Avenue**

1. Discuss communications training opportunities for the Mayor and Board of Directors
2. Review preliminary agenda for the July 3, 2012 regular meeting



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## MEMORANDUM

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**TO:** Ray Gosack, City Administrator  
**FROM:** Tracy Winchell, Communications Manager  
**DATE:** 6/22/2012

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### Communications Training Opportunities for Mayor & Board

Earlier this year members of the board of directors expressed an interest in participating in communications training sessions to assist with the multitude and variety of interactions with constituents, reporters, administration, and staff.

#### *Purpose*

As defined by staff, the purpose of this training would be for a third party communications expert to provide practical tools for building community consensus and fostering transparent communication with constituents and the media.

#### *Benefits*

The end result of improving communication would be to demonstrate to the public that the City of Fort Smith works every day to treat every citizen fairly, equitably, and with respect and that elected officials and city administration and staff will insist on this culture throughout the organization.

#### *Options*

Staff seeks board consensus on the following options before proceeding with specific recommendations:

**1. Do we seek out a facilitator from the Fort Smith area or from a different city?**

The benefit of employing someone who lives and works here is that he or she knows the issues. The disadvantage may be that elected officials may prefer objective feedback from someone who doesn't live and work in the area.

The benefit of employing someone from another city may be that he or she can be completely objective in assessing opportunities for individual and collective improvements. The disadvantage of using a non Fort Smith resident may be a lack of intimate knowledge of the specific issues facing the community, the city, and the policy-making board of directors.

## 2. Do we seek out a facilitator with a variety of communications experiences?

Perhaps someone with journalism experience, or a university professor? Or a public relations practitioner from a local agency, or a regionally-renowned agency known for training executives from Fortune 500 companies? Or do we consider a facilitator with another type of professional training and experience? If so, what should that experience include?

## 3. Does the communications training take place entirely in a public setting?

Or through a series of one-on-one sessions that the facilitator analyzes, shares the top 3 to 5 top board communication priorities, and then discusses with elected officials and administration in an open study session or public meeting?

### *Organization-wide communications plan*

In December of last year, we provided a board info item entitled, *Communication – Past, Present, Future*, during which we shared a few comments from a very frank meeting between two city staffers and a handful of small business owners who, in essence, told us they didn't think the city board, administration, or staff needed to provide *more* communication. They told Deputy City Administrator Jeff Dingman and me that it's the *kind* of communication that frustrates and angers them. Their admonition to us – *Show us the city cares*.

Attached to that same board info item was a recommendation that the city design a communications plan that involves internal communications training, as well as training for senior staff and elected officials. The most important part of the communications plan, however, is a citizen survey so that as we build our communications plan and concentrate on staff training, we will have a better grasp on public consensus.

Just this week we received our packet of information that will allow us to begin the process of surveying our citizens as part of the National Survey and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA).

Staff is eager to begin practical communications training across a number of key city representatives whose words touch citizens every single day. Designing and scheduling this training is essential to strengthening public trust that many citizens have begun to question during the past 12 to 18 months. This sentiment is not unique to our community, as evidenced by the *2012 Edelman Trust Barometer Executive Summary*, which states that, worldwide, governments have suffered the biggest decline in trust of institutions in the history of the Edelman survey.

A number of important pieces of communication information can be gleaned from this document as we train, build a communications plan, and stand up multiple social media presences throughout the organization.

Staff is eager to assist the mayor and board in designing a communications training plan that is mutually agreeable to all parties and that may serve as a baseline component for future elected officials.

By leading the organization in a desire to become better communicators, our governing body sets the standard for how all of us representing the City of Fort Smith should continue to improve our communications skills internally and, most especially, with the citizens we serve each day.