



Borough of Madison

Business Operations Committee

Submission by:
Maureen Byrne, Chair
Fran Boardman
Jim Burnet
Lisa Ellis
John Hoover
Diane Mann



Committee Goals & Objectives

From our charter, the Committee developed the following desired outcomes for its work:

- Assess community perceptions about the level and quality of Borough communications and service.
- Solicit residents' ideas for improvements to communications and services.
- Develop recommendations to enhance communications and service delivery with the expectation that improved communications will generate more community involvement in Borough affairs.



Philosophy & Values

The Committee agreed that its research and recommendations should serve to develop a better informed citizenry in the interest of:

- Expanding involvement by, and interaction among, a broader cross section of residents to provide the Borough with access to expanded human resources for governance and community development.
- Increasing opportunities for residents to participate in Borough leadership assignments, bringing in more diverse views.
- Strengthening the democratic process by growing participation in municipal governance.
- Deepening community relationships to better serve residents at all times, but particularly during emergencies and/or disasters.



Committee Process

The Committee defined the work and produced the following action plan:

- Research similar efforts in other communities
- Develop survey protocol & questions via paper & online:
 - Survey Monkey distributed through rosenet.org and shared links.
 - Paper surveys distributed around town and mailed in utility bills
 - 10 Drop boxes installed at key locations around town
- Issue media releases and other announcements about the survey
- Data returns processed through Survey Monkey
 - Borough interns entered data from paper surveys into Survey Monkey to create one data set.
- Review data and offer recommendations to Council.



Survey Structure & Response

- Primary categories of inquiry:
 - Service to residents by the Borough
 - Communications effectiveness by/with the Borough
 - Demographic data: Age ranges, years of residency, number of children in Madison schools
- Applied rating scale of 1 to 5
- Included areas for comment
- Survey and supplemental questions were distributed to the Mayor & Council, Department Heads and Committee/Board Chairs
- See Appendix for survey and supplemental questions

A total of 226 responses were received to the online and paper surveys as of September 25, 2014.



Supplementary Data

Key Borough leaders – Council Members and appointed volunteers -- were asked to respond to interview questions on their experiences with Borough communications.

- Council Members and Chairs of volunteer boards and commissions were asked about the following:
 - What is your overall impression of the Borough communication to the public?
 - What improvements or changes to communications that they would suggest?
 - Do the various committees and commissions have adequate resources to communicate effectively and in a timely fashion?
- Borough Department Heads were asked about the following
 - What information do you communicate to the public?
 - Do you publish annual reports, newsletters, articles or other documents?
 - What communication tools do you use to deliver information to the public?
 - What improvements to communications would you suggest?



Summary Survey Results



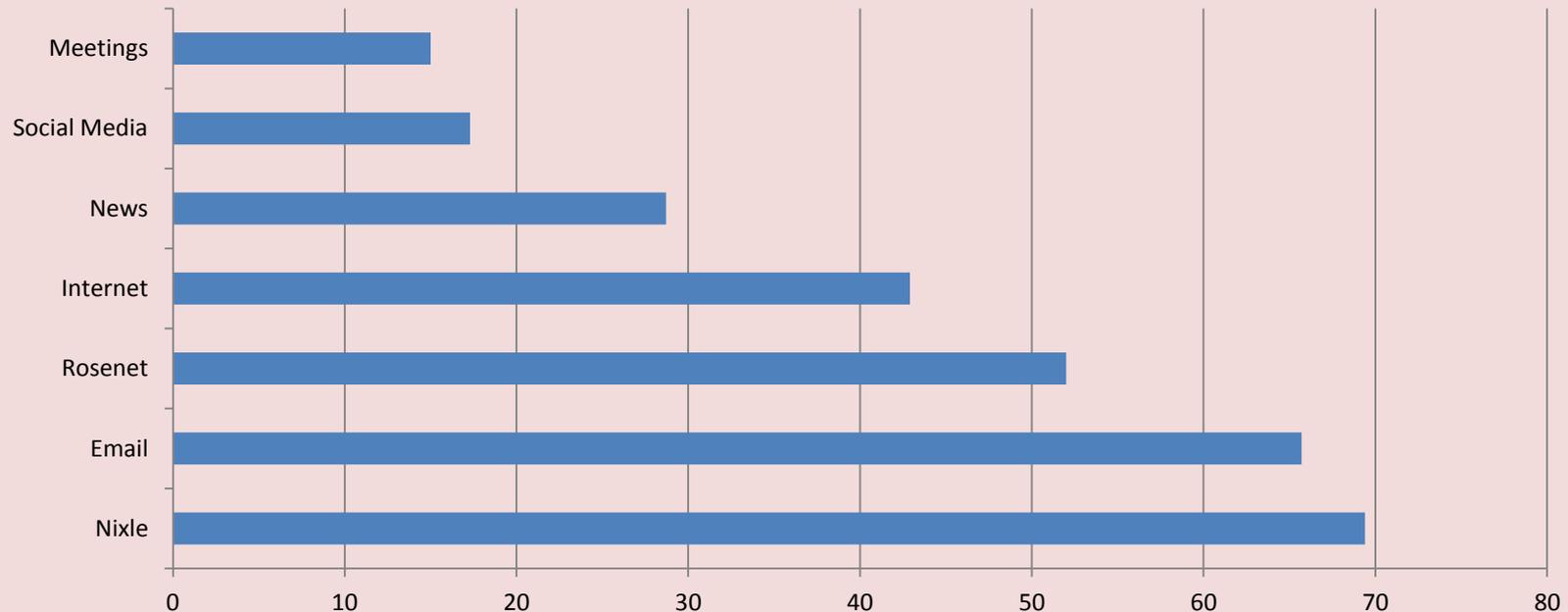
- 87% of respondents agreed that the Borough communications system should provide citizens with information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
- 59% of the respondents did NOT agree that communications about Borough decision-making is open and two-way, indicating an area for improvement.
- 64% of the respondents agree that they did NOT receive sufficient information about Borough matters such that “I feel fully informed,” also indicating an area for improvement.
- 52% of the respondents agree that Borough decision-making processes are NOT clear and open.



Summary Survey Results

PREFERRED MODE OF COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT BOROUGH ISSUES

High convenience “push” oriented communications like Nixle and Email were most preferred. “Attending Meeting” was the least preferred method of communications (least convenient option).

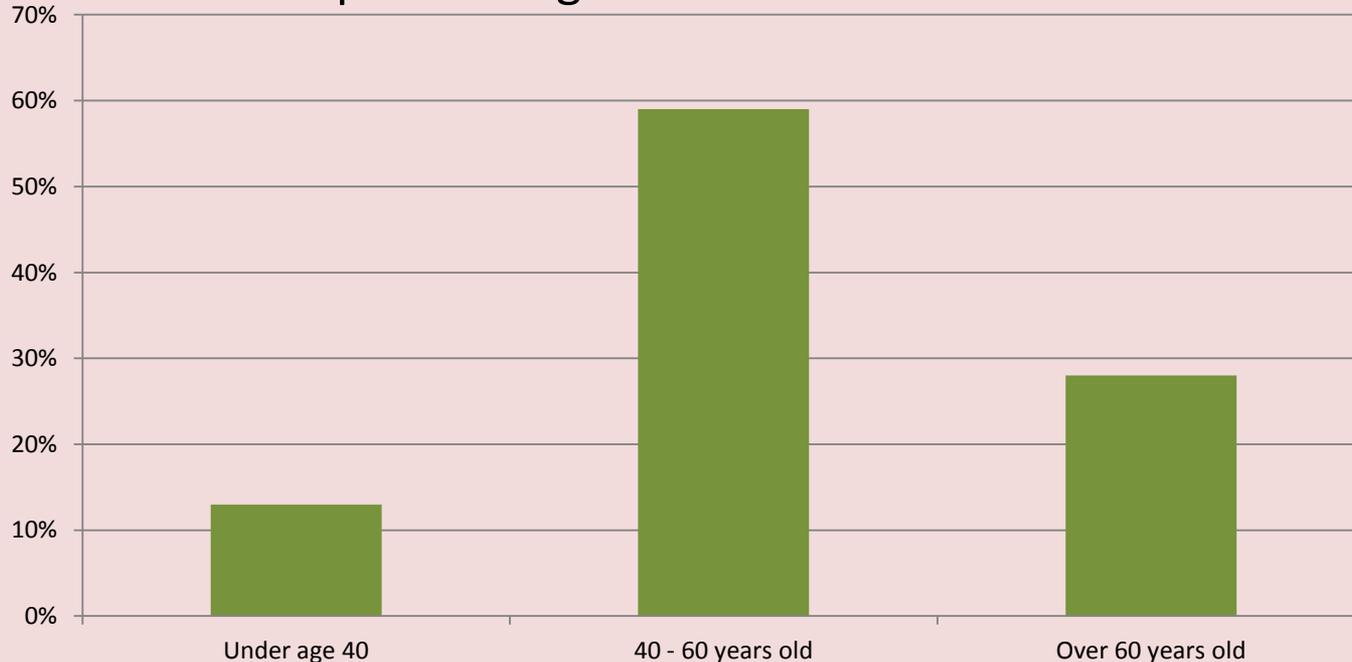




Summary Survey Results

WHY IS SOCIAL MEDIA SO LOW?

- Survey respondents were predominantly older and likely not as engaged in social media. 59% of the respondents were age 40-60. Only 13% of the respondents were under 40 years of age. The committee recognizes that while social media did not rank high, it is still an important communication tool and one that is expected to grow into the future.





Summary Survey Results

- The top three suggested improvements that were mentioned most were:

#1 Revamp Rosenet

#2 Identify additional communication tools

#3 Improve on-line bill pay

Additional data from comments by appointed Committee Chairs suggests the committees need more support and oversight.

The screenshot shows the official website of the Borough of Madison, New Jersey. At the top left is the borough's seal. The main header includes the text 'BOROUGH OF MADISON New Jersey'. Below this is a navigation bar with tabs for 'Borough Government', 'Community', 'Shop Madison', 'Madison Public Library', and 'Non-Profits'. A secondary navigation bar lists 'GOVERNMENT HOME', 'DEPARTMENTS A-Z', 'ANNOUNCEMENTS', 'CALENDAR', 'DIRECTORY', and 'CONTACT US'. The main content area features a large image of a festival with the text 'Bottle Hill Day 2014! Saturday, September 27th'. To the right is a 'Madison Weather' widget showing a temperature of 64° and a 'How Do I...' section with links to 'Access RoseNet Webmail', 'Access Secure Server', etc. Below the main content are sections for 'Borough Announcements' and 'Borough Calendar'. The footer contains contact information: 'Borough of Madison | Borough Hall: 50 Kings Road, Madison, NJ 07940 | (973) 593-3042 | Contact Us' and copyright information for 2014.



Committee Findings/Observations

- Monmouth University recently completed a [“Best Practices for Municipal Websites”](#) report.
- Middletown NJ was ranked #1 overall.
- This report and top websites can be used as guidance for revamping Rosenet.

The screenshot displays the website for Middletown Township, New Jersey. At the top, it features the slogan "the Biggest Small Town in New Jersey" and the "MIDDLETOWN Township, New Jersey" logo. A navigation bar includes links for DEPARTMENTS, FORMS/RESOURCES, REGISTER WITH MIDDLETOWN, ONLINE SERVICES, GOVERNMENT, DIRECTORY, and CONTACT US. A search bar is located in the top right corner.

On the left side, there is a vertical menu with the following categories: Animal Control & Licensing, Boards and Commissions, Brush and Leaves, Budget, Building & Inspection, Community, Employment, Garbage Collection, Health, History, Library, Meetings, Middletown 350, Middletown Arts Center (MAC), Public Safety, Recreation, Recycling, Schools, Senior Services, Taxation, Transportation, and Township Committee.

The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Having a problem? Middletown Marvin will be able to help!** with a "Click here to report a problem" link.
- Township Notices** section containing:
 - W. Front St Bridge Closed Nights 11/16/14 to 11/20/14
 - 1:00pm Holiday Train Ride Tickets Still Available
 - RFP Website Design Development & Expansion
 - Newman Springs Road Detour
 - November 5, 2014 Planning Board Meeting
- Calendar** section with a sub-menu for:
 - Main Calendar
 - Middletown Arts Center
 - Library
 - Meetings
 - Parks & Recreation
 - Poricy Park
 - Public WorksKey events include:
 - Nov 17: Twp Committee Regular...
 - Nov 21: Turkey Soccer Shootout
 - Nov 24: Dodgeball Registratio...
- Press Releases** section with items like:
 - Poricy Park Annual Trail Run Walk Early Bird Registra...
 - Mayor's Food Basket Needs Donations for Mtown Families
 - Poricy Park Holiday Craft Shop Opens 11/28

On the right side, there are additional features:

- Social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and RSS.
- Sandy Recovery Information** with links for Citizen Alert Registration, Service Requests, and Buy Middletown.
- Quick Links** section including:
 - RFP Website Design Development & Expansion
 - Middletown TV
 - Traffic Advisories
 - Business Survey 2104
 - Parking Permit Renewal 2014
 - TOWNSHIP MAP
 - Adopt An Historic Cemetery
- Video Tour of Middletown** with a thumbnail image.
- A **Welcome** section with sub-links for Quality of Life & Volunteerism and Economic.



Committee Findings/Observations

- New technology provides vast capacity but must be effectively scaled and managed in order to serve the Borough's needs most efficaciously and avoid wasting resources.
 - Making these changes will require training key personnel to utilize and manage dynamic, interactive, online communications that sometimes change on a daily/hourly basis.
- Important segments of the population will not use technology as their primary means of communicating so tools such as utility bill inserts will remain important.
- Survey data show some gaps in communications, where 64% of residents do NOT feel “fully informed” about Borough matters.
 - Greater resident involvement in governance and community building processes will help residents better understand the range of services that the Borough provides and the challenges of balancing services with property taxes.



Committee Findings/Observations

- Communication challenges will continue, as only 70% of residents feel decision-making is open and two-way, but the least preferred method of communicating is to attend meetings where most of the direct, interactive communication occurs.
- The survey and analysis process identified core areas for communication planning, each of which need to be managed differently:
 - **Public Safety:** Emergencies, law enforcement, weather issues, disasters
 - **General Information:** Public Health, Senior, Library, Recreation, DDC & related community activities
 - **Infrastructure:** Public works, utilities, garbage/recycling/yard waste/leaf pickup, capital projects, other borough services



Committee Recommendations

Short Term Recommendations

- The Borough Council should make communications a priority, and devote financial resources and personnel to make the necessary improvements.
- Policies should be established to determine a) all the communication tools, b) who will supervise day to day communications, c) what communications are appropriate, d) the appropriate frequency and timing of communications, e) which channels are utilized and when.
- Improve the online bill pay function.
- Nixle has proven highly effective for public safety communications. Another Nixle version (such as the BOE Honeywell Alert System) should be developed for non-emergency community communications.
- Rosenet TV broadcast delays should be eliminated and continuous programming, via a “loop,” should be initiated.



Committee Recommendations

Mid-Term Recommendations:

- Consider construction of a new website that can expand and incorporate interactive capabilities for more timely and robust communications, facilitating residents' involvement.
- Develop a protocol for annual feedback on residents' satisfaction with the effectiveness of Borough services.
- Bring back the "Borough By-Lines" newsletter, which can be distributed digitally with print versions available at the Library, Senior Center, etc. (See examples in appendix)



Committee Recommendations

Long Term:

Given the dissatisfaction regarding borough communications expressed in the survey and the importance of supporting volunteers and engaging the community, the Borough should use the Committee's data and recommendations to develop a more thorough communication plan considering the Borough's varied audiences and optimizing the utilization of its varied communication channels. Such a plan would:

- Outline specific strategies to optimize the use of the Borough's communication tools.
- Recommend which new methods would be most effective in meeting communication goals.
- Outline actions to expand residents' involvement.



Conclusions

Engaging and educating the residents is critical to a well run community. The benefits are clear:

- **TRANSPARENCY:** Residents will better understand how local government works and have a grasp of the challenges and issues facing Madison.
- **STEWARDSHIP:** Council, committees and commissions will have more information and thus make better informed decisions.
- **VOLUNTERISM:** Residents will learn what it takes to run a great community and will thus be more willing to volunteer and support the town.
- **APPRECIATION:** Employees, volunteers and elected officials will be recognized for their service to the community.
- **CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP:** Madison will be more attractive to businesses and corporations. Engaged businesses and corporations are more likely to stay in town or relocate to Madison.
- **VALUE:** Property owners will better understand that Madison offers a superior level of services when compared to other communities.

RECOGNITION: All of this will result in Madison being recognized as one of the best towns in NJ, thus supporting property taxes and real estate values. As such, dedicating a small amount of financial resources to communications should be considered an investment in our community.



Next Steps

- Form a committee, or re-charter this committee, recruiting additional members as needed to implement the short, mid and long term recommendations as endorsed by Council.