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CITY OF PALO ALTO
Memorandum

TO: **CITY COUNCILMEMBERS**

FROM: **CITY MANAGER** **DEPARTMENT: CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE**

DATE: **APRIL 6, 2009**

SUBJECT: **STUDY SESSION - SUPPORTING MATERIALS FOR COUNCIL PRIORITY: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR THE COMMON GOOD**

In support of the Council study session on the 2009 priorities, staff has prepared the attached materials as background on Civic Engagement for the Common Good. This document outlines and provides more detail on the proposed first phase of the civic engagement initiative. The intent of this information is to provide more context for the proposed strategies and actions outlined on the Palo Alto See-It model.

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Interim Deputy City Manager

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City Manager

Attachment

Where and How to Begin

Since the beginning of 2008, the City Council has had Civic Engagement as a top priority. Although the City has embarked on a few individual initiatives towards this priority, there has not been an overall or comprehensive strategy and approach. A small team has been meeting to draw up a roadmap to help us move forward with this initiative. This document outlines suggested first phase elements of the initiative. Three key pieces of this initial phase include 1) the definition of the problem, 2) developing a civic action plan, and 3) determining means of assessing progress utilizing several tools. This is simply a starting place, and we will be able to build on this work as time goes on.

For this initiative to take hold and create real change, its focus will obviously need to extend beyond one year. This does not imply that it remains a formal Council priority. Rather, we need to build a foundation of good systems that will continue to serve the community in the future. To that end, the things we choose to embark on over the last six months of this year need to create synergy and involve major segments of the community. We will learn as we try certain things that some will be better than others for the issues we're facing. We will need to continually assess the elements of the initiative and look for frequent feedback. Are these the right actions, methods, and assessments? Are the programs producing results that will make people want more? How might programs identify missing links or failed connections and provide what's needed?

The initiative described here is a first step. All of the elements outlined have the intent of building a foundation where the programs are mutually reinforcing and from which the impacts continue to multiply over time.

Defining the Problem

SEA and Other Civic Engagement Indicators

Civic engagement for the common good is as much about the quality of interaction regarding civic matters as it is about the reach and inclusiveness of this priority. The FY 2007-08 Service Efforts and Accomplishments (SEA) Report provides several indicators of the City's performance in the area of Civic Engagement. Although there are some measures that have consistently high ratings, there are also some significant areas that have seen a decline over the years and call out areas for improvement. Among the consistently good scores, residents rated opportunities to volunteer and participate and opportunities to participate in social events and activities as good or excellent, and opportunities to participate in community matters highly. The City of Palo Alto also ranks in the 97th percentile compared to other surveyed jurisdictions in overall image and reputation. Measures of having attended some type of public meeting or

participated in a club or civic group are similar to other surveyed jurisdictions. In large measure, these elements reflect the City's nonprofit sector and citizen initiatives. In other areas, such as public trust, value of services, and impression of employee contact, the SEA data point to areas for improvement. Negative public attention regarding the Children's Theatre investigation, the City's redesigned website, and last year's homicide and string of burglaries may have influenced adverse survey responses, but the data we examined covered a several year period. In contrast to the 97th percentile regarding image and reputation, Palo Alto ranks in the 65th percentile for the value of services received for the taxes paid to the City. The following categories have seen a decline in approval rating *over the past four years*:

- Percent rating the City's job at welcoming citizen involvement as good or excellent (-13%)
- Percent rating the City's job at listening to citizens as good or excellent (-8%)
- Percent having contact with a city employee in the last 12 months (-10%)
    - Good or excellent impression of knowledge (-11%)
    - Good or excellent impression of responsiveness (-11%)
    - Good or excellent impression of courtesy (-6%)
    - Overall impression good or excellent (-11%)

On the more specifically qualitative side, the problem—or better said, the challenge—is to carry on city business so that citizens and staff bring to their interactions a particular sense of both responsibility and ambition. The *responsibility* reflects stewardship of the community, its image and reputation and the characteristics on which they are based. The *ambition* involves our social and civic infrastructure, including our processes and practices, and the goal of making them models of a leading edge, democratic, inclusive, and effective community. As the familiar report card phrase puts it, it's about working up to our potential in regard to civic engagement.

Proposed Outcomes for Initiative

1) Build skills and capacities that facilitate civic processes (e.g., meetings, planning, problem-solving) and outcomes where people feel heard, understood, and respected
2) Build collaborative partnerships between the community and staff
3) Foster an organizational culture that invites engagement
4) Develop a core staff team from among existing staff that can be deployed to assist with community meetings and outreach
5) Develop a more comprehensive understanding of the City among residents and staff – enlarge the perspectives of single issue constituencies
6) Shift thinking to "problem-solving" approach versus "pro-con" debate
7) Define civic and engagement as terms reflecting Palo Alto's aspirations

8) Frequently assess progress on initiatives in ways that lead to increased effectiveness and satisfaction.

These outcomes would be tested as part of the assessment/community conversation process.

Defining the Problem and Developing a Civic Action Plan

Assessment

The purpose of the proposed assessment is to use existing data sources (namely SEA and U.S. Census) to develop a number of meaningful measures to gauge how the City of Palo Alto is doing in terms of Civic Engagement. These will be good starting points, but we will develop others as well. A survey of existing ways staff engages with the community, as well as an inventory/survey of existing organizations with whom the City already engages will contribute to an asset-mapping process. Asset mapping, as a concept, identifies the skills and talents of local residents, as well as the capabilities available or possible through local organizations and institutions. By identifying these resources, Palo Alto can draw upon its unique and talented resources to address the important issues impacting our community. This will determine how we can improve our interactions with the public, as well as aid in outreach for the development of our Civic Action Plan. The assessment will allow us to ensure the Civic Action Plan is developed in a method to ensure we're matching our efforts to the community profile of Palo Alto so that we make our best efforts to be **inclusive** in the process. For example, it will be useful to see the frequency and distribution of internet connectivity/access in the City, since we would propose to implement a lot of new web-based tools as part of this initiative.

Currently, staff is working with the City Auditor's office, to see if cross-tabs are available for the different Civic Engagement questions in the SEA report. Possible cross-sections in the community that would be of interest include age, race and ethnicity, home-owner vs. renter, and geographic subareas. The evaluation of current methods for civic engagement and community outreach will take place by sending a questionnaire or interviewing key staff members and department heads who have a good understanding of how staff interacts with the community. The City Manager's Office and department heads would be a starting point to gather information we already have institutionally on civic organizations, nonprofits, etc. Community conversations will also provide opportunities for developing and assessing initiatives of a qualitative nature.

Community Conversations

The City will embark on a series of conversation with both the community and with staff members. The intent of these conversations is two-fold: 1) to identify the existing perceptions and expectations around the relationship between City Hall and the community and between community groups as they interact with each other and 2) to help define the problem and begin to define "civic engagement for the common good" in the Palo Alto context.

The objective of the conversations is to help inform a baseline for assessment and to build community in the process. The views and opinions of the community and of staff are key to amplifying understanding of civic engagement and the common good and to building unifying themes around which people can develop actions and strategies.

We aim to hold 10-15 conversations with a total of approximately 100 – 150 participants between May and July. The participants would be drawn from a broad cross-section of the community, including: schools; faith community; emergency preparedness programs; businesses; youth; boomers and seniors; neighborhood associations; non-profits; and others. The themes from the conversations would be coupled with those from the "baseline assessment" and will be presented to Council as part of a comprehensive Civic Action Plan. The Civic Action Plan will outline specific initiatives to be undertaken over the next 1-2 years.

Civic Action Plan

After completing the community conversations and initial assessment, staff will develop, in conjunction with key community stakeholders, a civic action plan. This plan will identify and provide more detail about the specific actions and programs the community should undertake as part of the civic engagement initiative. The plan will synthesize the results of the assessment to further refine the key steps for moving forward.

The plan will also help everyone answer the "so what?" question. Why is this initiative important for the City? It should cultivate cohesion and consistency among the different elements. How do they all fit together and lend themselves to the goal of civic engagement for the common good? The plan should also have a way for assessing results and feeding learning back into the design and implementation. The feedback should be focused on assessing tangible differences in the quality of city goals and services, citizen participation, citizen and staff satisfaction and civic pride.

Staff intends to present this plan to Council in mid-July. However, the definition of the plan and its implementation should never be "done" in the sense of finished. We need to continuously assess our initiatives and methods to ensure that they are consistent

and unified in purpose and implementation. The work of implementing the plan presented would initially carry through the remainder of the year.

Identifying and Building Capacity

In concert with the development of the action plan, it will be important to begin building key skill sets among staff and the community in order to further support the Civic Engagement initiative. Using an athletic metaphor, we want a "deep bench." The section below describes some actions that will help build some of these skill sets.

Kitchen Cabinet

This idea arose as a result of the amazing talent that exists in the community and on staff. Developing a kitchen cabinet for Palo Alto is a metaphor for gathering around civic engagement all of the tools and resources reflected in individuals representing their own skills and capacities or those of organizations, schools, businesses, churches, etc. When we need a certain tool or resource for specific issues, we will be able to open up the kitchen cabinet and choose the one that fits best. The cabinet is divided into a staff resource team and a community resource team at this point but the two teams can overlap or collaborate at any point.

Over the past six months, many different community members have approached the City with different community engagement tools or mechanisms. The community resource team would be a vehicle to bring these resources together in a collaborative and systematic way. The intent would be to begin meeting monthly with this group and to expand the membership as we identify additional resources.

The staff resource team would bring together a group of staff members dedicated to enhancing the relationship between City Hall and the community and developing key skills in this group. The group will help City Hall understand why it exists and will help develop resources that will allow City Hall to work towards its purpose. This might take the form of a group of trained facilitators that can be utilized for varied community meetings. The group could also help design meeting agendas to maximize effective outcomes. This effort could be coupled with the effective meetings proposal supported by the Human Relations Commission/PAGE and outlined below.

Community Café Speaker Series

One key element of the initial civic engagement work will be to build awareness of the effort among community members. To this end, the City could host and/or co-sponsor a speaker series that would help introduce key civic engagement concepts to both staff and the community. Currently, staff is proposing three sessions between June and

November and is exploring different topical possibilities. A couple of ideas include a session focused on using technology to build community and a session exploring civic engagement models in other cities/agencies/institutions. Staff would also explore ways to incorporate an interactive or participative element to each session, thus allowing for further input and feedback on the civic engagement initiative.

Leadership Palo Alto Program

A small group of community stakeholders, staff and Council members has been meeting to discuss reinitiating the Leadership Palo Alto program formerly sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce. This group is evaluating ways to rebuild or re-form the program in a way that supports the Council's Civic Engagement priority. This proposal will likely return to Council for further discussion in the coming months.

Effective Meetings Proposal

The HRC and PAGE have developed a proposal (more fully described in the companion report from the HRC) that would help foster more effective meetings of various City Boards/Commissions and other community groups. This will become a key component of the staff and community skill-building that will occur over the first phase of the initiative. The City's Executive Leadership Team will look for ways to implement the ideas in the proposal throughout the normal course of City business, thus getting the job done while simultaneously building community. Staff will also survey other City boards, commissions or task forces to see if others would be interested in trying out some of the ideas proposed by the HRC and PAGE. To assist with these trial efforts, a small team could draft supporting materials that might include guidelines for chairs of boards/commissions and tips for conducting effective meetings.

Building Civic Engagement Principles into Existing Programs/Initiatives

In addition to some of the elements mentioned above specifically aimed at defining civic engagement and building skills, there is an opportunity to build civic engagement principles into some of the City's existing programs and initiatives. As an example, staff will look at ways in which City business can be accomplished that engage the community more effectively and that build relationships as part of the process. These initiatives have been identified previously and include: the Block Preparedness Coordinator Program; the Community Environmental Action Partnership; the community website committee; and the Comprehensive Plan update process. Staff will continue to explore other initiatives to add to this list.

Two Visual Views of the Initial Phase

Two ways to view the Civic Engagement initiative are implicit in the above overview: the organic/dynamic picture and the linear/time-based model. The organic/dynamic picture (Diagram A) really shows the relationships among the elements and how each element reinforces and supports the others. This model is consistent with early suggestions and models developed by the community coalition supporting this Council priority.

The linear/time-based model (Diagram B) will help identify and manage the action steps needed to implement the initiative. The timeline and elements of this initial phase are aggressive and will require substantial commitments of time and energy from the Council, staff and the community. However, in order for this initiative to take root, we need this level of commitment. This is not simply just another initiative – this is a process that aims to fundamentally alter the ways in which we approach and engage with the community during the course of City business.

The diagrams on the next two pages provide the two visual views of the initial phase of the initiative.

Diagram A: Organic/Dynamic Picture of Civic Engagement Effort

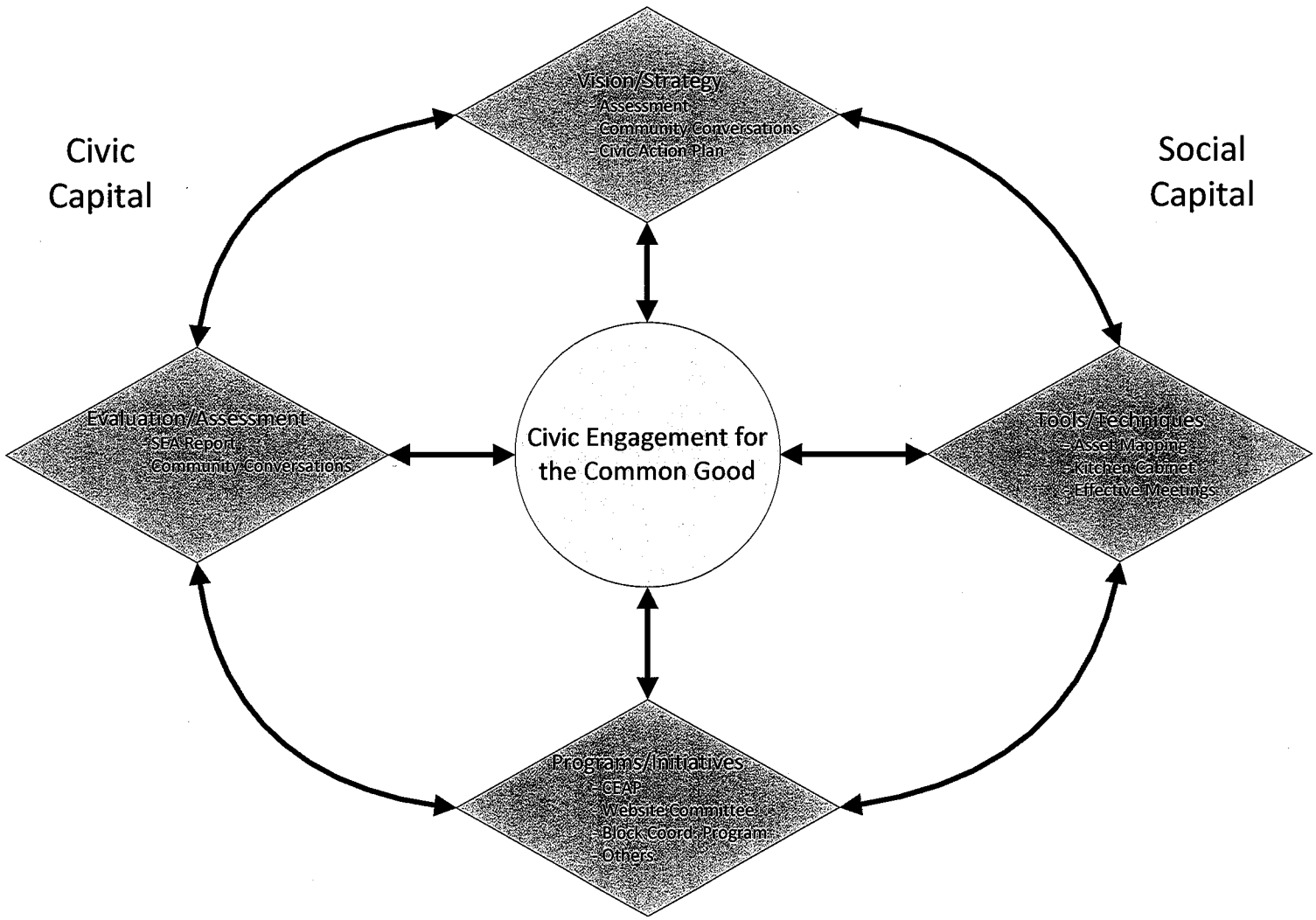
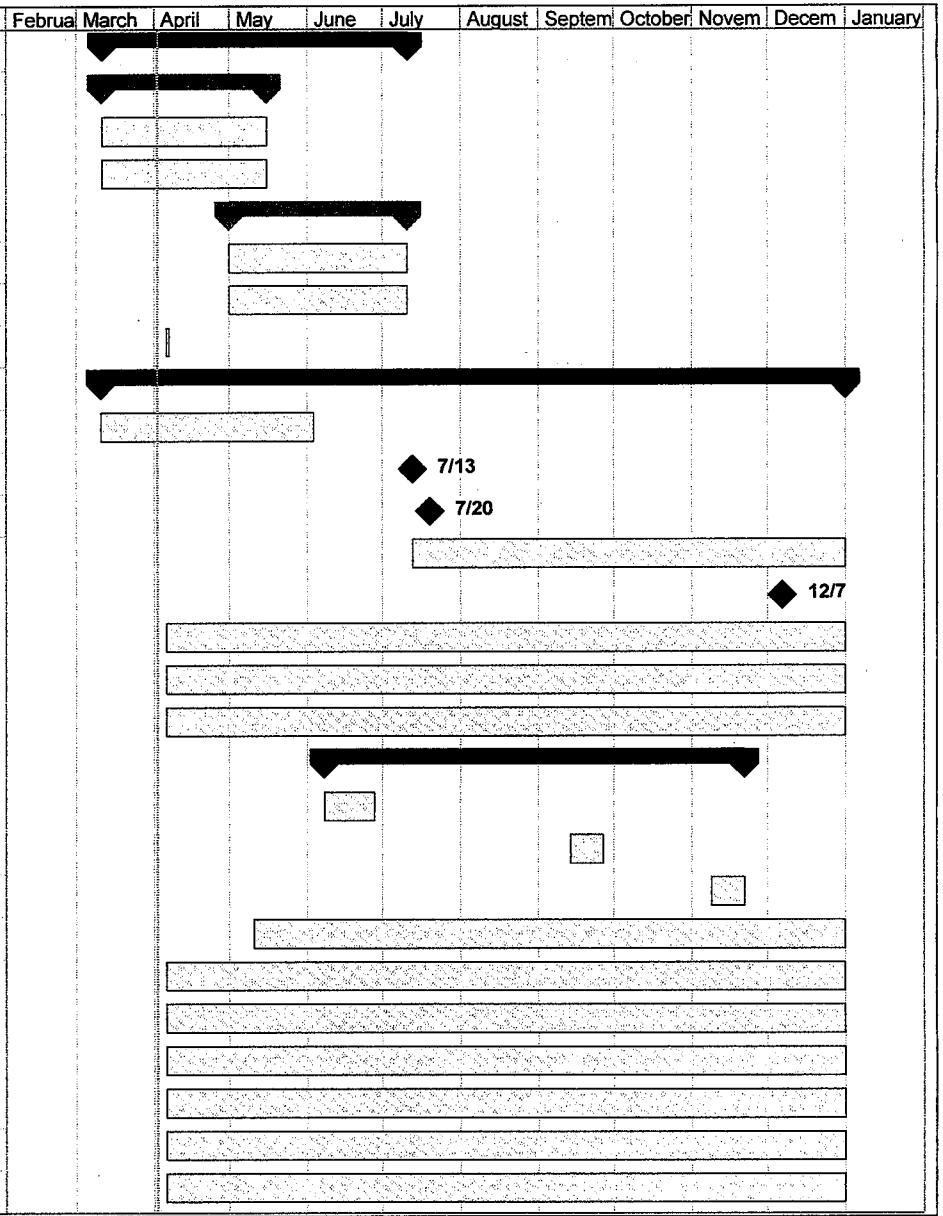


Diagram B: Linear/Time-Based Picture of Civic Engagement Effort

ID	Task Name	Start
1	**Defining the Problem**	**Wed 3/11/09**
2	**Data/Research**	**Wed 3/11/09**
3	SEA review	Wed 3/11/09
4	US Census	Wed 3/11/09
5	**Community Conversations**	**Fri 5/1/09**
6	Community	Fri 5/1/09
7	Staff	Fri 5/1/09
8	*Council Work Session on Priorities	Mon 4/6/09
9	**Civic Action Plan**	**Wed 3/11/09**
10	Development	Wed 3/11/09
11	Council Pres./Recs on Impl. Plan (Hold)	Mon 7/13/09
12	Council Pres./Recs on Impl. Plan (Hold)	Mon 7/20/09
13	Implementation	Mon 7/13/09
14	Council Discussion on Progress	Mon 12/7/09
15	**Identifying and Building Capacity**	Mon 4/6/09
21	**Kitchen Cabinet**	Mon 4/6/09
22	**Internal Staff Resource Team**	Mon 4/6/09
16	**Community Café Speaker Series**	**Mon 6/8/09**
17	Session 1	Mon 6/8/09
18	Session 2	Mon 9/14/09
19	Session 3	Mon 11/9/09
20	**Leadership Program**	Mon 5/11/09
23	**HRC/PAGE Effective Meetings Proposal**	Mon 4/6/09
24	**Building Civic Engagement into Existing Programs**	Mon 4/6/09
25	Block Preparedness Coordinator Program	Mon 4/6/09
26	Community Environmental Action Partnership	Mon 4/6/09
27	Website Committee	Mon 4/6/09
28	Library Bond Stakeholder Group	Mon 4/6/09



Project: civicengagementworkplan
Date: Thu 4/2/09

Task
Split
Progress
Milestone
Summary
Project Summary
External Tasks
External Milestone
Deadline