CITY OF SAN ANTONIO

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November 6, 2019

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SUBJECT: Audit Report of TCI Public Relations & Citizen Communication

Mayor and Council Members:

We are pleased to send you the final report of the TCI Public Relations & Citizen Communication. This audit began in February 2019 and concluded with an exit meeting with department management in September 2019. Management's verbatim response is included in Appendix C of the report. TCI management and staff should be commended for their cooperation and assistance during this audit.

The Office of the City Auditor is available to discuss this report with you individually at your convenience.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kevin W. Barthold, CPA, CIA, CISA
City Auditor
City of San Antonio

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CITY OF SAN ANTONIO

OFFICE OF THE CITY AUDITOR

Audit of Transportation & Capital Improvements

Public Relations and Citizen Communication

Project No. AU19-030

November 6, 2019

Kevin W. Barthold, CPA, CIA, CISA
City Auditor

Executive Summary

As part of our annual Audit Plan approved by City Council, we conducted an audit of Transportation & Capital Improvement (TCI) Public Relations and Citizen Communication. The audit objectives, conclusions, and recommendations follow:

Determine if citizen communication regarding TCI projects is adequate and timely and citizen feedback is addressed.

Overall, citizen communication regarding TCI projects is adequate and timely and citizen feedback is being addressed. TCI is ensuring citizens are notified about long-term projects, including providing input and feedback throughout the design process. Additionally, a Capital Project Officer or project manager responsible for citizen communication exists for all projects. Updates are occurring regarding project progress and status, and we found no indication that on-site communications with citizens was not professional or courteous. Finally, adequate mechanisms exists for citizens to request TCI services and submit complaints. However, we identified one area in which citizen communication could be continually enhanced.

The TCI Director should work with City Council Staff to ensure all complaints and requests for service are submitted to 311.

TCI Management agreed with the enhancement and have developed positive action plans to address them. Management's verbatim response is in Appendix C on page 10.

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Background

Transportation and Capital Improvements (TCI) oversees and directs the development and maintenance of the publicly owned infrastructure of the City of San Antonio.

TCI's department goals include effective communication with citizens to provide accurate and timely responses to citizen requests and to maintain a positive image within the community by promoting public trust through community meetings and timely, proactive, and positive communication with the media.

TCI's Communications and Engagement team, headed by the Chief Communications Officer (CCO) manage all forms of communication with the public about department projects and activities through the media, public outreach campaigns, and social media. The Communications and Engagement team's primary focus is to provide broad communications to all San Antonio residents and other relevant stakeholders to promote projects and initiatives or inform citizens of TCI activities. Additionally, the Communications and Engagement team provides guidance to Capital Project Officers and project managers regarding direct communications to residents.

Capital Project Officer's (CPO) are responsible for more direct communications with citizens about specific projects that will impact the resident, neighborhood, or smaller community. They prepare and disseminate information to citizens, businesses, City officials and other stakeholders concerning upcoming or current projects. CPO's are the primary staff assigned to ensure that affected citizens are informed and updated about TCI project plans and project status, and resolve relevant issues and complaints as they arise. CPO's work under the project management team for each project they are assigned. However, CPO's are not assigned to all projects, but rather projects in which resident engagement is considered paramount. Some factors include the scope of the project, projects considered politically sensitive, or the length of time the project is anticipated to last. If no CPO is assigned to a project, the project manager takes responsibility for citizen communication.

The intensity of resident communications is dependent upon a number of factors including public interest and project budget. However, the length of time a resident will be impacted is the primary driver for the communication measures taken. Long-term projects will include public meetings at various project phases, along with social media updates, email updates, door hangers, flyers, mailers, and face-to-face communication. Short-term projects are generally limited to door hangers, flyers, signs, and face-to-face communication.

Audit Scope and Methodology

The audit scope included currently active projects as of March 2019. This included 364 capital and operational projects with a combined budget of $2.4 billion. Prior to the audit commencing, TCI analyzed current communication practices and developed approaches to improve communicating with residents. Our audit was conducted considering prior communication practices and the implemented approaches.

To establish testing criteria, we reviewed policies and procedures, both past and present. Additionally, the audit team performed a survey among various local government public works departments to determine common practices in communication.

To gain an understanding of TCI practices, policies, and procedures, we interviewed staff including the CCO, to develop an understanding of roles and responsibilities. Additionally, we interviewed CPO's from various TCI divisions to gain an understanding of their communications process and determine how they obtain feedback.

Additionally, we interviewed City Council Liaisons and TCI Special Project Managers to gain an understanding of how complaints and feedback are logged and addressed. Further, we reviewed 311 data to obtain an understanding of the types of complaints received.

Finally, we reviewed TCI online communications, such as social media, TCI's website, and TCI's events calendar to gain an understanding of online outreach efforts.

As part of our testing procedures, we reviewed a sample of long-term projects to ensure that appropriate notifications of both the public meeting and the project were occurring. Additionally, we reviewed a sample of flyers, hangers, and notifications to ensure that reasonable details were included.

We reviewed a sample of updates to ensure that updates were occurring and were timely. Additionally, we reviewed a sample of complaints, inquiries, and feedback to ensure that all were being addressed timely and on-site communication was appropriate.

We relied on computer-processed data in SAP to establish our testing population. Our reliance was based on performing direct tests on the data rather than evaluating the system's general and application controls. Our direct testing included reviewing communication efforts related to sampled projects. We do not believe that the absence of testing general and application controls had an effect on the results of our audit.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Citizen Communication Enhancements

We reviewed several elements of TCI's current communication practices and identified one enhancement that could improve communication between TCI and citizens. Specifically, we reviewed TCI's current and newly implemented policies and procedures and analyzed complaints, inquiries, and service requests.

A. Policies and Procedures

Prior to and during the audit, TCI had begun implementing an improved communication approach that will have a significant impact in improving communication with residents concerning TCI projects. We reviewed policies and procedures in conjunction with a survey of city governments and determined consistent practices have been implemented. In particular, the addition of a clearer timeline of events, a quality control process, a post-project feedback process, and use of non-internet-based communications, when thoroughly ingrained into practice, will provide smoother communication throughout the life of a project.

Communication Timelines

Previously, communication efforts were determined based on different factors such as funding source, type of project and the length of the project. TCI Project Communication Plans provided guidance if a project was less than two months or greater than two months. TCI's recently implemented procedures now determine the timeline of resident communication based upon the length of time that a resident will be impacted as the primary driver. TCI has established better-defined timelines as follows:

- Less than 1 month of resident/stakeholder impact
- One month to one year of resident/stakeholder impact
- More than one year of resident/stakeholder impact

Where residents will be impacted for less than 1 month, communications tactics such as flyers, door hangers, mailers, letters, and face-to-face communication should occur at least 2-4 weeks in advance.

Where residents will be impacted for more than 1 month, but less than one year, communication is intensified. In addition to the previously mentioned methods, a "here we come" meeting should be held a week prior to construction beginning, and regular communication should be occurring throughout the project. See Appendix A.

Where residents will be impacted for more than 1 year, a timeline of events is suggested which provide many opportunities for TCI to communicate the project, its impact, and goals to residents and affected citizens. This includes opportunities

to participate in multiple public meetings prior to construction, email updates, and providing feedback. Additionally, the Communications and Engagement team provides increased support in executing public meetings and direct communications. See Appendix A.

Establishing appropriate criteria and timelines for resident communications ensures that communication efforts are appropriately targeted at individuals who require the information. Additionally, it provides a guideline in which project managers and CPO's can appropriately plan their communication efforts. Finally, for projects that will have a significant impact on residents, increased communications is paramount to avoiding issues as the project progresses.

Quality Control Process

Previously, TCI CPO's and Project Managers were not required to have direct communications to residents reviewed by the Communications & Engagement Team. The newly implemented approach has project managers send communication deliverables developed by the project team, such as flyers and door hangers, to the Communications and Engagement Team to review for accuracy, messaging, and understandability.

For example, we reviewed a sample of flyers and notifications associated with four projects. One flyer appropriately informed residents to ensure their vehicles were not parked along a specific route and provided a map, but did not specify the dates in which the vehicles should be cleared from the area.

Without an appropriate quality control process, TCI communications are more susceptible to errors such as incorrect contact information, incorrect resident instructions, and missing information such as incomplete start and end dates. Accurate details such as these allow resident to prepare appropriately and reduce complaints, misunderstandings, and inconveniences for all parties involved.

Post-Project Feedback

Previously, TCI's method of obtaining post-project feedback was inconsistent. Methods of obtaining feedback included telephone and email. The newly implemented procedures has project managers and/or CPOs obtain feedback from residents within a week of the completion of construction, which can be conducted via email, mailer, phone, or door-to-door. The feedback should be shared with team members and the Communications and Engagement team.

Obtaining post-project feedback allows TCI to optimize their communication efforts by keeping a record of what works and what does not and address complaints before they become significant issues. With the implementation of this measure, TCI and staff can continue to refine communication practices.

Non-Internet-Based Communication

TCI has in practice several means of communicating with residents concerning TCI projects that are not internet-based. Public meetings are held to gather design input and solicit design feedback. Additionally, residents are informed of upcoming public meetings via temporary signage, direct mailings, flyers, face-to-face, and door hangers. Additionally, for projects with a large impact, the Communications and Engagement team will generate advertisements and news releases. The method that is used can vary by the project and number of residents affected.

These methods of communicating with residents, when employed, are effective at reaching residents where they are and important in engaging with citizens who do not or cannot access internet-based means of communicating such as social media, email, and websites.

Recognizing that communication is not one-size-fits all, TCI's improved communication approach should improve consistency in communicating with residents about projects. Additionally, appropriate mechanisms have been developed which will reduce the risk of communicating inaccurate information, allow residents to provide direct feedback, and ensure all citizens have the opportunity to be involved in the process.

B. Complaints, Inquiries, and Requests

While TCI is addressing complaints, inquiries, and requests, we believe that improvements could be made to ensure that all complaints, inquiries, and requests are logged.

Among other duties, TCI City Council Liaisons provide information to the public on TCI policies and projects and assist with service requests. 311 requests can be created by City Council Staff, TCI divisions, or the resident, with their resolution coordinated by the City Council Liaisons. We tested a sample of 50 complaints, inquiries, and feedback received through the City Council Liaisons from all 10 districts to determine if a 311 request had been created. We determined that a 311 request had not been created for 35 of the 50 complaints, inquiries, and requests.

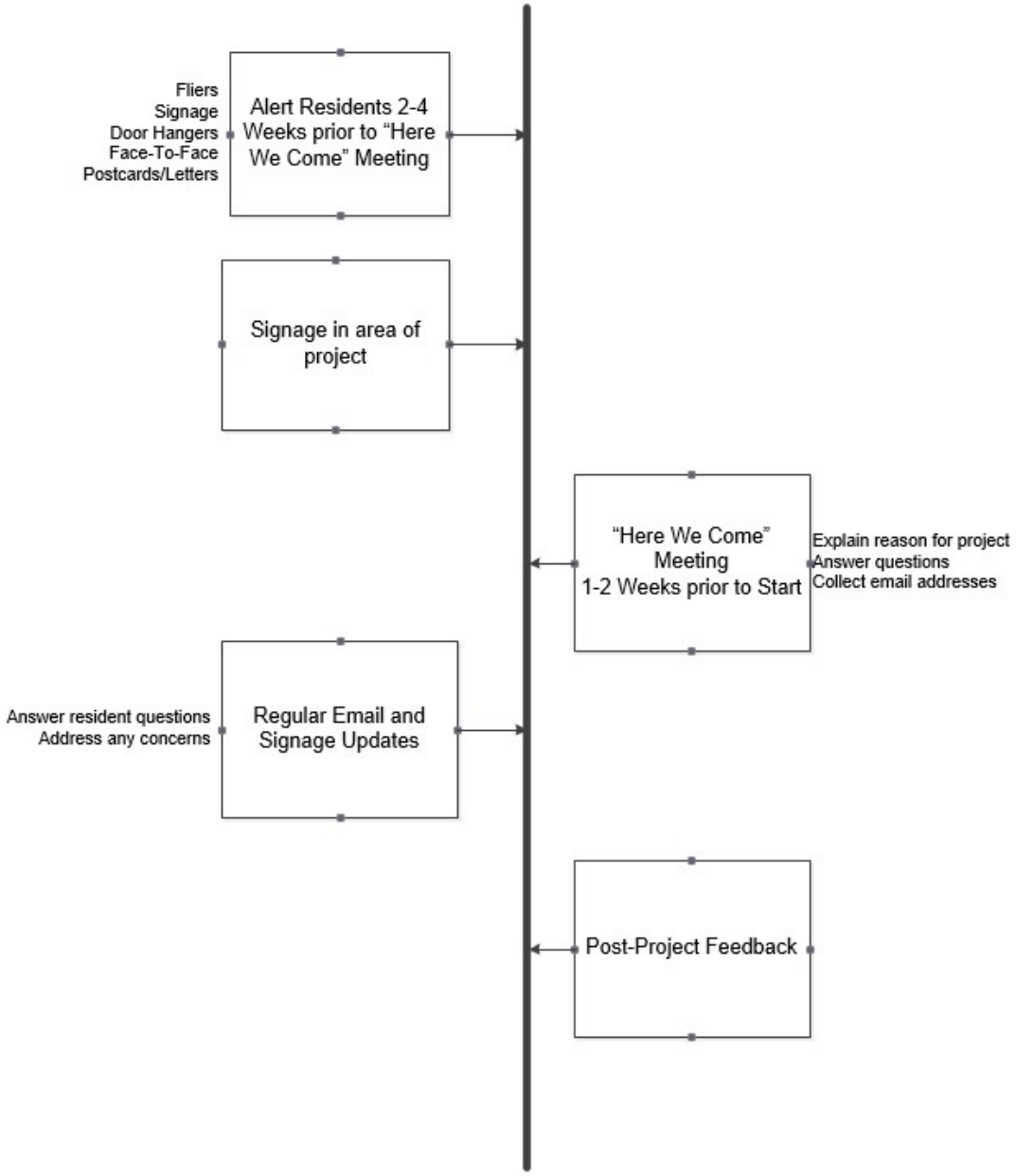
While the issues had been addressed, inputting the complaint or request into 311 allows the resident to track their issue, keeps a permanent record, and would allow TCI to spot trends that may exist within 311 data. While the audit team understands that simple inquiries may not warrant a 311 request to be logged, no clear criteria exists for when a 311 request should be submitted on behalf of a resident.

Enhancement

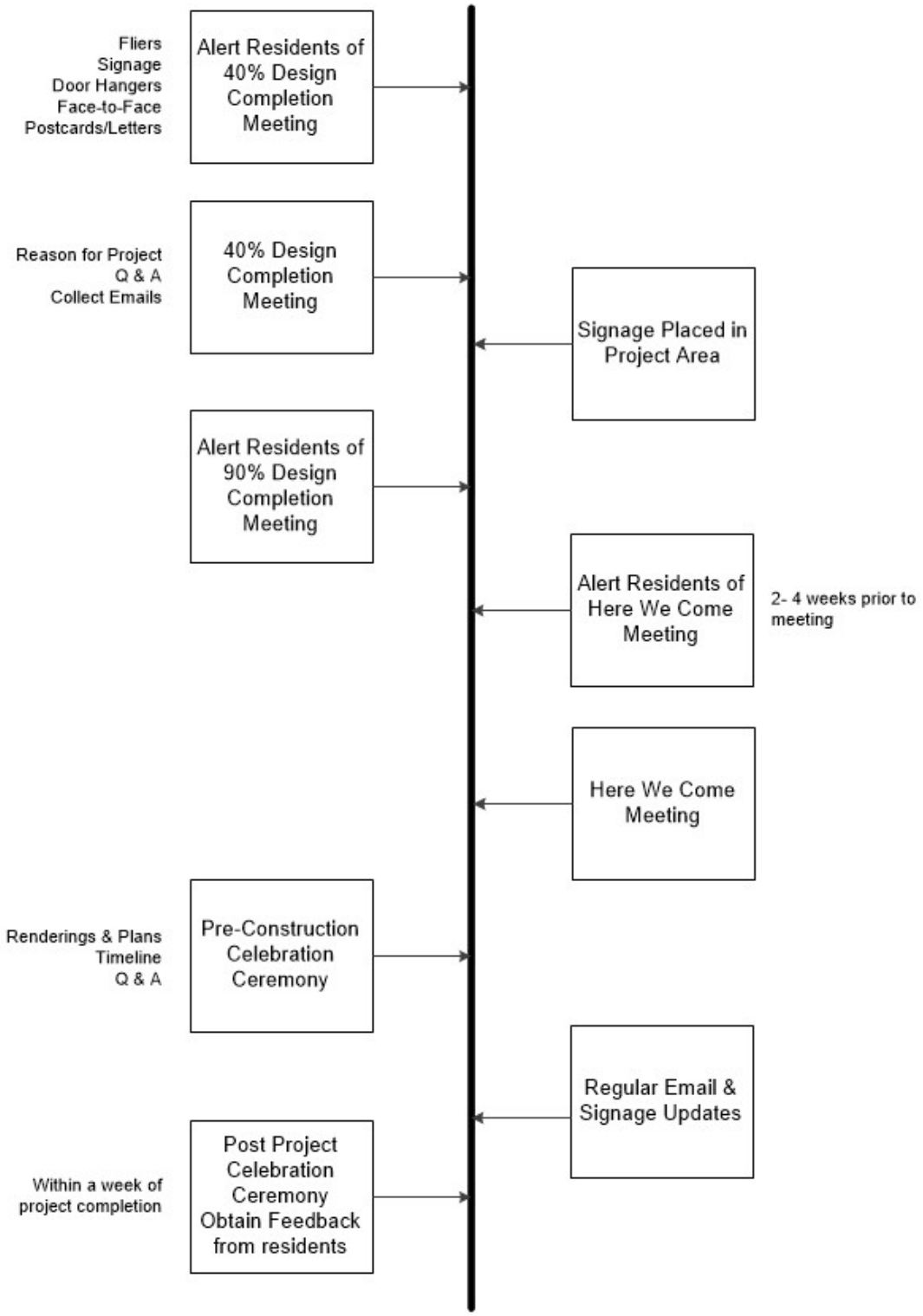
The TCI Director should work with City Council Staff to ensure all complaints and requests for service are submitted to 311.

Appendix A – Supplemental Information

TCI Resident Communication – One Month to One Year of Project Impact



TCI Resident Communication – More than One year of Project Impact



Appendix B – Staff Acknowledgement

Buddy Vargas, CIA, CFE, Audit Manager
Nastasha Leach, CIA, CGAP Auditor in Charge
Sophia Konstantinidis, Auditor
Elizabeth Reyes, Auditor

Appendix C – Management Response

CITY OF SAN ANTONIO

SAN ANTONIO TEXAS 78283-3966

October 24, 2019

Kevin W. Barthold, CPA, CIA, CISA
City Auditor
San Antonio, Texas

RE: Management's Corrective Action Plan for TCI Public Relations & Citizen Communication

Transportation & Capital Improvements has reviewed the audit report and has developed the Corrective Action Plans below corresponding to report recommendations.

Recommendation					
#	Description	Audit Report Page	Accept, Decline	Responsible Person's Name/Title	Completion Date
1	**Complaints, Inquiries, & Requests** The TCI Director should work with City Council Staff to ensure all complaints and requests for service are submitted to 311.	6	Accept	Paul Berry, TCI Chief Communications Officer	May 31, 2020
	Action plan: The City's 3-1-1 system serves as the primary mechanism for facilitating the resolution of requests for services from various city departments. It acts as a central repository tracking all requests for service and inquiries in a clear and efficient manner. TCI staff analyzes the requests in the 311 system (usually for infrastructure improvements) on a daily basis to capture service requests and to deploy the appropriate resources to resolve the issues in a timely manner consistent with the established service level agreements (SLAs). TCI uses the 311 data to address pothole repairs and larger base & pavement repairs, traffic signal outages and traffic sign maintenance, respond to project inquiries, and develop infrastructure projects and programs such as the City's Infrastructure Management Program (IMP). TCI has an internal team of staff referred to as the City Council Liaison Team (TCI Team) embedded in the Director's Office. The team is comprised of three Senior Management Analysts whose primary job responsibilities are to work directly with the Mayor's Office, City Council members, and/or the constituents to coordinate and facilitate the resolution of concerns and/or service requests, as well as to monitor and communicate on TCI's various infrastructure inventory, programs and projects. The Liaison Team coordinates and communicates with City Council staff and their constituents on a frequent basis.				

	Moving forward, to encourage City Council staff's use of the 311 system to document requests for service, the Liaison Team will work with the 3-1-1 Customer Service Office to provide training to all City Council staff on the benefits of using 3-1-1. One key benefit is that the 311 system enables requests from Council Offices to be flagged and classified as VIP, hence enabling TCI staff to prioritize and expedite the resolution of these requests. In addition, this training will also help City Council staff educate their constituents on the importance and benefits of using 3-1-1.

We are committed to addressing the recommendations in the audit report and the plan of actions presented above.

Sincerely,

Razi Hosseini, P.E., R.P.L.S
Interim Director/City Engineer
Transportation & Capital Improvements

10/24/19
Date

Roderick Sanchez
Assistant City Manager
City Manager's Office

10-24-19
Date