



WILDWOOD

Administration and Public Works Committee

June 6, 2023 Meeting

Wildwood Gazette Review

Overview

Over the last few years, the City has seen an increase in the cost of producing the bi-annual Gazette. The Department is looking at all expenditures to help save the City money, so the Department would like to propose a review of the City's current bi-annual Gazette publication and suggest considering a shift to an annual publication. Rising costs, changing communication preferences, and the significant amount of staff time involved make it necessary to evaluate the effectiveness and financial viability of the current publication strategy.

Cost Analysis

Since 2021, the costs associated with the Gazette have been steadily increasing, making it difficult to justify the current frequency of publication. Here is a breakdown of the costs for each publication since the beginning of 2021:

- 2021 Spring Gazette: \$23,487.14
- 2021 Fall Gazette: \$21,977.87
- 2022 Spring Gazette: \$23,229.29
- 2022 Fall Gazette: \$26,747.35
- 2023 Spring Gazette: \$26,138.52

It is worth noting that the City's design agency, KolbeCo, raised their hourly rate by \$10.00. While the City managed to save time on the 2023 Spring Gazette through clear communication with KolbeCo, the increased hourly rate led to higher-than-expected design costs. Specifically, KolbeCo raised its hourly rate from \$115.00 per hour to \$125.00 per hour. Additionally, the most significant expense of the Gazette lies in the production and distribution by Swift Print Communications, whose prices are expected to rise again in Fall 2023.

As responsible stewards of the City's finances, it is imperative that each edition of the Gazette justifies the financial investment it requires. The costs associated with the most recent Gazette, the 2023 Spring Gazette, were substantial:

- KolbeCo (Graphic Design): \$5,843.75
- Postmaster (Postage): \$6,189.77
- Swift Print Communications (Production and Distribution): \$14,105.00

These expenses, combined with the increasing costs over the years, highlight the need for a thorough evaluation of the Gazette's cost-effectiveness. By transitioning to an annual Gazette, the City could potentially save over \$25,000.00 per year, considering the cumulative costs of design, postage, production, and distribution.

Time Allocation

Apart from the financial costs, the Gazette also consumes a considerable amount of staff time. The Communications Manager, for instance, had to invest over 15 hours working with KolbeCo to make revisions and correct grammatical mistakes, misspellings, and formatting issues. This amount of time does not include the time it takes City staff to draft the articles that go into the Gazette. In order to get a true measure of the time it takes to draft the content within the bi-annual Gazette, the Department will be asking staff to record the time used to draft their respective articles. This time will be recorded and presented to the Administration and Public Works Committee after the release of the 2023 Fall Gazette.

Resident Preferences and Engagement

According to Wildwood's 2022 Citizen Survey, only 9.86% of residents indicated that the Gazette was the best way to receive information from the City. In contrast, 33.10% of respondents chose social media as the best communication tool, and the weekly e-newsletter received 30.99%. These results suggest a significant shift in residents' preferred communication channels.

It is crucial to strike a balance between the preferences of residents who appreciate the Gazette and the evolving communication landscape. While the 2022 Citizen Survey indicated that the Gazette was not the primary method of receiving information for the majority of respondents, there is still a segment of the community that values the publication. By conducting further research on resident preferences, the City can cater to these preferences while ensuring that our communication strategy remains responsive to the changing needs of the broader community.

Further research is warranted to determine the readership and engagement levels of the Gazette. Conducting another survey specifically focused on Gazette readership can provide valuable insights to help the City assess its effectiveness and make informed decisions regarding its future.

Returned Copies

The City mailed out 13,254 copies of the 2023 Spring Gazette. Of the 13,254 copies, 245 were returned to the City for various reasons. The City also received 300 hard copies of the 2023 Spring Gazette to have on hand at City Hall. One of the challenges the City faces with the Gazette is the number of returned copies. As per our mailing process, we send the Gazette to all addresses within the City, as we cannot determine if someone has moved into the property since the last mailing. Overall, 98.2% of the mailed copies were successfully delivered to a Wildwood address.

Communication Alternatives

To ensure that the City maintains effective communication with its residents, it is important to explore alternative methods of communication. The City could consider the following options:

- **Bring back the City Calendar:** Reintroducing the City Calendar could provide a comprehensive overview of upcoming events and important dates, serving as a valuable resource for residents. Also, the City still receives calls from residents asking about the City Calendar. This option could provide an alternative option that could cost less money than producing an edition of the Gazette.
- **Revamp the Weekly E-newsletter:** Enhancing the content and design of the City's weekly e-newsletter can make it more engaging. The weekly e-newsletter is already a popular method of communication for residents looking to stay informed about City updates. Revamping the weekly e-newsletter could increase engagement further and potentially attract new subscribers.
- **Utilize Individual Mailers:** For specific announcements or important information, targeted individual mailers can be a cost-effective way to reach residents directly. The City is able to print half page mailers. While these mailers are not professionally printed, they are great ways to communicate with the community for a fraction of the cost. The City only has to pay for the paper, ink, and postage when printing mailers at City Hall.

Conclusion

In light of the rising costs, changing resident preferences, and potential savings, the Department is requesting a motion from the Committee to initiate a review of the bi-annual Gazette publication. The Department would like to conduct a survey focused on the Gazette and other communication methods. The Department would also like to record the number of hours used by staff to produce the 2023 Fall Gazette. The Department will also conduct research on what other municipalities are doing with respect to their weekly, monthly, quarterly, bi-annually, or yearly publications.

The Department believes that this course of action will enable the City to allocate resources more effectively, align with residents' communication preferences, and demonstrate our commitment to financial prudence.