Moab City Council Agenda Item
Meeting Date: March 10, 2020

Title: Improvements to City Communication and Outreach based on Observed Discussions Around Highway Widening and Hotspot Funded Projects.

Presenter: Rani Derasary
Attachment(s):

Suggested Motion: No Motion as this is not an action item.

Background/Summary: (As drafted by Councilmember Derasary)
Since I came on the Council in 2016, we've been working as a local government and Council to improve communications and transparency with the community. Sometimes this involves the Council mainly, sometimes the staff, or a combo. Some of our work has gone well, and other parts could use improvement. I appreciate, for example, staff's recent push to get out weekly updates on the highway widening project, even if all they can say is: "we have no new info from UDOT this week." These updates are helpful.

Hopefully in our March 6 strategic planning workshop the Council will be able to discuss how communication fits into our values. I sense we all want to foster a local government that is as much as possible a helpful ally to residents, as opposed to an irksome adversary. My observations of simple things we could do to immediately makes things better include the following and I'm interested in gauging colleague and staff support:

• Adopting a policy whereby private property parcels do not get put in our meeting packets for theoretical discussion of things that might ideally happen on them (eg housing, parking etc), unless the property owner has first been notified, and agrees to such discussion. I'm not talking about large-scale urban planning that eg looks at whole zones here, but rather what appears to be dreamy visioning about certain parcels without alerting the property owner.

**Rationale:** It is stressful and I'd argue maddening even to have local government make assumptions about your private property without consulting you. It can also mislead folks reading our packets into thinking we already have permissions to take actions on certain properties when the property owner has no interest in such ideas. This wastes time and energy for everyone and I'd argue it runs counter to the respect for residents we strive to embody as a City.

• I think it's fair to say we've all either observed or participated in frustrating communication over the past few years about the downtown plan, parking, highway widening etc. I am now 4 years into discussions and attempts to improve the City's communication with our residents and I understand why some of them have reached the point of frustration of giving up on us. I'm not ready to give up. But I am done patiently waiting for things I'm told are going to change/improve to change for the better. We owe it to this community to put our money where our mouths have
been, and actually improve communication. It shouldn't be this hard to assess a project, figure out whom it impacts, and attempt to inform them - on a regular basis. Yes, vocal residents who just complain online but never actually read a paper or visit a web site or participate in meetings need to meet us half way, but there is more we can do too. One suggestion I have made and still maintain is key is: to have meetings on projects involving multiple stakeholders happen on the record, recorded, so staff and stakeholders alike can review recordings if there are no minutes should any misunderstanding occurs.

*Rationale:* We have been dealing with heated issues of late, and I would argue that this format not only makes it easier to consult the record in planning follow-up, and in reviewing what was said if disagreements or misunderstandings occur, but also encourages all parties involved to remain professional.

• Establish a clear process for allowing or denying last minute handouts at Council meetings having to do with agenda items. I understand that at times additional materials are generated last minute, or corrections are made to materials, but I would request that we clarify the grounds under which this is acceptable / a best practice. There was eg confusion about the two maps of Emma and Maxine at our February 11 meeting, and frustration about a handout at the joint City-County meeting about the parking structure.

*Rationale:* Clearly there are times we can only get something last minute, but having an agreement that strives to minimize this can spare misunderstanding, stress, mistrust, a sense Council, staff or the public are being denied adequate time to review materials, or that the packet narrative is being changed last minute.

• If possible, establish a clearer mechanism for stakeholders to sign up for updates on specific projects. This has the capacity to help both Council and staff remember and quickly capture a list of individuals who wants updates on a specific issue. I do email searches on my own as a Council member, when I eg want to respond to a lot of people interested in the same issue at once, but I'm wondering if there is any more efficient mechanism available to us Citywide for this.

*Rationale:* I sense that something like this could help with more inclusive outreach. For example, assumptions have at times been made around the North Highway 191 widening that only 2-3 parties need to be consulted, which has left out other parties that requested inclusion (eg HMK). With re-striping the back-in parking on 100S to front-in parking, it can help remind one it's not just Desert West, Zax and the Hogan who might benefit from a heads up that crews will be on the street on a potentially busy spring day, but other neighbors such as the Triangle House and Moab Backyard Theater as well.

• Invite Utah League of Cities and Towns General Counsel David Church for an annual workshop with the Council and Planning Commission.

*Rationale:* Church is known across the State for his presentations on the Open and Public Meetings Act, and trains most of us every year on the same. That said, such trainings seldom leave time to delve into the more nuanced questions Council members, staff and Planning
Commission members may face in their day to day work. Extended time with Church to address such questions could allow us valuable time to learn from him about approaches other communities are taking and best practices that we might not be on top of.