



NO: _____

**Draft for Planning Commission review
on July 13, 2009**

Council Date: July 28, 2009

**SUBJECT: Consider Creation of a Distribution List Linking E-mail
Addresses to Geographic Mailing Addresses (Study Issue), Continued from
May 12, 2009**

REPORT IN BRIEF

At Council's request, staff has explored the feasibility of creating an e-mail distribution list that links e-mail addresses to geographic mailing addresses. The purpose behind this exploration is to see if such a system would enhance the City's ability to effectively notify residents and businesses within a specific geographic area of pending Planning Commission or Council public hearings or other notices concerning City issues.

Staff has identified both advantages and disadvantages to the proposal of linking these two types of lists into a master combined distribution list. Staff recommends Council not direct staff to create a distribution list that would attempt to link as many geographical physical addresses as possible to an e-mail address. Instead, staff recommends that community members be provided the opportunity to sign up for email notices of topic-related messages, and that staff continue to use its best judgment to determine the most efficient and cost-effective method to convey public notices.

BACKGROUND

This issue was prompted by the concept of improved communications between city government and those it serves. There is no existing Citywide mailing list linking physical street addresses with e-mail addresses, and it was thought that were there such a list, it could be used to deliver important notices to residents and property owners. In concept, it would be more efficient and more effective than other methods of communication.

In its January 2009 Study and Budget Issues Workshop, Council considered OCM-02: Consider Creation of a Distribution List Linking E-mail Addresses to Geographic Mailing Addresses. This rose to the second-highest ranking within the Office of the City Manager's study issues.

This issue explores the feasibility of creating such a cross-referenced list as well as the benefits and drawbacks associated with using such a linked list for issuing official notifications to the community.

EXISTING POLICY

The following Council policies are included in the City's Community Engagement Sub-element of the General Plan:

Policy A.1: Assure that all community members have reasonable access to City information, services and programs within budgeted resources.

Policy A.3: Ensure an integrated approach to informing community members about local issues, City programs and services that reaches segments of a diverse community.

Action strategies staff has developed to support these policies include:

A.1g.: Identify communications media and communications technology which are appropriate and cost effective to provide information to and access for the community.

A.1h.: Monitor communications technology and policy developments and evaluate their potential impact on public information activities to improve communications, reduce duplication of effort, and enhance cost-effectiveness.

A.1i.: Monitor the City communications policy to guide utilization of technology for public participation and involvement.

A.2b.: Identify residents, community organizations and businesses affected by significant City actions and decisions and ensure that they receive timely and appropriate information enabling participation in planning and decision-making processes.

A.2c.: Ensure that effective public notification and access, in accordance with relevant laws and City Council policies, are provided to enhance meaningful community participation in the policy making process."

A.2d. Notify community members of opportunities for involvement in policy-making and program planning.

Identify communications media and telecommunications technology which are appropriate and cost effective to provide information and access for the community.

Provide reasonable and fair citizen access to information and services within budgeted resources.

DISCUSSION

Current Notification Systems

The City has numerous reasons for contacting community members, and a variety of ways with which to contact them. Variables include the type of message, the intended audience, and the method of communication. Generally speaking, the type of message and the intended audience dictate the method of communication used.

The most urgent need is generally related to emergency information, such as an evacuation or shelter-in-place order. A telephone voice autodialer system, linked to geographical information system (GIS) map data, can place calls to all residences and businesses within geographically-defined boundaries. This system was designed for emergency use only, and by contract is used solely for that purpose.

The next tier of defined-area public contact is non-emergency in nature and is the required noticing that takes place related to land issue public hearings. Notices may also at times be sent to those living and working near a construction site or some other activity that may cause a level of disruption. These notices are usually sent to all properties within a particular number of feet or blocks from the activity or event site. The Municipal Code mandates certain public noticing and specifies the delivery method. Sunnyvale, like most agencies, typically uses the U.S. Postal Service to send out notices to properties within the defined area.

The specific method of providing all other notices is determined by staff operationally, and typically includes some form or combination of e-mail, postal service, posted bulletin, hand-out, City Web site, KSUN, news releases or paid newspaper advertisements. Within the Community Engagement Sub-element there are specific action strategies, cited in the Existing Policy section above, that prompt staff to identify cost-effective communications tools with which to reach the public as well as to provide reasonable and fair access to information.

Use of E-Mail

This study contemplates the use of e-mail to improve the City's notification processes. Specifically, it considers the potential benefits associated with linking e-mail addresses to geographic addresses, so that messages could be easily delivered to people living in defined geographic areas (e.g., planning areas or neighborhoods).

Option 1

The original idea behind this study issue was to explore the possible expansion of existing e-mail lists in both coverage and amount of information. Ideally, the new master list would be as close to Citywide as possible, and would incorporate, at a minimum, the proper e-mail address and the physical street address linked to that e-mail address. In the ideal of having a list that links every street address to an e-mail address, the City would gain noteworthy advantages in two specific ways: notices would have no associated printing or postage costs, and notices, updates and reminders could be sent and delivered within minutes. Even if conventional U.S. Postal Service notices were still used as a primary notification tool, the e-mail notices could provide an excellent vehicle to remind members of the public of meetings and to pass on any last-minute changes in times or locations of those meetings.

There is also an obvious advantage to redundancy in message delivery. Providing information through multiple venues increases the chance that an affected member of the public will actually become aware of a pending action early enough to participate in the government process.

Staff has, however, identified several serious challenges to establishing and maintaining a mailing list that links e-mail addresses to street addresses, the most significant of which is keeping it up-to-date and accurate. This and other challenges are detailed in the "Recommendation" section later in this report.

Costs for attempting to list all geographic addresses to an e-mail address are related to staff time used to supervise volunteers canvassing the entire City. Ongoing costs, based on a Direct Marketing Association (DMA) statistic of a 31 percent churn rate for e-mail users changing their addresses annually, are related to the need to re-validate all Citywide e-mail addresses at least twice a year. This validation would require a mail or volunteer contact to every address in order to keep the error rate at a satisfactory level. While it is difficult to estimate the amount of staff time required until the project actually gets underway and we gain some experience, a very conservative estimate is that it would take a minimum of 1,000 hours of staff time, valued at \$51,640, to launch and conduct the initial data collection, using volunteers, and a minimum of 500 hours a year, valued at \$25,820, to maintain the list. For staff to undertake this work without the use of volunteers would lead to a very significant increase in cost to the City.

Option 2

It would be possible for the City to develop a website that provided community members the option of registering with a listserve that linking their name, email address and geographic address. While this would capture only that

segment of the community exhibiting a proactive interest in participating, it would represent a start in terms of capturing related data. Staff questions the value of such a listserve, as its usefulness would be quite limited. It would not preclude the necessity of redundant mailings for legal notices, and would require on-going updates to ensure that addresses stayed current. Staff estimates that it would cost approximately \$5200 to develop such a system, and \$13,000 to maintain it.

Option 3

The City currently uses e-mail to notify community members regarding a variety of topics. Some City departments, including the Department of Community Services, Library and Office of the City Manager have developed e-mail lists over a period of years, updating them as information is available (e.g., City's utility billing system and Recreation class registration information). These lists could be combined as a resource list to which the City could send an invitation to community members to provide a current e-mail address for the purpose of expanding our e-mail reach. Those who respond with a request to be included on the City's e-mail list could receive a variety of informational e-mails. These notices would likely be topic-related as opposed to geographically-related.

Development of a topic-driven e-mail list can – and already is – driven by an e-bot system. The City has an existing e-bot system in place. The e-bot system enables anyone with Web access to sign up to receive notices when particular items are updated on the City's Web site. The constraining factor in use of the e-bot system at this time is an issue of staff resources within the various City departments. The e-bot system is not automated; instead, when a visitor signs up for notifications, they are added to an e-mail distribution list. When a staff member makes a change to a Web page deemed significant enough to notify subscribers, or when a new Report to Council on a specific topic is created, an e-mail notice is sent to that distribution list. Automating this process is possible, but under an automated scenario, any change made to a Web page would trigger an e-mail to subscribers. Thus, a change in punctuation, the correction of a misspelling or other trivial changes would prompt an e-mail, resulting in a potential onslaught of less-than-useful updates to the e-bot subscriber.

A topic-based system eliminates the daunting task of keeping a geographically-based list accurate. Instead, a member of the public may simply request to be notified via e-mail of any new information related to a specific information topic (e.g., changes to Council agendas, new community events, Reports to Council related to specific topics, and the like). No additional resources are required to maintain these existing services.

Option 4

Council had also expressed interest in the development of a City website where community members could choose to sign up for any or all electronic transaction options (e.g., pay utility bills online; register for recreation classes; opt to receive email notification of reports regarding planning issues, etc.) as opposed to the current need to navigate several different sites to do so. Staff appreciate the benefits associated with this concept, but the technology does not currently exist to allow web users to register for a variety of online transactions using only one password. When this technology becomes available, staff will renew exploration of that possibility.

In the meantime, staff is able to provide one website that informs the user of all City transactions able to be completed online, and that links the user to each of those different sites to register for that service. This could be accomplished within existing budgets.

FISCAL IMPACT

Included in each of the options described above.

PUBLIC CONTACT

Public contact was made by posting the Council agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall, at the Sunnyvale Senior Center, Community Center and Department of Public Safety; and by making the agenda and report available at the Sunnyvale Public Library, the Office of the City Clerk and on the City's Web site.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Create and maintain a Citywide list of e-mail addresses correlated to physical addresses within the boundaries of the City of Sunnyvale.
2. Provide opportunity for members of the public to voluntarily subscribe to a list serve or other database function linking e-mail addresses to physical street addresses.
3. Continue current staff efforts directed toward the implementation of systems whereby members of the public are able to subscribe, on a non-address-specific basis, to services notifying them of changes to Web site listings and other topic-based information items.
4. Create a single website identifying all possible online City transactions, as well as a link from that website to each individual website where online transactions can be made.
5. Direct the city manager to have staff continue to use its best judgment to determine the most efficient and cost-effective method to convey public notices, provided that specific noticing methods described in the Sunnyvale Municipal Code are adhered to.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends alternatives 3, 4 and 5:

Continue current staff efforts directed toward the implementation of systems whereby members of the public are able to subscribe, on a non-address-specific basis, to services notifying them of changes to Web site listings and other topic-based information items; Create a single website identifying all possible online City transactions, as well as a link from that website to each individual website where online transactions can be made; Direct the city manager to have staff continue to use its best judgment to determine the most efficient and cost-effective method to convey public notices, provided that specific noticing methods described in the Sunnyvale Municipal Code are adhered to.

Staff believes establishing and maintaining an accurate linked distribution list is not feasible. Even if staff and volunteer resources were adequate to create such a list, it would not remain accurate beyond a very short time period. When a person does elect to provide an e-mail address and a physical street address, there may be a disconnect between home and business street addresses, and personal and business e-mail addresses. According to the DMA study, the average person maintains three e-mail addresses: a work address, a personal address, such as a Gmail, Yahoo Mail or other similar free services, and an address provided as part of the package from their Internet service provider (ISP). Users may use these, plus additional addresses, in particular ways. One growing trend is to use one e-mail address only for family, friends and others from whom the user actually wants to receive mail while another address is used for sign-up offers, product registrations, etc., and the third is a general public address. In this configuration, it is likely that only the first address – the one used by friends and family – is checked with any frequency. It also seems unlikely that this address would be provided to the City.

The DMA also found that e-mail addresses are changing at the rate of 31 percent per year. That is, about one in every three people will change his or her e-mail address in a year. This becomes an even greater challenge because not only is there no address-correction service for e-mail addresses, as with postal mail, but many people do not actually close an old e-mail address. They simply stop using it as they adopt a new address. Thus mail sent to the old address does not get returned as undeliverable; it simply sits in the mailbox unread. While the City may have the best of intentions in e-mailing notices to a resident or local business, there are some who may consider this an unsolicited mailing that is viewed as spam. One of the reasons given for the amount of churn in e-mail addresses is that owners

are trying to escape the large amount of spam that gets sent to e-mail addresses every day.

Legal noticing requirements dictate that a linked distribution list supplement, not supplant, many mailings, and therefore represents an additional expense. Given the City's focus on core services during the current budget crisis, staff can not justify the time and money needed to create and maintain such a list. All things considered, there is such a limited advantage to having the list that it dissuades the effort.

Staff does recommend that efforts directed toward providing community members the option to receive topic-driven notices via e-mail be continued, and that geographic-based distribution lists be used to help publicize that option. In addition, staff believe many community members would benefit from a single City website identifying all opportunities for online City transactions.

Reviewed by:

Robert Walker, Assistant City Manager
Prepared by: John Pilger, Communications Officer

Approved by:

Gary M. Luebbers
City Manager

Attachments

- A. Study Issue Paper OCM-02: Consider Creation of a Distribution List Linking E-mail Addresses to Geographic Mailing Addresses

Proposed 2009 Council Study Issue

**OCM-02 Consider Creation of a Distribution List Linking Email
Addresses to Geographic Mailing Addresses**

Lead Department	Office of the City Manager		
Element or Sub-element	7.2 Community Engagement SubElement		
New or Previous	New		
Status	Pending	History	1 year ago None 2 years ago None

1. What are the key elements of the issue? What precipitated it?

This issue would explore the possible linkage of email addresses to geographic mailing addresses such that the City could contact residents and businesses by email, in lieu of or in addition to, regular postal service. The feasibility of such a linkage City-wide would be explored, as would the benefits and drawbacks associated with utilizing such linkages for sending official notifications to the community (e.g., notification of planned developments).

2. How does this relate to the General Plan or existing City Policy?

The following Council policies are included in the City's Community Engagement SubElement of the General Plan:

Policy A.1:

"Assure that all community members have reasonable access to City information, services and programs within budgeted resources."

Policy A.3:

"Ensure an integrated approach to informing community members about local issues, City programs and services that reaches segments of a diverse community."

Action strategies staff has developed to support these policies include:

A.1g.: "Identify communications media and communications technology which are appropriate and cost effective to provide information to and access for the community."

A.1h.: "Monitor communications technology and policy developments and evaluate their potential impact on public information activities to improve communications, reduce duplication of effort, and enhance cost-effectiveness."

A.1i.: "Monitor the City communications policy to guide utilization of technology for public participation and involvement."

A.2b.: "Identify residents, community organizations and businesses affected by significant City actions and decisions and ensure that they receive timely and appropriate information enabling participation in planning and decision-making"

processes.

A.2c.: "Ensure that effective public notification and access, in accordance with relevant laws and City Council policies, are provided to enhance meaningful community participation in the policy making process."

A.2d. "Notify community members of opportunities for involvement in policy-making and program planning."

Policy 7.2A.4 is to "Identify communications media and telecommunications technology which are appropriate and cost effective to provide information and access for the community."

Policy 7.2D.3 seeks to "Provide reasonable and fair citizen access to information and services within budgeted resources."

3. Origin of issue

- Council Member(s)** Vice Mayor Hamilton
- General Plan**
- City Staff**
- Public**
- Board or Commission** none

4. Multiple Year Project? No **Planned Completion Year** 2009

5. Expected participation involved in the study issue process?

- Does Council need to approve a work plan?** Yes
- Does this issue require review by a Board/Commission?** Yes
- If so, which?**
Planning Commission
- Is a Council Study Session anticipated?** No
- What is the public participation process?**
Public hearings conducted with the City Council and Planning Commission

6. Cost of Study

- Operating Budget Program covering costs**
N/A
- Project Budget covering costs**
N/A
- Budget modification \$ amount needed for study**
- Explain below what the additional funding will be used for**

7. Potential fiscal impact to implement recommendations in the Study approved by Council

Capital expenditure range None

Operating expenditure range None
New revenues/savings range None
Explain impact briefly

8. Staff Recommendation

Staff Recommendation Defer

If 'For Study' or 'Against Study', explain

Staff recommends this study be deferred pending review and analysis of administrative functions related to public notification. Council policy supporting the exploration of technology to improve public notification processes already exists. This issue does not seek to change Council policy--rather, it seeks to explore a specific *method* of public notification (email). Staff therefore consider this to be an operational, or administrative, issue. Should Council wish to pursue changes in City policy subsequent to staff's administrative review, this Study Issue would serve as a platform from which to proceed.

9. Estimated consultant hours for completion of the study issue

Managers	Role	Manager	Hours			
	Lead	Walker, Robert	Mgr CY1:	20	Mgr CY2:	0
			Staff CY1:	0	Staff CY2:	0
	Interdep	Nguyen, Cuong	Mgr CY1:	20	Mgr CY2:	0
			Staff CY1:	0	Staff CY2:	0
			Total Hours CY1:	40		
			Total Hours CY2:	0		

Note: If staff's recommendation is 'For Study' or 'Against Study', the Director should note the relative importance of this Study to other major projects that the Department is currently working on or that are soon to begin, and the impact on existing services/priorities.

Reviewed by


 Department Director

9-3-08

 Date

Approved by



City Manager

9/3/08

Date

Addendum

A. Board / Commission Recommendation

Issue Created Too Late for B/C Ranking

Board or Commission	Rank	Rank
	Rank 1 year ago	Rank 2 years ago
Arts Commission		
Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee		
Board of Building Code Appeals		
Board of Library Trustees		
Child Care Advisory Board		
Heritage Preservation Commission		
Housing and Human Services Commission		
Parks and Recreation Commission		
Personnel Board		
Planning Commission		

Board or Commission ranking comments

This issue was inadvertently omitted from the issues presented to the Planning Commission for ranking. If Council acts to defer the issue, the Planning Commission will rank it the coming year.

B. Council

Council Rank (no rank yet)
Work Plan Review Date (blank)
Study Session Date (blank)
RTC Date (blank)
Actual Complete Date (blank)
Staff Contact