



## **CITY OF KIRKLAND**

### **City Manager's Office**

**123 Fifth Avenue, Kirkland, WA 98033 425.587.3001**

**[www.ci.kirkland.wa.us](http://www.ci.kirkland.wa.us)**

---

## **MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Dave Ramsay, City Manager

**From:** Marilynne Beard, Assistant City Manager  
Marie Stake, Communications Program Manager

**Date:** April 30, 2008

**Subject:** PUBLIC EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION STRATEGIES REGARDING CITY FINANCES

## **BACKGROUND**

At the 2008 City Council retreat, information was presented on how best to communicate about the City's current financial condition and future outlook, specifically the 2009–2010 budget. Communication strategies presented included:

- Developing key messages
- Increasing media relations (TV, newsprint and web)
- Increasing public speaking opportunities and skills

The presentation also included an overview of public participation concepts and planning processes that can provide meaningful ways to engage community members in either helping to resolve or reduce the long term structural imbalance between revenues and expenditures. Staff presented key public participation (P2) concepts focused on the importance of the P2 planning process which results in determining the appropriate level(s) of participation and the appropriate tools to engage the public. The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Involvement is attached for reference.

The purpose of this memo is to provide an outline of proposed communications and public involvement strategies and associated costs so that the City Council can provide direction to staff about which to pursue.

## **COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES**

The City Council is about to begin its 2009-2010 budget deliberations. Its discussion around the financial gap will need to raise public awareness about the difficult choices that will need to be made by the City Council for the coming biennium. Kirkland has tried a number of different approaches in the past to inform and engage the public about the City budget. At the Retreat, the City Council expressed the desire

to have timely communications aimed at educating and informing the community about:

- Revenue sources, how they work and trends (especially property tax)
- Services provided and expenditure trends
- Current and forecasted financial condition and budget-balancing options

It is anticipated that the following strategies can create a renewed level of interest by community members.

***Strategy I: Develop Key Messages***

As shared at the March retreat, the City's communications strategies will be most effective if key messages are developed and used consistently by City officials. "Key messages" need to describe the situation in straightforward terms that are simple and memorable. The key messages should reflect that the financial gap is a serious issue that the City is addressing reasonably, sensibly, and responsibly.

Sample key messages were presented in the staff memo prepared for the retreat. Although Council did not have an opportunity to comment on the key messages, we propose incorporating the following key messages in written materials, presentations and other materials:

- The City of Kirkland is committed to providing quality public services to its residents and businesses.
- Kirkland residents value the level and quality of services they receive. These services are provided by City staff and employee compensation represents 70% of the budget.
- The City's expenses are growing faster than the revenue base due in large part to tax-limiting initiatives and the economic downturn.
- The City must live within its means and prepare a balanced budget.
- The Kirkland City Council will need to make difficult choices to balance the budget that may include service level cuts, tax increases, or both.
- The City's highest priority continues to be the protection of the health and safety of the community.
- The Kirkland City Council needs the community's input about how to balance the budget and create a more sustainable financial future.

Developing and agreeing on key messages is the first essential step in communicating to the public about issues associated with the upcoming budget, city finances and the City's financial outlook. Once key messages are identified, they need to be articulated consistently throughout the process by City officials so that the organization speaks with one voice. While individuals may not agree on the solution to the problem, there is value in presenting a unified message to the public about the nature of the problem and the range of solutions.

Staff recommends that the Council discuss and refine the key messages offered by staff at the May 7 meeting so that staff can begin productions of written and presentation materials to support the communications plan described below.

## ***Strategy II: Increase & Enhance Media Relations***

Once key messages are identified, they can be communicated through various media. For purposes of this staff memo, newsprint includes the City's newsletter (City Update), as well as local newspapers, such as the Kirkland Courier Reporter. Additionally, television media is available including the City's government access channels – KGOV (Channel 21) and KLIFE (Channel 75) as well as web-based media including the City's website which has the capability to video stream.

Some ways to increase and enhance media coverage regarding City finances is through:

- **News Releases.** News releases are intended to garner the interest of media (TV, print, radio) so that a feature story is printed or aired. City news releases are generally distributed internally (City Council, City Manager's Office, City Public Information Officers, KirkNet and boards and commissions).

External distribution is made via the City website (News Room) to TV, radio and newspaper media and to community contacts (Business associations, other jurisdictions, neighborhood associations).

*Recommendation:* News releases should be issued where there is a public comment (e.g. public hearing) opportunity, community involvement opportunity (e.g. open houses), or when the City Council is about to or has made a major decision about changes to levels of service or revenue.

- **Guest Editorials.** An editorial is an analysis of or commentary on news events or public concerns written by someone whose credibility is based on his/her knowledge of a particular subject and/or position in an organization. Although guest editorials may be submitted by City officials, they may not be published. Publication is at the discretion of the newspaper's editor.

*Recommendation:* It is recommended that a guest editorial authored by the City Council be drafted following the acceptance of key messages and that this first editorial announce the City Council's commitment to informing the community about the budget issues. Additional editorials could be drafted when a major policy decision has been made by the City Council as a means to explain the reasoning behind the decision.

## ***Strategy III: Enhance City Newsletter***

The City's newsletter (City Update) can be an effective communication tool that has the potential to reach all residents and businesses. In the 2006 citizen survey, most residents indicated that Kirkland was doing a "good" (54%) or "excellent" (10%), job of keeping citizens informed. Those who said communication was "only fair" (25%) or "poor" (8%) tended to say that a better job could be done via a newsletter. When asked to choose from a set list of ways to disseminate City information, 35% preferred to get information from a City newsletter.

For a number of years, City Update was designed, produced and mailed by the City directly to homes and businesses within city limits. The publication ranged from four to eight pages and was mailed quarterly. In 2002, funding was reduced due to budget constraints and the City moved to its current format.

The current City Update is published in the Kirkland Courier Reporter ("Courier"). The Courier was purchased in 2007 by Sound Publishing Company and became a weekly publication; instead of a monthly publication. The Courier's current distribution is 26,400 (including the potential annexation area) with limited distribution to multi-family (condos and apartments).

City Update is published in the first edition of each month. The publication is a full page advertisement which costs \$1,580 per month (with the recent addition of color). The annual cost is \$18,960. Although the Courier posts its editions on the web, it does not post paid advertisements.

Since the City began publishing City Update in the Courier, more advanced and less expensive printing methods (digital printing and web press) have become available. The annual funding for City Update may be more effectively utilized by re-instituting the City-produced publication.

A preliminary cost estimate for a City-produced newsletter indicates that the current budget could support a stand-alone, four- or eight-page publication (similar to the original City Update publication) produced up to three times per year. This estimate includes printing and postage. Based upon the average of three vendors' estimates, the cost to print 20,000 copies of an 8-page, 4-color publication on newsprint-type paper is \$2,200 and the associated cost for postage is approximately \$2,200. One vendor's estimate of the number of households and businesses is 16,000. Extra copies can be available as counter copies at City and public facilities. A sample of a similar publication from the City of Shoreline was provided in the retreat packet.

The 2008 budget could be used to publish at least one or two issues in 2008 (if current publication in the Courier ceases as of June, 2008). It is estimated that three publications could be produced annually in the coming biennium if the same level of funding is approved.

A multi-page direct mail edition of City Update would reach most households and businesses and could be very effective in informing the public about the budget situation. An "All About the Budget" edition would incorporate the key messages agreed to by City Council and contain:

- A description of the problem and causes
- Sources of revenue
- Services provided
- Explanation of how property taxes work
- Discussion of Council's decision process and how public input will be sought and used

*Recommendation:* An inaugural issue should be published that would be dedicated to the budget. Follow-up issues could have dedicated feature stories about the budget issues, their status and how citizens can stay informed and be involved. As an alternative, a one-time publication could be mailed and the one-page ad in the Courier could be retained as the normal publication.

#### ***Strategy IV: Educational Video***

The cost to develop a stand alone educational video on budget issues/city finances depends on several factors including the length of the video and the use of graphics and animation. Time would be needed to develop a script (based upon the key messages), schedule production and complete film editing. IT staff estimates that a short video could be produced by mid-July. The video would be aired on KGOV and KLIFE and streamed as “On Demand” programming from the City’s website.

The City’s Multimedia Services (MMS) provides consultation on developing story ideas for stand alone program videos as well as for “Currently Kirkland,” the monthly news magazine show that airs on KLIFE, Channel 75. The Video Production Specialist’s time is funded half-time as a regular general fund employee and half-time from “one-time” funded special projects. The regular funding covers City Council meetings, program scheduling, and other administrative tasks such as streaming video, equipment maintenance, etc. In order for MMS to produce a stand alone video for the budget process, the Video Production Specialist’s labor would need to be charged back to the General Fund. The estimated cost of a stand-alone video produced in-house could be as much as \$10,000.

As an additional or alternative method, Currently Kirkland, the monthly magazine show on KLIFE, should contain a budget piece centered around the key messages. Based upon the current production schedule, the earliest show that the budget messages could be incorporated is the July show.

*Recommendations:* It is recommended that a script be developed based around the key messages and be incorporated into the July edition of Currently Kirkland. Additionally, “basic budget” information could be included in future editions. Further direction is needed from Council regarding whether to produce a stand-alone video.

#### ***Strategy V: On-line Budget Calculator***

The retreat staff memo described how some cities use a web-based tool for the purposes of helping citizens understand how to “balance the budget.” The Council has expressed an interest in developing a budget calculator tool for educational purposes.

The Association of Washington Cities (AWC) created a standard budget calculator that can be loaded onto the City’s website. AWC’s calculator is developed as a sequel-based (SQL) application; however, AWC has advised us it is working to correct administrative and reporting capabilities of the application. The calculator is being pulled from its website in the coming weeks and won’t be available until later this summer. As presented in the retreat memo, the City of St. Paul, Minnesota developed a customized on-line budget calculator that appears to be SQL based. A request has been made by Kirkland about the possibility of obtaining the code from St. Paul. A response was not received at the time of finalizing this staff memo. Kirkland’s IT Department does not have in-house staff that could create the SQL-based application. If Kirkland was to hire a programmer, the hourly rate is estimated at \$75 to \$100 per hour. We do not have an estimate of the number of hours needed to develop the budget calculator.

A second type of calculator, currently used by the cities of Spokane Valley and Mukilteo, is essentially an Excel spreadsheet. It is possible to download the spreadsheet and customize it for Kirkland's purposes or to create one in-house.

*Recommendation:* The City currently does not have the in-house expertise to develop an SQL-based on-line budget calculator and staff will further explore options to obtain one that meets our purposes. IT, Finance and CMO staff will further explore the functionality of an Excel-based on-line application. However, it could not be available until the fall. Council direction is needed regarding whether or not to continue to pursue this tool for the future.

### ***Strategy VI: Create and Promote a Budget Speakers Bureau***

A speaker's bureau can be an effective means to continuously and consistently carry the City's key messages in a person-to-person format. The bureau would be comprised of City Council members and key staff who would be available to speak at neighborhood, business and community association meetings. Speakers would be equipped with printed materials, a PowerPoint slide show and other relevant resources.

As a means to enhance the public speaking skills of the speaker's bureau, the City could engage the services of a communications consultant to work with Council and key staff on effective techniques for staying on message and responding to the public. Michael Buschmohle, Applause Associates, is a communications consultant that has worked with a number of cities and City Councils in Washington on similar projects. He estimated a cost of \$3,000 for a full day of training or \$1,500 for a half-day training session that could be supplemented with individual coaching at a rate of \$250 for 90 minutes.

*Recommendation:* It is recommended that a consultant be hired to advise Council members and key management staff on how to best communicate the budget information. Promoting the speaker's bureau will be coordinated by the Communications Program Manager using the City's various communications tools.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The section above describes the communications strategies which can be considered the techniques associated with the **"Inform"** level of public involvement on the IAP2 Spectrum. During the Council's discussion about public involvement in the budget process, some general principles were outlined concerning the level and type of public involvement that would be appropriate for the upcoming budget. Under the "inform" mode of P2, the promise is that "We will keep you informed."

Council believes that **educating and informing** the public about the City's finances and the current challenges was most important and should be initiated as soon as possible. We should also inform the community about the decision-making process and how they will be involved. Council also agreed that public involvement would be most helpful once the Council has narrowed the tool set to a range of options that the public could comment on.

Council was clear that the budget decisions would be in the hands of the City Council (including whether or not to seek voter-approved tax increases) and that the public involvement effort is most appropriate at the **“Consult”** level (i.e. “We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.”). Methods that are typically used at the consult level include soliciting public comment at hearings, using feedback cards, focus groups and public meetings. As noted earlier, an important consideration is how the input will be used by the Council in their decision-making process. In a “consult” mode, using voting or workshop-type formats can be misleading because it may imply that the input will be directly reflected in the Council’s decision rather than simply taken into consideration.

Specific methods that we may consider include:

- Webpage with email feedback and streaming of educational video
- Response forms included in mailing
- Speakers bureau with facilitated discussion and recording of comments
- Small format meetings (speakers bureau with facilitated discussion) out in community
- Open houses
- Informational materials at community fairs and farmer’s markets

Our efforts will need to reach a broad cross-section of interests:

- Age/diversity
- Homeowners and renters
- Single family and multi-family
- Small, medium and large businesses
- Involved citizens (opinion leaders) and those that typically aren’t involved
- Internal stakeholders (employees, unions, board and commission members)
- Public and non-profit institutions

Each stakeholder group has unique interests and will respond to different modes of communication. They will be compelled to participate for different reasons and so our outreach should be designed to capture their input on the issues most important to them in the venue most accessible to them. To that end, we recommend that we begin contacting representatives from each of these interest groups to determine the venue and timing best suited to their needs. We already have a number of established groups to work with including the Business Roundtable, Neighborhood Associations, Chamber of Commerce, etc. and it may take some time to get on their agendas. The work plan discussed below demonstrates the need for quick and focused attention in order to conduct a meaningful process before the budget recommendation is prepared.

**WORKPLAN AND BUDGET**

Before the public input phase can begin, the educational process needs to be well underway. One of the most important first steps will be Council’s agreement on key messages and endorsement of a special mail-out edition of City Update to begin the education process. Staff should begin the process of scheduling presentation to neighborhoods, businesses and community groups. A work plan is shown below that suggests a proposed sequence of activities. Major tasks and milestones include:

<b>“Inform”</b>	{	May 7	Budget Study Session – Key Messages Identified
		May–June	Prepare City Update Special Edition and Web Page Initiate Stakeholder Contacts for Public Involvement Phase
		May 29	Second Budget Study Session
		June 5	Mid-Year Budget Meeting – General Policy Guidance Provided by Council Media Contacts (press release and/or guest editorial)
		Mid-June	Print and Mail City Update and Publish Web Page
		Early July	Communications Training
		July 15	Budget Balancing Strategies Finalized
		Mid-July	Currently Kirkland Feature Story
<b>“Consult”</b>	{	July–Mid-Sep	Community Meetings
		Sep 16	Report Back to Council and Community on Input Public Hearing
		Sep–Oct	City Manager prepares Budget Recommendation
		Oct 21	Budget Transmitted to City Council Media Contacts (press release and/or guest editorial)
		Nov–Dec	Budget Study Sessions and Adoption Public Hearing
		Dec	Second Issue of City Update regarding Budget Outcomes (including how public input was used)

In order to support these efforts, staff recommends that selected temporary staff currently devoted to annexation be redirected to the development of the newsletter, presentation materials and website. Two positions—an Administrative Assistant and ICMA Local Management Fellow—were funded through the end of 2008 for annexation. These staff would be reassigned to work on this effort and related budget documents.

	<b>Direct Costs (excludes staff support)</b>		
	<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>	
Special Edition of City Update	4,400	4,400	One special edition—20,000 @ 8 pages
Educational Video	6,500	14,000	Range based on content
Communications Consultant	3,250	5,500	Half day with individual consults or full day with individual consults
General Printed Materials	2,500	5,000	
<b>Total</b>	<b>16,650</b>	<b>28,900</b>	

Funding for the staff support and the communication elements would come from annexation study savings.

**SUMMARY**

Educating the public about City finances will need to be an ongoing effort that extends beyond this budget cycle. The 2009-2010 Budget process is approaching quickly and time is of the essence if meaningful public input is sought in time to help shape the budget. In order to move forward with this plan, Council direction is needed on May 7.

1. What changes/additions/deletions are needed to the proposed key messages?
2. Should the City Update be produced as a four to eight page mail-out instead of a full-page ad in the Courier on an ongoing basis, as a single special edition or not at all?
3. Would Council like to further pursue a short educational video?
4. Would Council like to further pursue a budget calculator for future use?
5. Is the Council interested in scheduling communications training?
6. Does the City Council support redirecting annexation staff to assist with the budget process?



International Association  
for Public Participation

# IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

*Increasing Level of Public Impact*

## Public participation goal

### Inform

To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

### Consult

To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.

### Involve

To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

### Collaborate

To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

### Empower

To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

## Promise to the public

We will keep you informed.

We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.

We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.

We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.

We will implement what you decide.

## Example techniques

- Fact sheets
- Web sites
- Open houses

- Public comment
- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Public meetings

- Workshops
- Deliberative polling

- Citizen advisory committees
- Consensus-building
- Participatory decision-making

- Citizen juries
- Ballots
- Delegated decision