

COUNTY OF YORK

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 26, 2017
TO: York County Board of Supervisors
FROM: Neil A. Morgan, County Administrator
SUBJECT: Communications Audit Phase 1



As we work toward reporting out the status of the Board's Strategic priorities, I want to share the first phase of our external communications audit. This audit is assigned to our Public Affairs Manager and is one of the initiatives under your priority of *effective and outstanding communications and civic engagement*.

As part of our newly organized Public Affairs Division, I encouraged our Manager to begin with the areas she has been working with the most closely. Hopefully, you have already noticed progress in our external communications efforts.

This Phase 1 report includes yorkcounty.gov, social media, and Citizen News along with the New Resident Kit. These are the external communications efforts, along with the County Cable channels, that probably reach the most residents on a regular basis. In the audit you will see how we are experiencing growth in audience and moving toward best practices in all of these areas. Some of my top line takeaways include:

- Increased importance for County promotion and showcasing on the website.
- Continued growth in returning visits and mobile access to yorkcounty.gov.
- Emphasis on making the new website design and navigation a user-friendly experience to encourage more engagement and facilitate transparency.
- Exponential growth in social media presence and following.
- The need/value for managing and executing real-time engagement on social media.
- Opportunity to update the look and feel of the highly valued Citizen News.
- Opportunities to introduce new branded sections in Citizen News –tied to strategic priorities, reader engagement, and county promotional opportunities.

In addition to these observations, I would also note that the plan for our communications to be more coordinated is being realized. In just the past few months, we can see examples of

consistent messaging shared across multiple channels and platforms. While this has long been the case for budget news and high profile events and promotions, we are seeing improved results and stronger message consistency for the smaller, yet still important, initiatives and educational efforts, including a new electric charging station, the Mobi-Mat, the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown Grand Opening, Restore Partnership, boat tax elimination, 911 staffing recruitment, and Economic Development initiatives.

In the coming weeks (months) you will see additional reporting on the Strategic Priorities and the next phase of this audit-which will include the County television channels. I am sure you have noticed they are in transition, and I look forward to sharing what's next with the Board.

PLH

Attachment

Communications Audit Phase 1

The Board of Supervisors established *Effective and Outstanding Communications and Civic Engagement* as a Strategic Priority and, as a result, many action goals and initiatives are underway. One of these initiatives is a communications audit of the County's external communications methods. This action goal was assigned to the Public Affairs Manager by the County Administrator.

In the first phase, this audit looks at some areas of communications managed by the Public Affairs Division including the Web, Social Media, New Resident Kit, and Citizen News. In future phases, the audit will review the County's Cable Television/Video Services plus external communications from other selected Departments and Divisions such as Public Works, Treasurer and Commissioner of Revenue, Public Safety, Community Services, and Development Services. This is not meant to be a historical *review*, and it does not take into account available resources; but rather it is a document that looks "broadly" at current materials and external platforms. Recommendations/action steps range from things already put in motion to activating ongoing opportunities to implementing longer range goals. A spreadsheet is attached that outlines the communications platforms utilized by each of the departments and divisions that supplied information.

Website

Since the late 90s, www.yorkcounty.gov has been the online portal for all things York County. The County's website is a primary resource for citizen information about government operations, paying taxes and fees, submitting customer service requests, and learning about upcoming events, programs and services. In the most recent customer service satisfaction survey (2015), 57% of the respondents said they get their information from yorkcounty.gov. Unfortunately, it only received a 28% rating as excellent –well below the other Public Affairs platforms. This is one of the reasons for changing the web platform provider and focusing more effort on the web. One step taken to improve user satisfaction was to align it more closely with the Public Affairs Division, the staff dedicated to external communications and citizen engagement. Previously, the web was a function of IT (a more common structure), and the web design and content was not "connected" to the other communications functions either in reporting or proximity. The move has established a much smoother path to adding content and improving user experience. Plus, the new structure enhances opportunities to align the website with the priorities of York County.

Web management is a fluid operation, and achieving optimal results requires constant monitoring and attention by staff dedicated to keeping up with all the new and changing information. The tasks associated with the daily page management, content showcasing, and enhancements are handled by the Webmaster and include oversight of online editors from the various departments and divisions. The Public Information Officer (PIO) and Administrative Assistant provide back-up. Website traffic is growing as more and more services are offered online and via mobile devices. Starting in 2016, York County committed to be "all-in" in terms of maximizing audience, upgrading the look and ease of navigation, and increasing the content rotation for showcasing County programs and services. The homepage is now updated many times a week, and new items are noted. Homepage photos and links are used to promote activities and events (i.e., Riverwalk, Senior Center and Libraries), encourage civic engagement (voting, meetings, and calls for board and commissions applications) plus important reminders, announcements, and deadlines. The individual pages within the website are also routinely reviewed by the webmaster, edited and updated to ensure the most recent and relevant content. This frequent updating with the most current information, along with regular promotion to the website for details, encourages more visits and more opportunities to engage with citizens. In comparing January to May 2016, to the same January to May period in 2017, the return visits to the County webpage

increased 4600%, from a little over 800 to almost 39,000. The video box is still used to highlight County produced videos and promotion of BOS and Planning Commission meetings with one-click to *live* streaming function added this year.

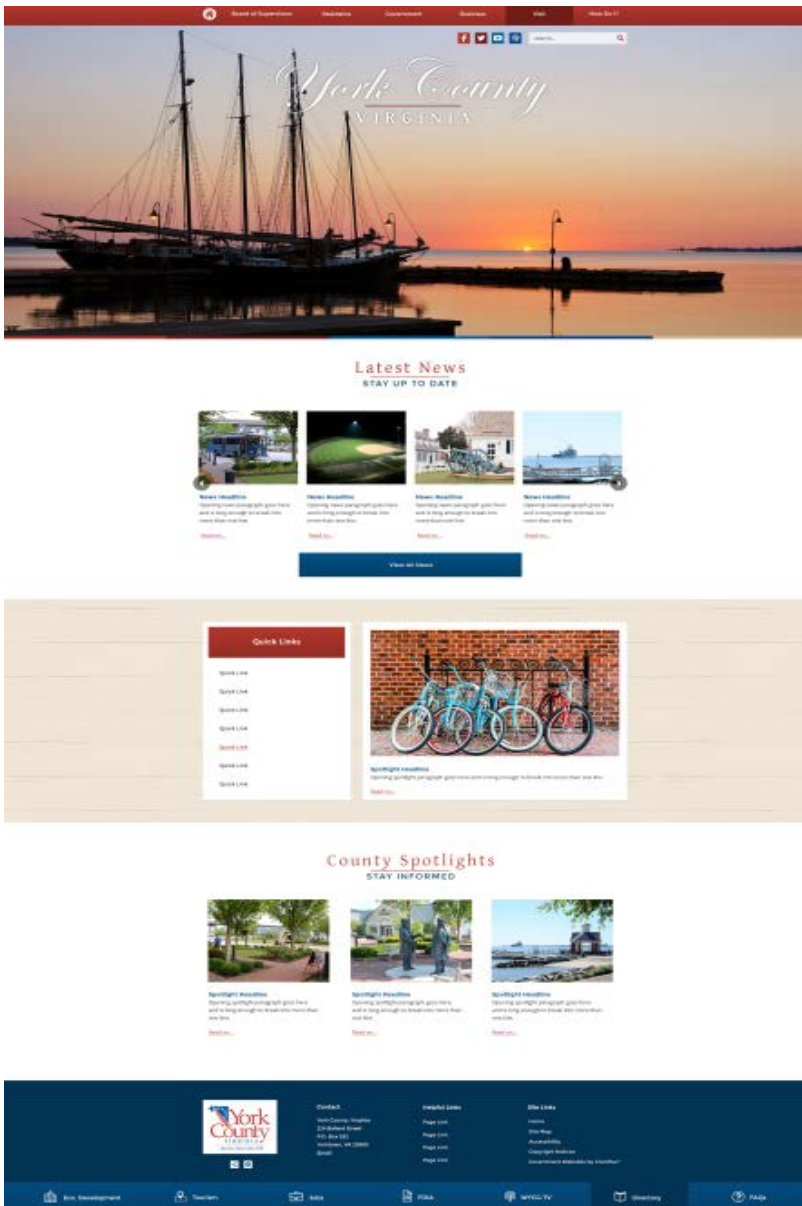
May 2016

May 2017

To date, many pages have been reviewed and enhanced to ensure current information and ease of use, including the landing pages for WYCG-TV, Board of Supervisors, Wetlands, and Development Services. There are still many that will need more time and resources and department leadership support. Of course, this is often predicated on what is of high importance/urgency and can be variable and often unpredictable.

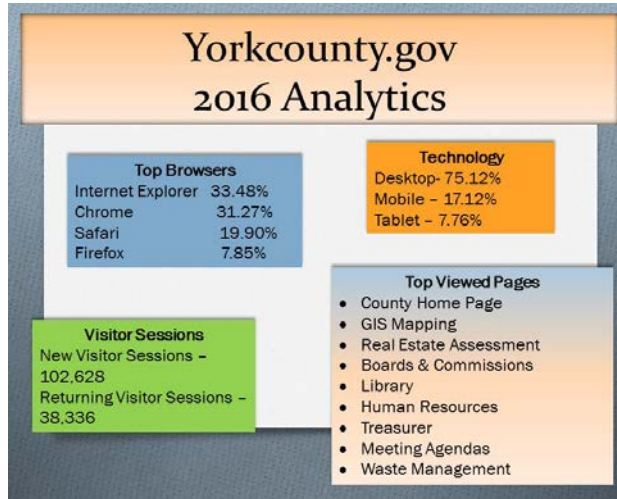
The website is in the process of being redesigned and relaunched on a new platform that will offer citizens a more user friendly, easy to navigate, experience. This new website is from CivicPlus, the leading local government provider with over 2500 current clients. This company was selected for its expertise and industry leading modules geared towards maximizing local government transparency. CivicPlus also ensures full ADA compliance and provides a “clean” interface with mobile and emerging platforms. Launch is slated for summer 2017.

New Website launch Summer 2017



Analytics 2016

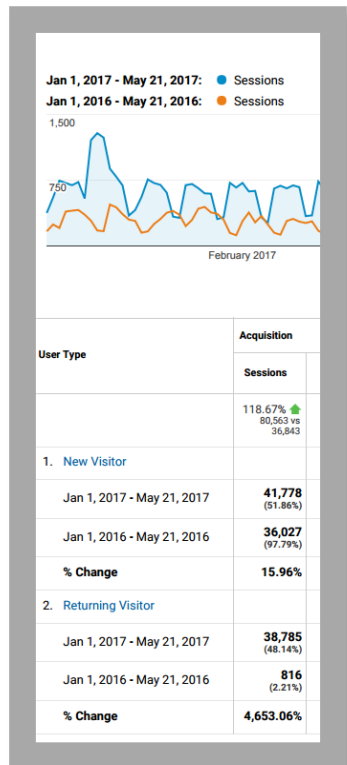
To measure website usage, Google offers a service that measures traffic, unique users, type of device, and pages viewed. This is very helpful in focusing efforts and determining where to put resources. It also reinforces the need for constant monitoring and tweaking. Top highlights reported from Google Trends are shown below to include browsers used, type of device, new /returning visitors, and top viewed pages. In 2014 the County website moved to a responsive design allowing for easier mobile access and viewing. With mobile access numbers being the fastest growing, the new website redesign will further enhance responsive



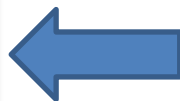
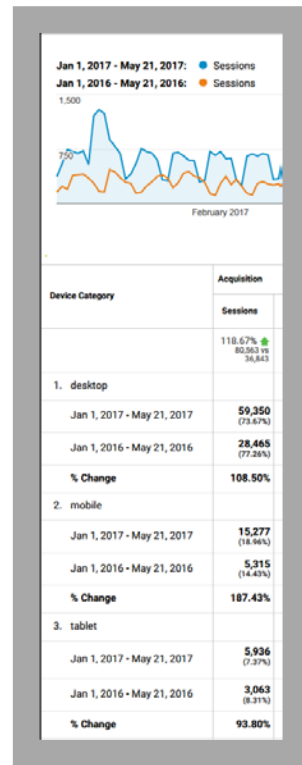
characteristics and a better mobile experience.

In comparing the first half of calendar year 2016 with the first half of 2017, the exponential growth of the mobile user and the return visitors mentioned above is evident.

New vs. Returning



Devices Used to Access Website



Also managed within the website are 21 opt-in email subscriber lists reaching up to 30,000 inboxes per month, providing information ranging from waste management pickup schedules to event notifications. Central Purchasing has a separate subscriber list of bid categories that total over 250. The process has been started to add defining characteristics (e.g., County logo front and center) that relay the fact that they are official county correspondence. The new website platform will have the ability to create custom templates to ensure the same, if not improved, branding.

Action Items

1. Webmaster is working with the vendor and leading the updates to the homepage and wireframe (website page structure) to reflect current best practices in design and navigation. Also includes York County Economic Development and Tourism websites.
2. Continue to train and coach website contributors to maximize relevant content and user experience.
3. Engage managers to focus on updated content and consistent branding.
4. Continue to monitor trends and add content of high importance and relevance to citizens and stakeholders.
5. Evaluate and update customer service/request system (Hansen) navigation and interface to be more user friendly, “targeted” and less generic.
6. Evaluate photographic needs and options; work with departments for getting best possible photos.
7. Evaluate subscriber lists and activity, explore alternatives and resources.
8. Use Announcement Channel for content /cross promotion resource.

New Resident Kit

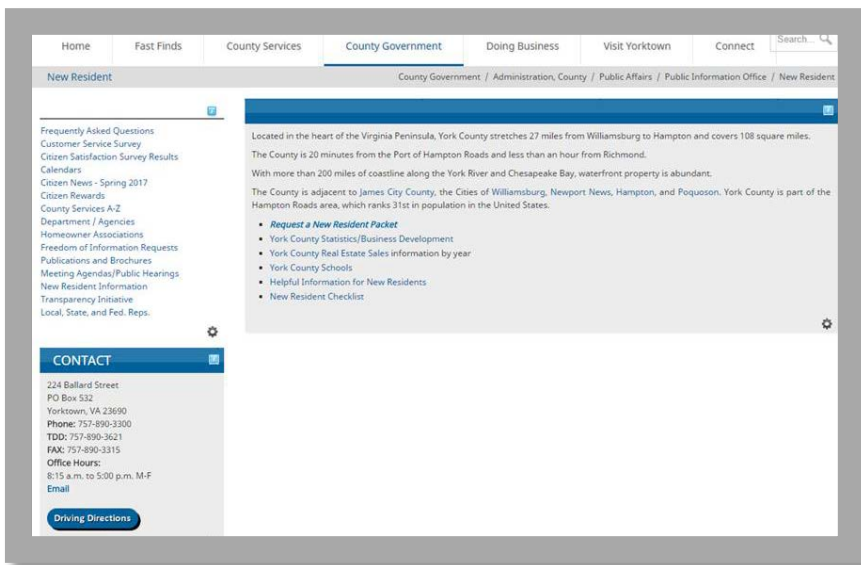
As a service to newcomers to an area, most jurisdictions and large companies make available a “New Resident Kit” with helpful information regarding schools, services, and other points of interest. York County Public Affairs handles those requests, and the current pro forma is to mail out a generic manila envelope filled with pamphlets and communications from the various departments and county and state offices. In the packet of information is a *Welcome Checklist* and phone list of County numbers, some with emails. The York County government information is mostly standardized using a common template. Visit Yorktown provides event calendars, shopping, and dining guide. There is also voter, schools, and severe weather preparedness information, and a stormwater guide. Additional pieces are produced and supplied by partner agencies of the County.

About 100-150 New Resident Kits are requested annually through the website, PIO mailbox, or call-in; and these are mailed at a cost in excess of \$5 each. The checklist and some “helpful” information was made available online under the Public Information page, although most of the individual departments and agency information provided in the printed materials was not linked from the page.

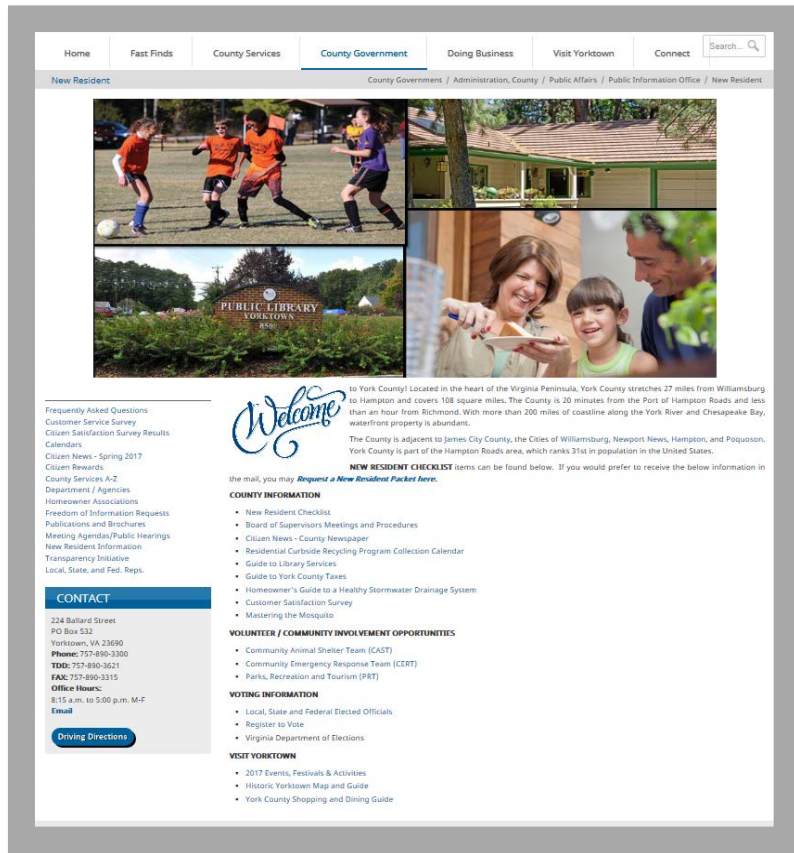
Of course, in this day and age, technology and Google allow for immediate access to any *specific* information new residents may be seeking, and other entities aggregate similar local content on their homepages (i.e., Realtors, Newspapers, Tourism sites, etc). York County needed to coalesce all of the information currently being mailed to a central webpage on Yorkcounty.gov and make it available digitally. This is not only more efficient and cost effective, it also allows the County to have a better visual representation and persona to prospective citizens. **After all, you only get one chance to make a positive first impression.**

Note: As with many webpages, the Webmaster has completed a new and improved and more relevant branded landing page for new residents loaded with read files and clearly marked links to partner-supplied material or to other websites where information can be easily accessed. It will be interesting to see if there are fewer requests for the traditional “paper” copy New Resident Package.

BEFORE



AFTER



Additional Action Items:

- Produce branded envelopes and flash drives and for those that are still requesting via mail-can send either.
- Update County information that is not currently templated; work with PIO to get them in the proper formats. (Libraries, County Tax Guide)
- Conduct yearly audit of materials

Social Media

The County uses social media (Facebook and Twitter primarily) to engage citizens and communicate information to an audience that may not be reachable through traditional media. Citizen engagement on social media platforms is now commonplace and expected. From traffic alerts to meeting reminders, social media accessed on mobile devices is more the norm than the exception. The *York County, VA* Facebook page was established in June 2014 and is managed by the Public Affairs staff. The page saw its first significant growth in followers coinciding with the arrival of the French ship, *Hermione* in 2015. In recent months the expected pro forma is to achieve a minimum of two posts per day including weekends and holidays—always with a picture or graphic. Some examples of recent posts that have received the largest responses include beauty shots from around the County, Tourism events, and photos from the filming of AMC's "TURN:

Washington Spies” and the installation of the Mobi-Mat at Yorktown Beach—that post shared over 1300 times, reaching more than 155,000 and recruiting almost 250 new followers. In addition, there is now an emphasis on tagging and sharing with other County pages, branding of #york757, and using hashtags. Along with this increased activity, the number of followers on many of the County Facebook pages has increased, and the County page has reached 3500+ followers, up almost 60% since June 2016. Growing followers and audience is the ultimate goal. It is important to understand that increasing the citizen engagement through social media results in a larger audience to more efficiently and effectively receive and send communications during times of emergencies.

The York County PIO originally set up, and has administrative access to, several of the County’s social media accounts. While the Public Information Officer administers the official County page, the majority of pages are maintained and content posted by the various Departments/Divisions they promote. Ranked in order of “likes” or followers, they are:

1. York-Poquoson Sheriff
2. Fire & Life Safety
3. York County, VA
4. PRT
5. Library
6. Visit Yorktown
7. Economic Development
8. Victim-Witness Assistance Program

The last three on the list were launched in early 2017 and are still building their unique audiences. Departments/Divisions that don’t have their own pages (Solid Waste, Mosquito Control, Human Resources, Purchasing, etc.) send information to be shared via the County page.

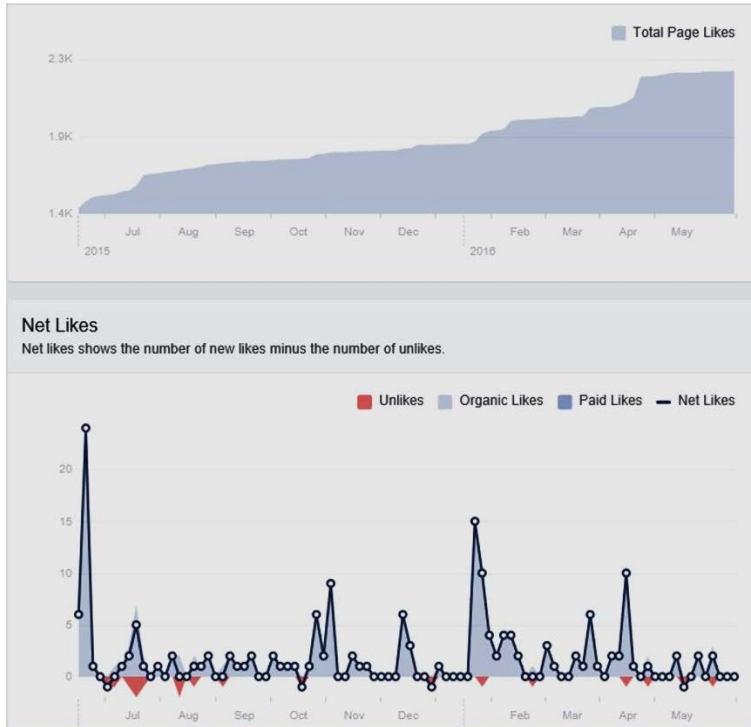
Some examples from the various pages of the ways York County is using social media to engage and alert citizens include Fire and Life Safety: Safety Minute Monday from the Chief; Scam Alerts from the Sheriff; Solid Waste pick up changes and alerts from Waste Management; seminar recruitment from Economic Development; special programming announcements from the Libraries; posting York Alert or other emergency messaging; and, of course, local event and festival promotion *shared* across several pages. Most posts are tagged to be shared on the York County VA Facebook page, but it is not a systematic process that ensures 100% participation. Tagging and sharing posts boosts reach and maximizes resources.

Twitter is also used regularly for citizen notification, and Facebook Live has been used successfully for large community events such as the July 4th Parade, Rt. 17 Opening, and various Tourism Events. York County does have a social media policy, recently updated to address employee best practices and protocols (attached).

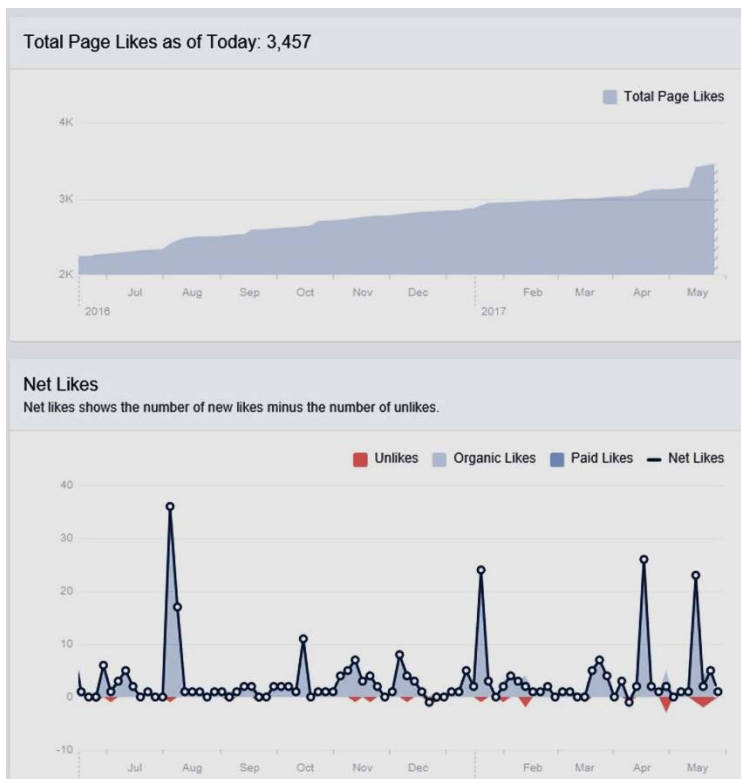
Social media is a crucial part of growing the County’s communications and engagement strategy across all the Departments. More and more, it’s where the engaged citizens get their news and information and respond in real-time. This has proved especially true for the Sheriff’s Department PIO which uses Facebook exclusively for posting press releases, and it is producing immediate results in solving cases. The Tourism Development office is also relying on it more and more for its event promotion, moving away from paid media. To maximize tourism promotion efforts, a new marketing position was recently added—with emphasis on social media. This new position will assume responsibility and oversight of the department’s online and social media efforts.

Whether it is promoting campaigns from mosquito control to recycling events, or making residents aware of the boat tax elimination, or the installation of the Mobi-Mat for handicap access to the beach, this is a tool that continues to grow in importance and effectiveness for Public Affairs. Moving forward, social media will continue to be more and more the platform of choice for reaching citizens with important and real-time data. Along with this comes an expectation of non-stop information and “replies.” In a recent Governing Magazine article on public engagement, it was noted “There is a mass production of digital data in our lives, and we use it, create it, and demand it and as a result consumers expect and demand the same transparency and responsiveness from our public institutions.”

June 2015- June 2016 Likes



June 2016- June 2017



Today, the PIO continues to have primary responsibility for the York County social media effort with administrative support as needed. The increase in posting and following is manageable at this level (Facebook and Twitter only) and allows for reasonable oversight and response time. However, it won't be long before

Public Affairs and all departments that now use existing staff to maintain their presence will need dedicated resources to manage content and meet the expectations of the audience served in this space.

Action Items:

- Continue to be a resource for other divisions and operations that want to establish a presence on social media.
- Continue to increase posting and tagging for more followers
- Work to accomplish more/consistent department/division cross -promotion among county pages – (Sheriff, FLS,PRT)
- Plan for allocation of resources and staff to support growing social media emphasis, not only on County pages but also in monitoring related sites that pertain to County business.
- Seek opportunities for staff training-best practices, new emerging trends, effective social media, government applications, etc.
- Utilize cover photos for seasonal and promotional opportunities
- Explore more opportunities to actively engage with followers-user generated content, photos, comments, call to action, giveaways, etc.
- Grow the use of other tools, including Facebook Live, and consider launch of Instagram
- Future launch/utilize Next Door presence

Citizen News

Four times a year homeowners in York County receive a copy of **Citizen News** produced by the Public Information Officer. This quarterly tabloid is considered one of the best sources for County news and information and receives very positive customer feedback. In the most recent customer service satisfaction survey (2015), 60 percent of respondents said they get their information about County services, programs, and government affairs from the publication, with 94 percent rating it as good or excellent. Among all the county sources rated (TV channels, and website) it had the lowest “poor” rating – 5 percent. Print publications are declining in numbers and popularity, but the demographics of York County most likely match the demographics of a typical newspaper reader. The decline of traditional print media is well documented, and obvious changes are underway as newspapers look for new audiences and migrate to digital editions. To accommodate and engage those who prefer to consume their information via non-traditional media, each edition is published online and shared through social media.

The publication is a mix of “current news” articles, regular columns supplied by departments and divisions, important reminders, and “paid” camera ready ads, including those supplied by Parks & Recreation and Tourism, Waste Management, Economic Development, and the York County School Division. The current look and formatting of Citizen News has been in place since at least 2012 (the oldest issue archived online). Front page articles have been geared toward the highest priority news of the county at the time (budget, reassessments, organizational changes, emergency preparedness, etc.). Inside pages include recaps of Board Actions, submitted columns and reports from various divisions, and those pre-produced ads. From year to year, reoccurring items may be date revised versions of the same articles, and residents tend to rely on the many reminders and notices included in each issue. While Staff makes sure the content remains accurate and timely, these types of facts, figures, dates, and notices tend to hinder creative initiatives.

The process for publication includes a reminder (about 2 weeks out) to staff for submitting articles and camera-ready ads. The PIO decides and edits as needed the articles that will be included and determines the overall layout and placement. The costs associated with the publication are kept to a minimum, with design work done in-house and careful cost saving measures utilized when possible (number of pages, paper selection, etc.) for the printing and distribution of the 27,000 copies.

Because Citizen News is a quarterly publication, and there is some restriction on print and delivery timing, it follows more of a magazine model in content delivery. Less emphasis is placed on spot news, and included are more educational and feature-type pieces usually taking a more “seasonal” approach. This seems to work well for the business of the County.

Citizen News has had the same basic look for almost 2 decades, and in the last 5 years with only slight modifications. The publication is in need of some “freshening” up, both graphically and in content branding. The publication could be enhanced greatly by updating the graphic execution and adding some branded features. Possibilities include, developing new ideas for “evergreen” specific content, more modern graphic approach, reader engagement opportunities, and more photos—all of these could be an opportunity to update and freshen up the publication while remaining valued and relevant.



York County CERT Training Program

Now taking registrations for session that begins January 2013

The York County Department of Fire and Life Safety is currently accepting applications for registration for its Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training course. The next program is planned to start in January 2013. Information and the proposed schedule of courses will soon be posted on the department's website at www.yorkcounty.gov/cert. CERT training provides citizens the opportunity to obtain and/or enhance their knowledge, skills, and abilities to not only help their families be better prepared for emergencies, but to help their neighborhood be better prepared to take action when York County is affected by major emergencies or disasters.

In recent years, the York County Department of Fire and Life Safety has seen that training citizens to be prepared for an emergency offers another level of protection for the community. CERT was originally developed by the Los Angeles Fire Department to train residents to have the skills to assist their families and neighbors during and immediately after an earthquake until emergency services could respond. Since then, the CERT model has been adapted throughout the nation to prepare citizens to assist in both man-made and natural disasters.

Those interested in participating in York County's CERT Training Program should be prepared to make a commitment to one night a week (typically Thursday) in the evening from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. and two Saturday mornings (for exercises and graduation) over a two-month period. Classes often fill quickly, so early registration is encouraged. The course includes presentations, discussions and practical experiences on the following topics:

- CERT Organization
- Disaster Preparedness
- Fire Safety/Fire Extinguisher Use
- Disaster Medical Care
- Light Search and Rescue
- Disaster Psychology
- Practical Exercises and Graduation

For additional information about the CERT training program, call the York County Department of Fire and Life Safety at 800-3600, Monday through Friday, from 8:15 a.m. to 5 p.m. or visit the website at www.yorkcounty.gov/cert.



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York County Public Information Office
P.O. Box 532
Yorktown VA 23090-0532

PRESENT STANDARD
ENVELOPE #101
VARIABLE DATA UNIT
PERMIT NO. 22
CLASS RT PREPRINT



It's Almost Done! Rt. 17 Project Nears Completion

Project will finish on-time, says VDOT; Celebration planned for Dec. 17

VDOT's Rosie Carroll, the Williamsburg Residency Administrator, is optimistic about the Route 17 project's completion deadline. "The project is on track to be completed by December 31," he said. "And within budget. We are in the final stretch of the project with a few items left to complete, including signal work from Washington Square Shopping Center to Wolf Trap Road, completing the northbound turn lane past Wolf Trap Road, and small punch list items."

The three-year project has been a challenge to commuters, tourists, and business owners. But, according to VDOT, this traffic inconvenience was necessary to improve future gridlock scenarios.

"Traffic is projected to increase from an average of 66,000 vehicles to 90,000 vehicles per day by 2035. This project will address the current congestion as well as increase capacity for future traffic volumes," Carroll said.

If you've traveled the corridor during the widening project, you know already the improvements increase the capacity of Route 17 between Hampton Highway and Wolf Trap Road



Change barriers and directional signs have been a common sight from four to six lanes (three lanes each direction). The new roadway includes a raised median, curb and gutter, and a shared-use path along the northbound lanes from Mill Road to Sherwood Road. In addition, prior to the roadway beginning, overhead utility lines were removed and placed underground along the majority of the project corridor. Perhaps the most glaring aspect of the construction work

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York County Public Information Office
P.O. Box 532
Yorktown VA 23090-0532

PRESENT STANDARD
ENVELOPE #101
VARIABLE DATA UNIT
PERMIT NO. 22
CLASS RT PREPRINT

2 Board of Supervisors Actions

September 4, 2012

- Discussed proposed changes to policies to clarify and incorporate direction received from the Board of Supervisors in regards to parks usage and fees, vehicle usage, Yorktown events county support, and advertising at the Sports Complex. Amendments to these policies were adopted at the September 18 meeting.

September 18, 2012

Contact Your Board Member

District 1
Walter C. Zaremba
186 Royal Grant Drive
Williamsburg VA 23185
(757) 696-3328 (voice mail)
zaremba@yorkcounty.gov

District 2
Shelia S. Noll

2 Board of Supervisors Actions

AUGUST 16, 2016

- Amended the conditions of approval for the previously approved Yorktown Crescent mixed-use development to increase the number of residential units that can be built prior to the construction of a community meeting room and other amenities. The development will increase from 27 to 42 units.
- Authorized the use of the York-Pennsum Williamsburg Emancipation

Contact Your Board Member

District 1
Walter C. Zaremba
186 Royal Grant Drive
Williamsburg VA 23185
(757) 696-3328 (voice mail)
zaremba@yorkcounty.gov

District 2

Action Items:

- Update look and feel (masthead, graphics, fonts)
- Implement more modern layout, sections, typography, including those of regular contributors (Libraries, Waste Management, Cooperative Extension, Economic Development)
- Renegotiate space and pricing for “advertisers”
- Create new branded sections (#York757 photo gallery, Volunteer recognition, Open for Business, What’s on TV, Viewpoint /Editorial ,Reader engagement elements, Department Spotlight)
- Maximize lead time for submitting articles
- Integrate BOS Strategic Priorities
- Explore opportunities for reader feedback

	PIO	Parks/Rec	Waste Management	Mosquito Control	Tourism	Eco Dev
Brochures	Who to Call	Child svces	VPPSA chemical	Mastering the Mos	Visit Yorktown	
	Elected officials		Curbside Recycling	Release forms	Yorktown Events	
	BOS meetings/proced		Collection Calendar	Leave behinds	Yorktown Shopping	
	Cust Service Charter				Trolley map	
					Wmsburg	
Flyers		seasonal				invites
Mailers/Newsletters	Customer Survey	New Quarter Park	Stormwtr Advisory Comm			monthly-digital only
	Citizen News					
Guides		seasonal				
Door hangers			√	√ VDH		
Posters		seasonal√			event	
Websites	√	√	√	√	√	
Facebook	√	√			√	
Twitter		√			√	
You Tube					√	
Instagram					√	
Subs lists		cancellations	solid waste		events	inhouse
		e mail newsletter				
Premium Items			Annual Calendar	Kids Collateral	√	
On Site/Kiosks			Market Days ; Schools, tours	Schools, community groups	York Hall	
			Collection events			
Paid Advertising					√	very little
	New Resident Kits					Annual report
	Press Releases					

	Libraries	FLS	COR	Treasurer	Sheriff	Registrar
Brochures	Guide to Lib Svcs		Guide to YC taxes	Guide to YC taxes		
	Digital Resources					
	Book-a-Librarian					
	Atomic Training					
	Rosetta Stone					
	Learning EVpress					
Flyers	Various Seminars					
	Children programs					
Mailers/Newsletters						
Guides						
Door hangers						
Posters						
Websites	√ page, blog, calendar					
Facebook	√	√				
Twitter		√				
You Tube						
Instagram						
Subs lists						
Premium Items						
On Site/Kiosks	Digital Displays					
Paid Advertising						