



CITY OF TACOMA

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
SERVICES COMMUNICATIONS PLAN
IMPLEMENTATION: SOCIAL MEDIA

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
URBAN DESIGN AND PLANNING

CEP 460: PLANNING IN CONTEXT

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LIVABLE CITY YEAR 2017-2018
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
CITY OF TACOMA

FALL 2017





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ABOUT LIVABLE CITY YEAR

The University of Washington's Livable City Year (LCY) initiative enables local governments to engage UW faculty and students for one academic year to work on city-defined projects that promote local sustainability and livability goals. The program engages hundreds of students each year in high-priority projects, creating momentum on real-world challenges while enabling the students to serve and learn from communities. Partner cities benefit directly from bold and applied ideas that propel fresh thinking, improve livability for residents and invigorate city staff. Focus areas include environmental sustainability; economic viability; population health; and social equity, inclusion, and access. The program's 2017–2018 partner is the City of Tacoma; this follows a partnership with the City of Auburn in 2016–2017.

The LCY program is led by faculty directors Branden Born (Department of Urban Design and Planning), Jennifer Otten (School of Public Health) and Anne Taufen (Urban Studies Program, UW Tacoma), with support from Program Manager Teri Thomson Randall. The program was launched in 2016 in collaboration with UW Sustainability and Urban@UW, with foundational support from the Association of Washington Cities, the College of Built Environments, the Department of Urban Design and Planning, and Undergraduate Academic Affairs.

LCY is modeled after the University of Oregon's Sustainable City Year Program, and is a member of the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Network (EPIC-N), the collection of institutions that have successfully adopted this new model for community innovation and change.

For more information, contact the program at uwlcy@uw.edu.



ABOUT CITY OF TACOMA

The third largest city in the state of Washington, Tacoma is a diverse, progressive, international gateway to the Pacific Rim. The port city of nearly 210,000 people has evolved considerably over the last two decades, propelled by significant development including the University of Washington Tacoma, the Tacoma Link light rail system, the restored urban waterfront of the Thea Foss Waterway, the expansions of both the MultiCare and CHI Franciscan health systems, and a significant influx of foreign direct investment in its downtown core.

Washington State's highest density of art and history museums are found in Tacoma, which is home to a flourishing creative community of writers, artists, musicians, photographers, filmmakers, chefs, entrepreneurs, and business owners who each add their unique flair to the city's vibrant commercial landscape. The iconic Tacoma Dome has endured as a high-demand venue for some of the largest names in the entertainment industry.

A magnet for families looking for affordable single-family homes in the Puget Sound area, Tacoma also draws those seeking a more urban downtown setting with competitively priced condos and apartments that feature panoramic mountain and water views. The city's natural beauty and proximity to the Puget Sound and Mount Rainier draws hikers, runners, bicyclists, and maritime enthusiasts to the area, while its lively social scene is infused with energy by thousands of students attending the University of Washington Tacoma and other academic institutions.

The City of Tacoma's strategic plan, Tacoma 2025, was adopted in January 2015 following unprecedented public participation and contribution. The plan articulates the City's core values of opportunity, equity, partnerships, and accountability, and expresses the City's deep commitment to apply these values in all of its decisions and programming. Each Livable City Year project ties into the principles and focus areas of this strategic plan. The City of Tacoma is proud of its 2017–2018 Livable City Year partnership with the University of Washington and of the opportunity this brings to its residents.



TACOMA 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

The *Planning and Development Services Communications Plan Implementation: Social Media* project supports the Livability and Civic Engagement goals of the Tacoma 2025 Strategic Plan and was sponsored by the City of Tacoma’s Planning and Development Services Department.

- 

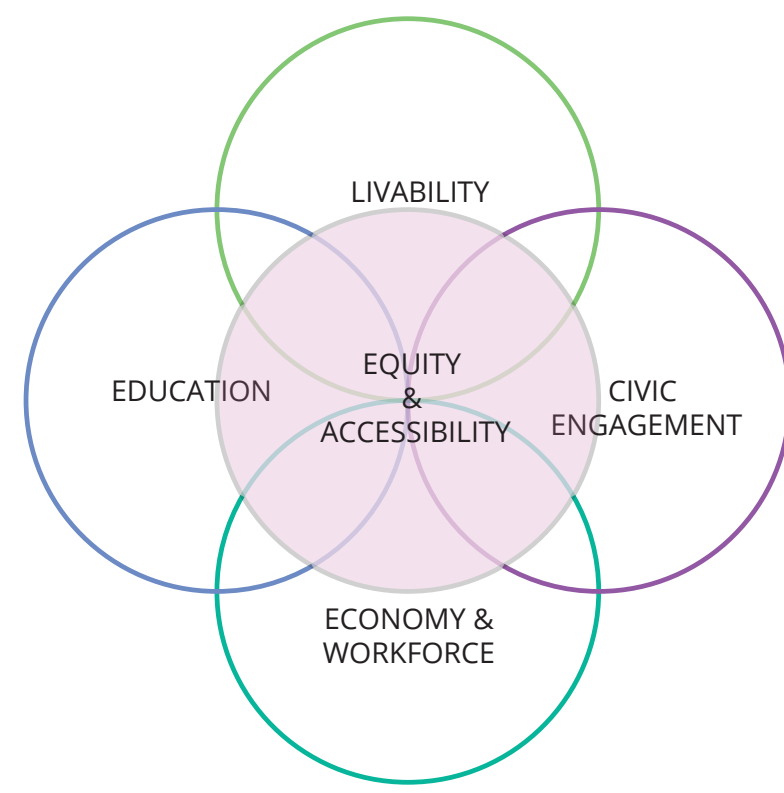
Goal #1 Livability
The City of Tacoma will be a city of choice in the region known for connected neighborhoods, accessible and efficient transportation transit options, and vibrant arts and culture. Residents will be healthy and have access to services and community amenities while maintaining affordability.
- 

Goal #2 Economy and Workforce
By 2025, Tacoma will be a growing economy where Tacoma residents can find livable wage jobs in key industry areas. Tacoma will be a place of choice for employers, professionals, and new graduates.
- 

Goal #3 Education
Tacoma will lead the region in educational attainment amongst youth and adults. In addition to producing more graduates from high school and college, more college graduates will find employment in the region. Lifelong learning and access to education will be prioritized and valued.
- 

Goal #4 Civic Engagement
Tacoma residents will be engaged participants in making Tacoma a well-run city. The leadership of the city, both elected and volunteer, will reflect the diversity of the city and residents and will fully participate in community decision-making.
- 

Goal #5 Equity and Accessibility
Tacoma will ensure that all residents are treated equitably and have access to services, facilities, and financial stability. Disaggregated data will be used to make decisions, direct funding, and develop strategies to address disparate outcomes.



RESOURCES

- Tacoma 2025:** https://www.cityoftacoma.org/tacoma_2025
- Department of Planning and Development Services Department:** <https://www.cityoftacoma.org/pds>
- Livable City Year:** <https://www.washington.edu/livable-city-year/>
- University of Washington Urban Design and Planning:** <http://urbdp.be.washington.edu/>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Social Media Plan for Planning and Development Services (PDS) of the City of Tacoma provides a set of guidelines for the department to engage with the general public using social media. This document offers a social media handbook for staff, which is based on our survey of peer city social media accounts, the City of Tacoma’s Social Media guidelines, and social media best practices.

As social media becomes an increasingly prevalent form of communication, it offers a new opportunity for government agencies and departments to engage with the public. The impetus for this Social Media Plan comes from the PDS department’s desire to communicate with the public in a more accessible, interactive way. This builds on the department’s existing communications through print and website updates, broadening their communications strategy and ability to directly connect with interested members of the public.

Our report identifies two social media platforms for PDS to use to better engage with Tacoma residents: Facebook and Twitter. This recommendation is based on the user demographics and reach of these two platforms, as well as the number of likes, followers, and frequency of posts that our team identified in a survey of peer cities. In our report, we offer this research in a series of case studies of official social media accounts of other jurisdictions.

In our Recommendations section, we provide a handbook for PDS staff to use as they launch and maintain a regular social media presence. The section includes mockups to graphically demonstrate what these two social media platforms look like and how they can be used most effectively, as well as suggesting different types of social media content. The guide will help the department use each platform to their fullest potential. We conclude with a recommendation about increasing staff time dedicated to social media to expand the department’s outreach capacity.



People gathering for an event at the Tacoma Dome along East D Street in Tacoma, Washington.

Photo Credit: City of Tacoma.

Our client for this project was the Planning and Development Services (PDS) of the City of Tacoma. The department's goal for this project was to learn more about the opportunities to use social media in their communications with the general public. This report offers a social media plan for the department, familiarizing staff with the best practices for using social media platforms in alignment with the social media guidelines already created by the City of Tacoma. This new social media presence will enable the department to deliver updates on city-related projects, provide help and support to residents, and learn about community priorities.

Why Social Media?

Social media is a rapidly-growing form of communication. Across sectors, social media can serve as a platform for fast-paced, direct communications between institutions and the broader community.

As social media becomes increasingly prevalent, several scholars believe that it offers a new opportunity for government agencies to engage with the public. In *The Networked Young Citizen – Social Media, Political Participation and Civic Engagement*, Loader et al. (2014) argue that social media is an important tool for engaging young citizens in a time of low political participation and high youth unemployment rates. Therefore, social media can offer an opportunity to connect with members of the public, including young people, who might not be otherwise participating in government processes. However, Julie Uldam and Anne Vestergaard (2015) argue in *Civic Engagement and Social Media: Political Participation Beyond Protest* that social media cannot foster long-term committed participation from both the public and the government, suggesting that the government should be getting public feedback through a variety of methods. In other words, social media is just one of many strategies for government agencies to effectively communicate with the public.

Across sectors, social media can serve as a platform for fast-paced, direct communications between institutions and the broader community.

In this report, we focus on the potential benefits from increased communication between the public and local government through social media platforms. We believe that social media can help achieve increased civic engagement with a variety of demographics, serve as a more accessible and welcoming form of communication, and contribute to transparency with the immediate release of information, allowing public agencies to better serve their constituencies (Vestergaard, 2015).

With effective use of social media, PDS can actively market Tacoma as a forward-thinking city and share the important work that PDS is performing for the city.

A Social Media Plan to Address PDS Needs

In our consultation with PDS, staff members identified the need for an outward-facing platform to share information with Tacoma residents in addition to the department's regular website updates and newspaper listings. Recognizing the importance of social media as a means of connecting with various audiences, this report suggests a handful of recommendations to better inform the public about the department's work. We have adapted our recommendations to be easy to implement, keeping in mind limited staff and resources and the need to have information come from a verified and official source.

The objective of this project is to develop a social marketing plan for PDS using the City of Tacoma's Social Media Guidelines. Staff asked the social media team to address the following needs: the ability to benchmark with other jurisdictions, ability to measure success, the need to populate content quickly with limited time commitment, and to accomplish both public education and departmental marketing. This report includes a handbook of guidelines to help align the department's social media presence with other jurisdictions; the logistics of how best to use Facebook and Twitter, our recommended social media platforms; and case studies of other jurisdictions. Together, this report serves as a

social media plan, with strategies to help PDS establish their social media account and further increase their communication with the community. First, we make recommendations for the best social media platforms for the PDS department: Facebook and Twitter. Second, we provide case studies of several other planning departments and their social media presences. Finally, the document provides examples of a professional social media presence. Specifically, we detail best practices for using these platforms, including mock-ups and suggested content, and we provide an overview of how to create and manage a social media account. We also cover the time commitment required for successful social media outreach, and conclude with a discussion of the staff time required to have an active and effective online departmental presence.

With effective use of social media, PDS can actively market Tacoma as a forward-thinking city and share the important work that PDS is performing for the city. Through these platforms, the department can increase their reach and build a better connection between residents and city government.



A sunrise view of downtown Tacoma, Washington captured from the Greater Tacoma Convention Center.

Photo Credit: City of Tacoma.

Our recommendations emerge from research on social media best practices at other planning departments across the country. First, we did research on other planning departments of cities that have successful Twitter and Facebook presences, including the planning departments of Seattle, Los Angeles, and Honolulu. In addition, we reviewed the city government account of Las Vegas, which has effectively connected with citizens on social media. We also included local Facebook page Tacoma Untapped, an unofficial Facebook account that currently reports on planning projects around the city. Finally, we interviewed Seattle’s Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) as well as Los Angeles’ Department of City Planning (DCP) via email.

We applied the research we did about other cities, as well as what appropriate communication looks like with official and verified governmental social media accounts, including a review of the City of Tacoma Social Media Guidelines. Our review included everything from the formality of language, to current social media trends, to how to respond to positive and negative feedback online. The project approach is also portrayed in our timeline (Figure Tacoma PDS Social Media).



Photo Credit: Paul Doyon, 2017
Electronic devices are facilitating wide-spread use of social media.

Project Timeline

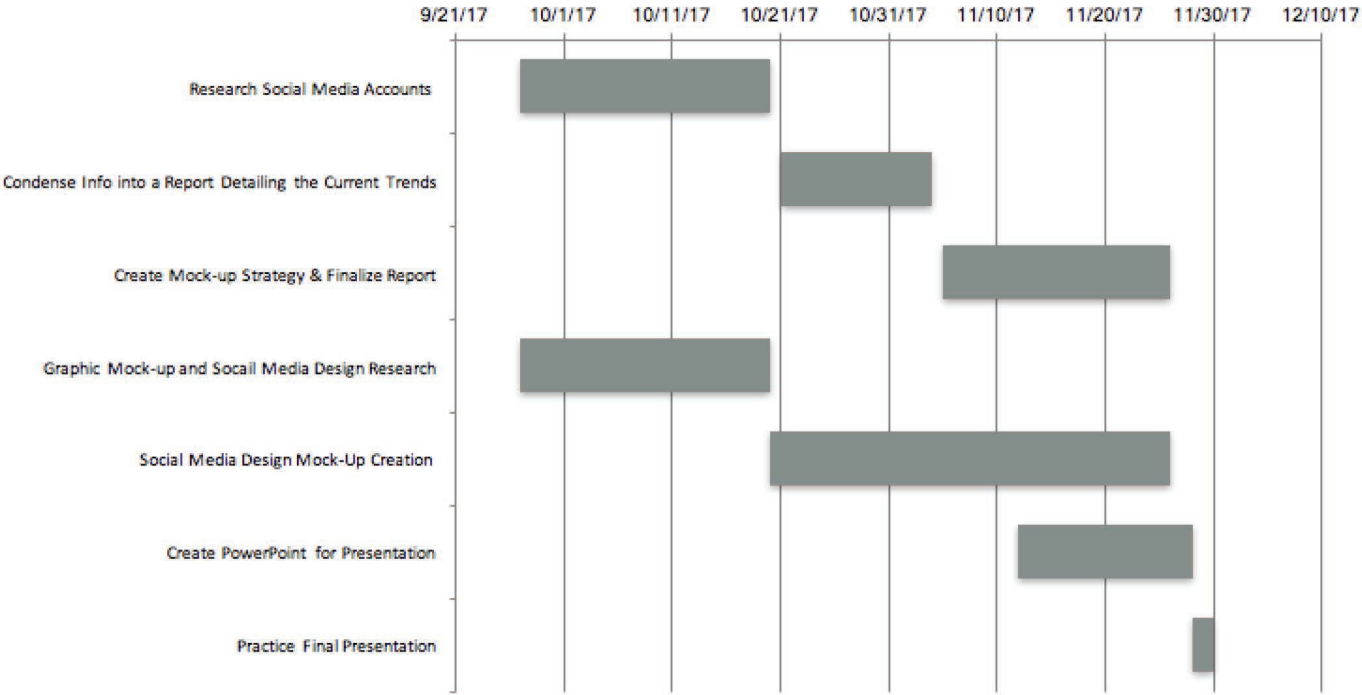


Photo Credit: LCY Social Media Team

We believe that social media can help achieve increased civic engagement with a variety of demographics.

In this section, we outline our research to improve Tacoma’s Planning and Development Services’ (PDS) social media presence. First, we make recommendations for specific social media platforms, concluding that Facebook and Twitter will be the most effective way to reach PDS’s targeted audience. Next, we include case studies of peer cities and their social media accounts, outlining specific findings from these different departments.

Facebook

Facebook is a leading social media platform with more than one billion users worldwide. Individuals on Facebook can “like” government pages, such as “Tacoma Planning and Development Services,” and will then see content posted on these pages in their “News Feed.”

Compared to Instagram, Pinterest, and LinkedIn, Facebook is the most popular social media platform in the United States among adults, with 68% of adults (18+) using the platform. In addition, it has the highest percentage of use for adults that are 65+ [see Figure to the right], with the platform closest behind for this demographic being LinkedIn at a mere 11% (Forbes). Therefore, creating an active Facebook account is one of the most valuable ways to reach Tacomans of all ages.

Twitter

Twitter is a fast-paced social media platform that is well-known for its 280-character limit. Twitter revolves around “favoriting” and “retweeting” the tweets of others, allowing users to spread information widely. The distinguishing factor between a “favorite” and a “retweet” is that when a tweet is “retweeted,” it will show up on the user’s profile, whereas if a tweet is “favorited” it will not.

For Twitter, only about 6% of adults 65+ use the platform, so using Twitter will primarily reach a younger audience. According the figure to the right, Twitter has the lowest user percentage of all platforms – but it is also the most practical means to distribute information compared to more creative platforms like Instagram or Pinterest, or a professional platform like LinkedIn. Twitter is a social media site that involves a character limit—so it is for short bursts of information that are easily digestible to the user. Therefore, according to Forbes, Twitter is the ultimate social media

Percent of US adults who use each social media platform

	Facebook	Instagram	LinkedIn	Twitter
Total	68%	35%	25%	24%
Men	62%	30%	25%	23%
Women	74%	39%	25%	24%
Ages 18-29	81%	64%	29%	40%
30-49	78%	40%	33%	27%
50-64	65%	21%	24%	19%
65+	41%	10%	9%	8%

Chart showing the demographics of users of various social media platforms. The platforms we are recommending to PDS — Facebook and Twitter — are boxed in gray.

Credit: Pew Research Center. 2017

Facebook is the most popular social media platform in the United States among adults, with 68% of adults (age 18+) using the platform.



Twitter will reach a primarily younger audience.



platform for millennials because the platform provides a stream of “fresh, new content” (Patel, 2017).

We recommend that PDS consider using both of these social media platforms in tandem to reach their desired audiences.

Case Studies

As a part of this project, we consulted other jurisdictions to see how they built, developed, and maintained their social media presence. The following case studies include Seattle, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Honolulu, as well as the unofficial account Tacoma Untapped. In our research, we reviewed post content, post frequency, post response, rules and regulations for social media platforms, and the branding and marketing of the social media accounts. Through this review of how other jurisdictions use social media, we identify the most effective ways to use social media, as well as the amount of work required to have a successful social media presence.

We reviewed the Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development on the request of PDS staff. Los Angeles was chosen because it has a social media presence specifically for the planning department. The City of Las Vegas, though without a separate social media account for the planning department, was chosen because of its strong online presence as an entire government, and the effort they put into branding, posting, and interacting with residents. Honolulu’s social media accounts demonstrate departmental coordination, but the planning department’s page is not as active or informative as visitors might expect. Lastly, we included Tacoma Untapped, an unofficial Facebook account that currently reports on planning projects around the city. With its high number of local followers, Tacoma Untapped demonstrates local interest in planning issues, and suggests that the department’s social media presence could become an official source of Tacoma planning news and center of communication with residents.

Peer cities primarily use Facebook and Twitter to connect with residents.

Across these case studies, all of the jurisdictions have established and maintained a series of guidelines for their social media accounts. Most departments post a wide array of content, including invites, alerts, updates on current issues, public events, meetings, newsletters, goals and commitments as a department, and contemporary and historic photos. Typically, content is queued so that there are posts every day, and best practices for social media include posting in the mornings and avoiding late afternoons, particularly on Fridays. The Seattle, Los Angeles and Honolulu planning departments do have different content than the general government posts of Las Vegas, which tend to focus more on updates and alerts of current traffic or accidents.

As noted in the previous section, peer cities primarily use Facebook and Twitter to connect with residents. A small team, usually only one or two people, is in charge of the accounts. These can be full-time staff or interns.

Seattle’s Office of Planning and Community Development

Seattle’s Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) uses Twitter and Facebook to provide department updates and daily news. Because this is an official social media account, notifications of public commenting and scoping periods for projects and upcoming events make up a big part of the posting content. For department-hosted events, they begin promotions at least two weeks in advance, and all posts are put up sometime between 8:30 AM – noon for maximum visibility.

However, Seattle OPCD also uses these platforms more informally, such as posting pictures or videos from past events or sharing links to relevant articles. To keep the community engaged in their work, OPCD posts from a variety of sources, mostly from other departments or news outlets, including these recent examples: “A study on how a shortage of women planners/developers impact neighborhoods” and “A Design Dilemma: How to Visualize the Trauma of Slavery.” They often share information on #RSJIFridays, where they focus on information pertinent to the Race and Social Justice Initiative, including content addressing displacement, gentrification, and housing/homelessness. With Twitter, they often post quick information and a link for those who want to learn more. For Facebook, they usually share a graphic to catch the attention of visitors.



Seattle’s Office of Planning and Community Development

610 Facebook followers, 936 Twitter followers

Finding: Seattle OPCD uses social media to share planning and community information that may not be directly related to planning projects that are underway at the City. However, these posts help people to get and stay connected to the department and their work.



Planning4LA

1880 Facebook followers, 1060 Twitter followers

Planning4LA

The Los Angeles Department of City Planning’s Twitter account, Planning4LA, is probably one of the most active city jurisdiction accounts on Twitter. It has a posting frequency of one or more daily posts, ranging from live-tweeting community events, fun facts in the history of planning, and updates on plans and projects. The Facebook page for Los Angeles’ planning department, also called Planning4LA, often posts the same content as the Twitter account. Both accounts post updates using hashtags to simplify the search process—for instance, using #HappeningNow in posts to indicate events that are currently underway. Like Seattle, they post a combination of official and unofficial department projects: pictures and videos of current events, job openings, updates and announcements of development plans, planning document changes, and commenting and scoping periods, and last but not least, links to relevant articles and interviews. By matching their Twitter and Facebook account content, they save time for staff and reduce confusion for the public.

Finding: Planning4LA has a high level of activity on social media to connect with residents who are interested in learning about what is going on around the city. The department’s frequent posts on social media are coordinated and prioritized to highlight the most important information.



The City of Las Vegas

71,364 Facebook followers

The City of Las Vegas

Las Vegas does not have its own social media platform for the planning department, but the city page posts frequently about updates and notifications from the planning department, including community outreach meetings, updates on new policies, new technologies, and traffic news and notices. As a general government account, Las Vegas coordinates the logo and color of posts, and follows internal guidelines and regulations in writing posts and responding to comments. They post daily videos to cover what is happening that day, but they also share videos during election periods and video updates of ongoing developments, redevelopments, and updated city policies. The frequency of posting is daily on both Facebook and Twitter. In addition, they often use social media to provide urgent updates and to respond to comments on topics such as traffic, incidents, or alerts.

Finding: While Las Vegas does not have their own planning department account, they provide a good example of how to use social media for regular updates, and how integration between departments provides easier way-finding for visitors.

The City and County of Honolulu

With only a Twitter account for the department of planning, the social media presence in the City and County of Honolulu is relatively low compared to the other jurisdictions we’ve examined. Therefore, these accounts tend to be underutilized. However, the highlight of the City of Honolulu’s social media presence is that it has a centralized hub for all its departments’ social media accounts. Different departments share relatively similar branding, and the profiles across different departments usually consist of the seal of the City of Honolulu or the department’s seal. The Twitter account for Honolulu’s planning department, though posting frequency is low, uses Twitter to update on news, emergencies, meetings and community outreach opportunities. In addition, the department includes the link to its official website on its Twitter page, making it easy for viewers to navigate and find more information.

Finding: Honolulu, while having multiple departmental social media accounts, is not as active as the other city examples provided. Without frequent posts and adequate activity, it can be hard to keep people engaged.

Tacoma Untapped

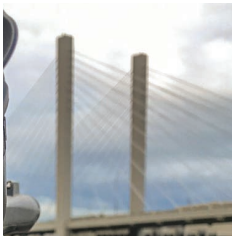
Tacoma Untapped is an unofficial Twitter account that provides updates about what is happening around Tacoma’s neighborhoods, notifications of developments and demolitions, and planning and policy changes. Different from the previous examples, Tacoma Untapped mostly retweets and reposts other accounts, serving as a clearinghouse for information. This includes official government accounts and local organizations, construction and development plans, and neighborhood-level changes ranging from new restaurants to building sales.

Finding: While Tacoma Untapped is an unofficial account, the page provides in-demand information and updates on what is happening on projects across the city—indicating public demand for local planning information.



The City and County of Honolulu

4167 Facebook followers, 734 Twitter followers
(Planning and Permitting Department)



Tacoma Untapped

4865 Facebook followers, 3419 Twitter followers

In this section, we outline best practices for the two recommended social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter. These best practices can serve as a handbook for the department, providing mock-ups and sample content. Finally, we make a specific recommendation for allocation of staff time in order to support the level of social media engagement that PDS hopes to attain.

Analytics

Tracking and analyzing metrics for your social media will be essential tools in ensuring successful communications and engagement, and is a great way to tailor content and postings to successfully reach your audience. Facebook and Twitter have excellent analytics pages where you can view counts, shares, likes, and other page activity over time. Knowing who likes and dislikes your content and where it is being reposted can be very valuable, as this information can allow you to target your goals and specific audiences while tailoring content to best fit viewership.

Diversify content

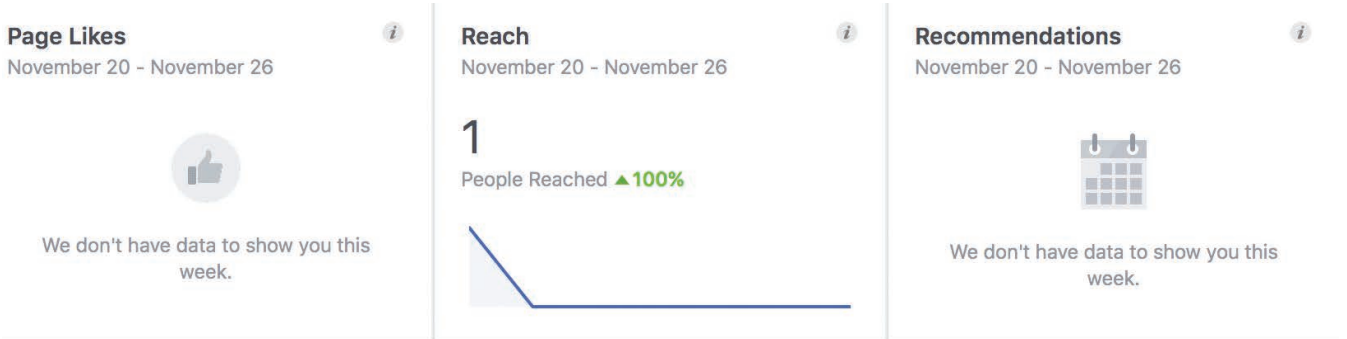
To ensure that follower bases are retained, it is important to diversify the PDS social media content over time. Though it is important for PDS to keep social media reliable and consistent, it will also be important to incorporate fresh new content throughout the month. The department should provide content that viewers can rely on and expect to see every week—for instance, regular updates about department projects and

Though it is important for PDS to keep social media reliable and consistent, it will also be important to incorporate fresh new content throughout the month.

policies. However, viewership will also increase if the department provides surprises: special projects, funny content, or other interest-catching topics. The digital age requires a steady flow of diverse content to keep the public interested and excited about what the City is up to. Don't be afraid to take chances by shaking up your content with new ideas or channels of communication with citizens.

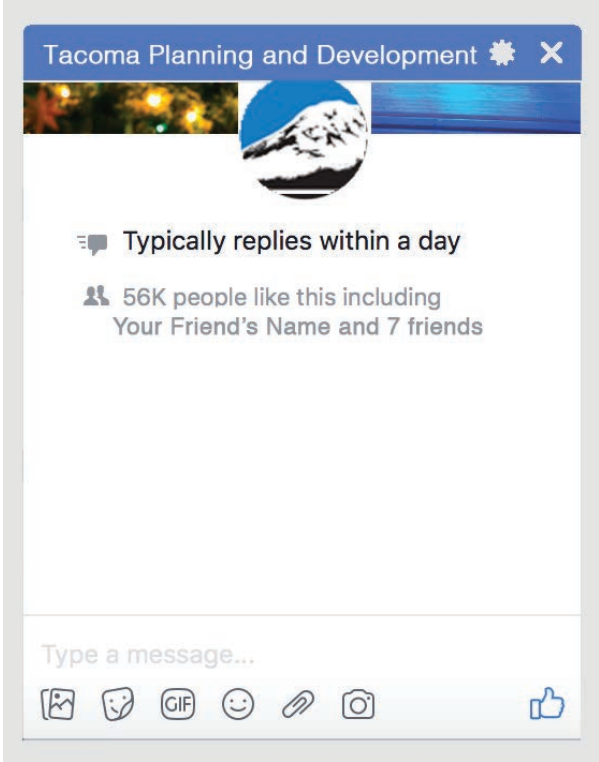
Evidence-based posts

One important and frequently-overlooked part of professional social media posting is providing evidence and backing up claims. As outlined in the City of Tacoma Social Media Guidelines, public records requests can be made on anything posted by social media accounts. It is imperative to double-check facts, figures, and post sources and evidence of your findings. Ensure there is as little ambiguity as possible in any fact-based posts. Posting a link to your sources within a post can also be a good idea, as this gives interested parties the option to learn more about your information, and further strengthens your social media accounts' legitimacy for the public. To summarize, be sure that if you are making assertions in a post, you provide the data to back up your claims. Always try to provide a link for those who are interested to learn more about the topic.



Analytics are used to measure social medial performance. Above, examples from a one-week period.

Credit: LCY Social Media Team



Credit: LCY Social Media Team
Example of what people who message PDS on Facebook will see.



Credit: LCY Social Media Team
Example of using graphic design to promote a public meeting on Facebook.

City of Tacoma Social Media Guidelines

For every social media platform, the City has the following guidelines for social media account managers:

Following the City of Tacoma’s Social Media Policy

The City of Tacoma has a document titled “Application Process and Guidelines for Establishing Department Social Media Accounts.” All pages should follow the guidelines and policies in this document to ensure the Social Media is appropriate, follows all legal requirements, and is cohesive across departments.

Social Media and Public Records

Everything posted on a government Facebook Page is subject to the Washington State Public Records Act. The City of Tacoma has an official policy on how to make sure that all information is captured and made available to the public. Information on this policy can be found on page 11 of the “Application Process and Guidelines for Establishing Department Social Media Accounts” document.

Removing inappropriate content

The City of Tacoma has a section detailing their policy for removing inappropriate content in their “Application Process and Guidelines for Establishing Department Social Media Accounts” document. Information on how the City prefers inappropriate content to be removed can be found on page 14.

Posting multiple times per day is an acceptable practice.

Facebook Best Practices

Posting often

On Facebook posting at least every other day is important. If there is a lot of information to get out, posting multiple times per day is an acceptable practice.

Respond to messages in a timely manner

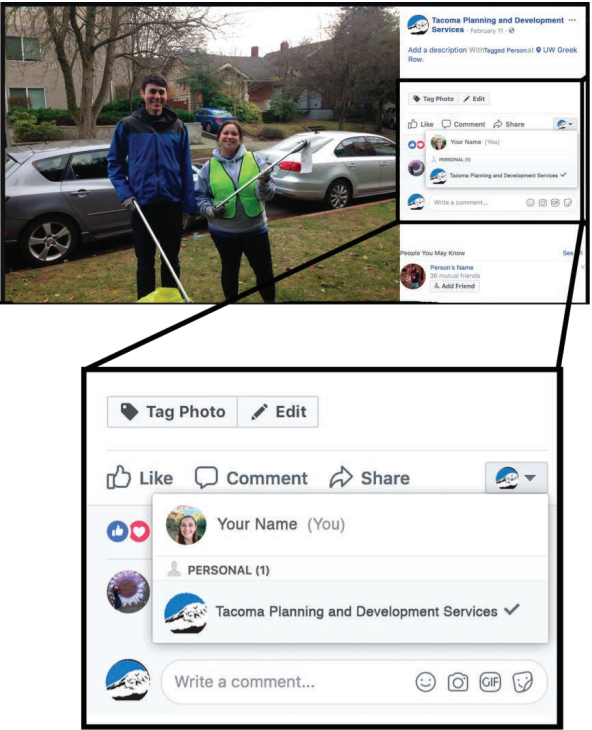
Official pages, like the Tacoma Planning and Development Services page, will show a viewer how long it takes on average to get a reply to a message. Taking time to reply to messages at least once a day is important to keep up a good public image and maintain a professional social media presence.

Liking and Commenting from the Correct Account

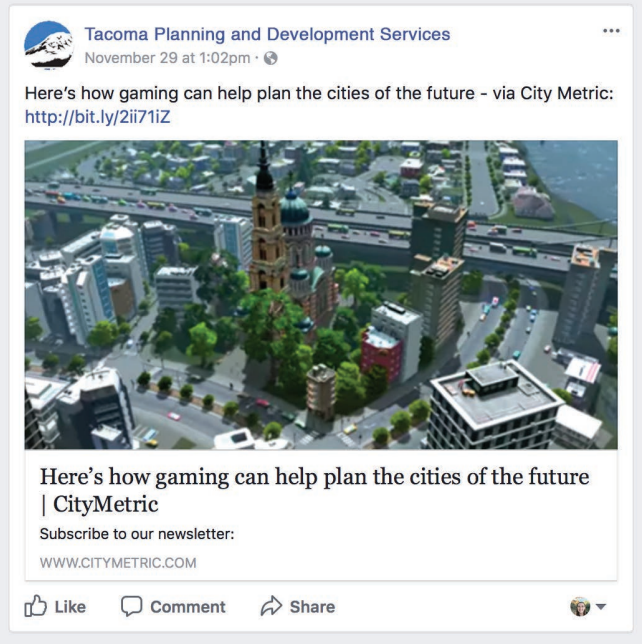
When “liking” material, it is important to check which account you are liking it from. When you are an administrator on an official page, you can like content as that page. However, make sure you are not “liking” the Tacoma Planning and Development Services content from the Tacoma Planning and Development Services page. In general, it is considered a faux pas to “like” your own content on social media, both on personal and public accounts—this is because sharing it already shows that you “like” this content. However, you can “like” the PDS content from your own personal profile.

For comments, you want to make sure you are responding to people as Tacoma Planning and Development Services, not under your personal account. The image above shows an example of a post. Enlarged below the example post is the section where you choose which account to like or comment from. Here you can see that the official account, Tacoma Planning and Development Services, is selected, not your personal account.

Almost every post on your Facebook page should include an image or video.



Credit: LCY Social Media Team
Example of what it looks like to change a comment from a personal account to a business account on Facebook.



Example of a Facebook post sharing an article about Urban Planning.



Credit: LCY Social Media Team
Example of a throwback Thursday post on Facebook

Emojis/GIFs/Media

Posts that include Emojis, GIFs, and other media (photos, links to videos, articles, etc.) get more likes than those with just text. Almost every post on your Facebook page should include an image or video.

Facebook Proposed Content

The content that is posted on your Social Media will determine how engaging your page is for the public. Varying post types is one of the most important ways to keep the public interested in your page. Below are some examples of different types of posts. Accompanying each post type is an example of what this type of post could look like if a PDS Facebook page were up and running.

Public involvement periods on projects

These posts could include an announcement of scoping period and comment periods. It also includes public meetings, such as regular Planning Commission meetings or public hearings. These will likely be the most frequent post type that you have. They should be posted every time that a public involvement period opens, is about to close, and is extended, and every time there is a meeting open to the public. These posts should include a link to where the public can participate online, submit comments, and/or information about in-person events. These posts should also include a photo relevant to the project—for example, a picture of the proposed land use change.

Pictures of past events the department is involved in

When Planning and Development Services is involved in an event, posting pictures taken at that event with a descriptive caption is a good way to keep the public up-to-date with what the department is doing. These posts need to be made within a couple of days of the event occurring to make the content feel relevant. City Council and Planning Commission Meetings, community meetings, and joint projects with other departments are all things that could be posted about in this category.

Relevant news articles

When there is a lull in material to post about, posting relevant news articles about planning or other relevant topics is a good way to keep your account active. The post ideally will include a short description of the article as well as a link to the full article.



Credit: LCY Social Media Team
Example of a Facebook post sharing a photo from a community event that the department participated in.

Frivolous fluff posts

These posts may not be directly related to PDS projects, but instead can help give the public insight into the more lighthearted aspects of the job or demonstrate engagement in current social media trends. These posts include things like trick-or-treaters in the office, group volunteer events, company retreats, Throwback Thursdays #TBT, etc. Another possible post type that could fall under this category is a regularly-scheduled employee spotlight. For instance, posting a professional photo of an employee, followed by a blurb about what they do for PDS or their personal interests, can help make PDS more approachable to the public.

Twitter Best Practices

Character limit

Twitter has a 280-character limit, which means that anything you tweet must be under this limit. It can be challenging to condense what you are trying to say, but this is why Twitter is used for small bursts of information rather than large paragraphs.

Emojis/GIFs/Media

Tweets that include media such as Emojis, GIFs, photos, links to videos and articles, get more attention than those with just text.

Be active

Another thing that sets Twitter apart from Facebook is the frequency of activity. Twitter moves a lot faster in terms of influx of new content on your news feed, so it is important to be tweeting, favoriting relevant tweets by other users, and interacting with those who may be tweeting at you. If you are doing these three things, your account will gain momentum in terms of impressions and followers.

Find a balance between formality and informality

Because of Twitter’s character limit, the language used tends to be more casual/informal. On this platform, it is acceptable to use commonly known abbreviations if you are having trouble staying under the character limit.

Twitter Proposed Content

The content that is posted on your Social Media will determine how engaging your account is for the public. It is important to vary post types to keep the public interested in your page. Accompanying each post type is an example of what this type of post would look like, if the Twitter page were up and running.



Credit: LCY Social Media Team

An example of posting a photo on Twitter and tagging another account in the tweet.



Credit: LCY Social Media Team

Example of a tweet using hashtags and emojis to announce a public meeting.

Twitter is used for small bursts of information rather than large paragraphs.

Abbreviations on Twitter

You want to say this...

“We are so excited to announce that the City of Tacoma will be partnering with Sound Transit for a Light Rail opening event on January 18th. It will be open to the public and food and refreshments will be provided. We are very excited for the opportunities that the Light Rail will bring for small businesses as well as the easy transit it will provide for Tacoma residents.”

...but you should tweet this:

“We’re so excited to announce that the @CityofTacoma will be throwing an event with @SoundTransit to celebrate the opening of the Light Rail on 1/18. All are welcome and there will be food & refreshments. Hope to see you there to celebrate the easy transit the Light Rail will bring to Tacoma residents! 🚆”

Here, you are tagging relevant agencies that have Twitter handles, using contractions, abbreviating the date, condensing the information, and adding an emoji. This makes the tweet quicker and less overwhelming for the user, and directs them to related accounts for more information.

Public involvement periods on projects

This includes scoping periods and comment periods. It also includes public meetings that are open to the public. These will likely be the most frequent post types that you have. They should be posted every time that a public involvement period opens, is about to close, and is extended, and every time there is a meeting open to the public. These posts should include a link to where the public can participate online in the process, submit comments, or attend in-person events that they can attend. These posts can also include a photo relevant to the project—for example, a picture of the proposed land use change.

Pictures of past events the department is involved in

When Planning and Development Services is involved in an event, posting pictures taken at that event with a descriptive caption is a good way to keep the public up to date with what the department is doing. These posts need to be made within a couple of days of the event occurring to make sure that the content feels relevant. City Council and Planning Commission meetings, community events, and joint projects with other departments are all things that could be posted about in this category.



Our team recommends devoting one to two employees to serve as part-time social media “content curators.”

Frivolous fluff posts

These posts may not be directly related to PDS projects, but instead help give the public a look into the more lighthearted aspects of the job or demonstrate engagement in current social media trends. These posts include things like posting about trick-or-treaters in the office, group volunteer events, department retreats, Throwback Thursdays #TBT, etc. Here, PDS is engaging with their audience while promoting a beautiful photo of the city and using the popular hashtag, #RiseAndGrind.

Staff Time and Capacity Recommendation

Based on our review of best practices, case studies, and interviews with other jurisdictions, our team recommends that one to two employees are devoted part-time as “content curators” on social media. These employees can come in the form of paid employees dedicated part-time to social media, or as interns from local colleges, such as the UW Tacoma or Tacoma Community College. Their work would include responding to messages, writing posts and tweets (at least once per day), and traveling to noteworthy events or project sites in Tacoma to take photos or record videos to share online. By having dedicated staff, PDS could maintain a consistent and reliable presence on social media.

This report provides an overview of how PDS can connect to the public using social media, and reviews best practices for staff to create and social media accounts.

In our review of case studies and best practices, we found that it is vital to be continuously active on social media accounts. Posting frequently helps to keep people engaged and interested. In addition, successful social media posts are graphically eye-catching. Since some posts may not be directly related to the department's projects and work, the posts should be coordinated, with priority given to news and information on major projects. In addition, social media can be an effective way to guide users to the City's official websites.

Finally, we recommend hiring someone to manage social media accounts, including creating content and responding to comments. This will help PDS maintain a high level of activity online to effectively connect residents to the resources and information they seek.

With a more robust presence on social media, PDS can better connect with residents of Tacoma and keep them engaged in city decisions, promoting a more livable city.

We found that it is vital to be continuously active on social media accounts.



Photo Credit: Teri Thomson Randall
Carlie Stowe and Derek Dragseth, undergraduate students majoring in Community, Environment, and Planning, present their work to City of Tacoma staff.



Photo Credit: Teri Thomson Randall
City of Tacoma staff participating in the students' final presentation at UW Seattle on December 6, 2017. From right: PDS Project Lead Jana Magoon, Latasha Santos (PDS), Chris Bell (LCY Liaison), and Tanisha Jumper (LCY Program Manager).

Appendix A: Definitions

Terminology

Terminology adapted from *hubspot.com*

Bitly Bitly is a free URL shortening service that provides statistics for the links users share online. Bitly is popularly used to condense long URLs to make them easier to share on social networks such as Twitter.

Engagement Rate Engagement rate is a popular social media metric used to describe the amount of interaction -- likes, shares, comments -- a piece of content receives.

Fans Fans are the users who like your Facebook Page.

Favorite Represented by the small star icon on Twitter, favoriting a tweet signals to the creator that you liked their content or post.

Follower In a social media setting, a follower refers to a person who subscribes to your account in order to receive your updates.

Friends Friends is the term used on Facebook to represent the connections you make and the people you follow. These are individuals you consider to be friendly enough with you to see your Facebook profile and engage with you.

GIF GIF is an acronym for Graphics Interchange Format. In social media, GIFs serve as small-scale animations and film clips.

Handle Handle is the term used to describe someone’s @username on Twitter. For example, HubSpot’s Twitter handle is @HubSpot.

#HappeningNow #HappeningNow is a hashtag that indicates that an event is currently taking place, making it easier for users to search and find ongoing events.

Hashtag A hashtag is a tag used on a variety of social networks as a way to annotate a message. A hashtag is a word or phrase preceded by a “#” (i.e. #InboundMarketing). Social networks use hashtags to categorize information and make it easily searchable for users.

Like A Like is an action that can be made by a Facebook or Instagram user. Instead of writing a comment or sharing a post, a user can click the Like button as a quick way to show approval.

Mention A mention is a Twitter term used to describe an instance in which a user includes someone else’s @username in their tweet to attribute a piece of content or start a discussion.

News Feed A news feed is literally a feed full of news. On Facebook, the News Feed is the homepage of users’ accounts where they can see all the latest updates from their friends. The news feed on Twitter is called Timeline.
Reply - A reply is a Twitter action that allows a user to respond to a tweet through a separate tweet that begins with the other user’s @username. This differs from a mention, because tweets that start with an @username only appear in the timelines of users who follow both parties.

Retweet A retweet is when someone on Twitter sees your message and decides to re-share it with his or her followers. A retweet button allows them to quickly resend the message with attribution to the original sharer’s name.

Social Media Monitoring Social media monitoring is a process of monitoring and responding to mentions related to a business that occur in social media.

Tag Tagging is a social media functionality commonly used on Facebook and Instagram that allows users to create a link back to the profile of the person shown in the picture or targeted by the update.

Throwback Thursday Throwback Thursdays (#TBT) involve sharing an old photo or video with a small description of the content. These memories should be at least a few years old. Examples of this could include old photos from the completion of a project, or memories from a past event.

Trending Topic Trending topics refer to the most talked about topics and hashtags on a social media network. These commonly appear on networks like Twitter and Facebook and serve as clickable links in which users can either click through to join the conversation or simply browse the related content.

Appendix B: Citations

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