

TO: James L. App, City Manager
FROM: Meg Williamson, Interim Director of Public Works
SUBJECT: Landscape and Lighting District: Under-Funded Sub-Area Communications
DATE: April 6, 2004

NEEDS: For the City Council to consider a Landscape and Lighting sub-area communications program.

- FACTS:**
1. The Landscape and Lighting District (L&L) was formed by the City Council in 1989.
 2. In January 2003, the City balloted property owners to approve an increase in the assessment for landscape and other maintenance. Only property owners in a sub-area with a deficit budget were balloted. All but one of the sub-area ballots failed.
 3. On November 4, 2003 the City Council directed staff to correct certain sub-area landscape deficiencies and re-ballot as follows:
 - a. Provide landscape improvements to the deficit sub-areas in the L&L; and
 - b. Communicate sub-area service needs, challenges, and options; and
 - c. Re-ballot the deficit sub-areas.
 4. On November 18, 2003, the City Council appropriated \$100,000 for these efforts.
 5. Landscape upgrades to deficient sub-areas will start mid-April. Balloting will be scheduled in January, 2005.
 6. The City requested proposals for the neighborhood communication efforts.

**ANALYSIS
AND**

CONCLUSION: The City received two proposals for the Landscape and Lighting District Communications Program, one from MIG (Berkeley) for \$48,500 to \$58,500 (depending on the specific tasks that the City wishes to pursue, another from Barnett Cox (San Luis Obispo) in the amount of \$22,335.

The work to be performed by Barnett Cox would include:

- Communiqués to affected residents (letters, newsletters)
- Written progress notices
- Media information
- Neighborhood survey
- Neighborhood information exchange meetings

The remaining funds of the \$100,000 budget (approximately \$77,000) would be used for the planting efforts and costs of balloting.

POLICY

REFERENCE: Resolution No. 03-219.

FISCAL

IMPACT: \$22,335 from the L&L District improvement budget.

- OPTIONS:**
- A. For the City Council to authorize the City Manager to engage the services of Barnett Cox to assist staff in developing a communication program with the homeowners in the deficit sub-areas of the City's Landscape and Lighting District for \$22,335.
 - B. Amend, modify, or reject the above option.

Attachment: (1)
Barnett Cox Proposal

Report Prepared By:
Ditas Esperanza, P.E.
Capital Projects Engineer



memorandum

Date: 3/19/04
To: Ditas Esperanza
From: Maggie Cox
Subject: Landscape & Lighting District Assessment – Community Outreach Communications

I reviewed the materials previously used by the City for communicating with residents about Landscape and Lighting District Assessment (LLDA) increases, and I have recommendations for how the communication program – and the outcome – can be improved.

The City is undertaking an effort that can be compared with the process of selling an item. The City is selling, and wants the customer to buy. There are several steps needed to produce a successful sales effort that gains resident approval for an increase in lighting and landscaping assessments.

1. The City needs to be certain that the product being sold (improved lighting and landscaping services) has value to the intended customer, is priced fairly and is a reasonable cost.
2. The City needs to communicate with property owners about the services being provided – you must communicate the value of the product and service.
3. You must back up your promises with performance.
4. Once your intended customer (the property owner) understands and desires the product, believes it has value and is fairly priced, he/she should be ready to agree to pay for the continuation of that service.

As we have previously discussed, a ballot should not be requested until the product/promise side of the equation has been accomplished. You have indicated that due to contractors in the past who have performed poorly, landscaping in

neighborhood parkways, medians, slopes and open space areas have not been maintained adequately. Subsequently, plant materials have died and the areas are sparsely landscaped and in poor health. Residents are angry to have been asked to fund these services when these areas have not been maintained to their satisfaction. **The City has determined that it will undertake installing new plants and improve the irrigation system to provide for a more proper watering sequence to these plants to insure a well-maintained and well-landscaped areas. These will be completed at the City's cost. In return, the City hopes to achieve a future success of an assessment increase which would provide the cornerstone of the communications effort.**

I propose the following approach to neighborhood communications. This program is designed to establish credibility, foster trust in the City and prepare property owners to vote for assessment increases. It is conducted primarily via direct mail, in order to speak to the affected neighborhoods rather than the city as a whole. Note that all communication outreach also offers an opportunity to promote water conservation. Those messages will be included in all materials.

1. **Overall Approach: Communication with affected property owners**
 - a. Communicate regularly and forthrightly with affected neighborhoods.
 - b. Give the project its own identity so that all efforts reinforce the City's commitment. Give the City-funded phase of the program a name ("Paso Landscape Makeover"; you might want to have fun and call it "Trading Places").
 - c. Give the project a face—the City staff member who will be in charge should become readily familiar to neighborhoods. Include his photo, name and contact info on all materials. Establish a call line for questions or comments and have him personally respond to inquiries.

2. **Begin by sending a letter to every affected resident indicating the City's oversight and commitment to improving conditions**
 - a. This letter should be apologetic in tone... "We goofed".
 - b. Let residents know the City will pay to bring medians to standard as a show of good faith.
 - c. Let neighborhoods know future costs will be borne by property owners, per their purchase agreements.

- d. Follow letters with postcard mailers to all affected property owners as each neighborhood project is undertaken. This should be a simple “Wanted to let you know we’re working in the XXXXX neighborhood...watch for new flowers and landscaping blooming in your neighborhood soon.” This effort will create a sense of momentum and allow for continued communication with neighbors.

3. Initiate News Media Contact

- a. News media in Paso Robles should be approached for help in generating community awareness about the program and what it can mean for the community. Media to consider are local newspapers and magazines along with KPRL radio and possibly KSBY. Media reporters will need information from the City in order to write/produce a story that is factual and not confusing. We recommend individual meetings with key reporters. Media coverage will give residents a baseline for information about the program. It may develop that news stories are not needed; however, it is still important to inform reporters so that disgruntled neighbors can’t create a story of their own.

4. Conduct Neighborhood Survey

- a. As each neighborhood is completed, a postcard survey should be sent in a letter to that neighborhood, asking property owners “how we did”; again offering contact info and a survey question about interest in a neighborhood meeting.
- b. Also as neighborhoods are completed, I recommend a celebration mailer be sent –“thanks for your patience”, include a local nursery coupon for a discount on drought tolerant plants to help keep individual yards in the neighborhood beautiful.

5. Produce and Distribute “Progress Report” Newsletter

- a. When the beautification project is $\frac{3}{4}$ completed, a newsletter should be sent as a progress report to all affected property owners—before and after photos, maps showing neighborhoods completed, etc. This can be as simple as a flyer in an attractive newsletter format.

The above efforts are recommended to communicate efforts of the City, produce results, and continually remind property owners that the future will be theirs to pay for. These steps are necessary before the City undertakes a second effort at a ballot.

6. Host Neighborhood Meetings

- a. As 2004 ends and the move for an assessment ballot in 2005 approaches, community meetings should be scheduled to address each neighborhood. A postcard mailer will invite residents to the meeting.
- b. At the meeting, photos or PowerPoint slides should be used to visually lead the residents through the information about what has occurred in the previous months, what is involved on the go forward basis and what will be provided by the increased assessment. The meeting should review the ballot process and instruct residents on the process for voting. A "frequently asked questions" sheet should be produced and distributed at the meeting.
- c. A roster of attendees at the meeting should be kept (a simple at-the-door sign up), with a follow up "thanks for attending" letter sent to attendees. Non-attendees should receive a letter noting that the meeting was held and should include a copy of the frequently asked questions sheet. Both attendees and non-attendees should also receive a summary of questions/issues raised at the meeting. It is critically important that residents know they are being heard.
- d. I recommend the City produce and present a proposed timeline of activities so that resident know not just what they will receive, but when. It is important to address issues of accountability and delivery on promise.

7. Summary Recommendation

The City's proactive effort to correct past problems will be the cornerstone of returning community faith in the L&L District Assessments. Once the program is back at full operation and residents derive value for their assessments, many of the communication issues will be resolved.

It is important the program focus not just on the message, but also on the packaging of the message: simple, clear, compelling and visual printed

March 25, 2004

pieces will help defuse the sense of government heavy handedness that can otherwise occur. While the City cannot eliminate homeowner unhappiness with assessments, it can make the program palatable and reasonable – and worthy of a vote for maintenance.

City of Paso Robles
LLDA
Communications Plan

Barnett Cox Associates

Element	Item	Quantity	Costs
Neighborhood Outreach			
	Initial letter (copywriting, printing, postage, handling)	2700	\$ 1,620.00
	Postcard mailer (design, copywriting, printing, postage, handling; three mailings to neighborhood)	8100	\$ 4,000.00
	Survey Card (design, copywriting, printing, postage, handling, results compilation)	2700	\$ 1,080.00
	Newsletter (design, copywriting, printing, postage, handling)	2700	\$ 1,755.00
	Project completion letter (copywriting, printing, postage, handling)	2700	\$ 1,620.00
News Media Coordination			\$ 420.00
Community Meeting(s) -- 4 total; some combined groups			
	Meeting set-up -- invitations, arrangements, set up	4 meetings	\$ 3,880.00
	BCA on-site meeting attendance	4 meetings	\$ 2,240.00
	Meeting materials: Fact Sheet (copywriting, revisions, printing)		\$ 400.00
	Meeting follow up (Q&A, summary of comments)	2700	\$ 2,180.00
Letters to Editor			
	Suggested Content	6 letters	\$ 140.00
BC&A Service Fees			
	Client meetings, phone calls, giveaway acquisition, overall coordination		\$ 3,000.00
Communications Plan Total			\$ 22,335.00