

DATE: April 12, 2017
TO: Board of Commissioners
FROM: Kimberly Branam, Executive Director
SUBJECT: Report Number 17-14
Update on the PDC Communications Strategy

BOARD ACTION REQUESTED

No action is requested; information only.

SUMMARY

At the April 12, 2017 Portland Development Commission (PDC) Board of Commissioners (Board) meeting, staff will provide an update on the PDC Communications Strategy (Communications Strategy). The goal of the Communications Strategy, which was initiated in October 2016, is to significantly increase awareness and support for PDC, its 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, and related projects, programs, and initiatives. The objective is to ensure that PDC's communication and engagement approaches are aligned and effective in communicating our new approach, and address existing misperceptions and concerns.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Communications Strategy is an evolution of the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, which laid out a new vision for the agency focused on four key objectives: growing middle-wage jobs, advancing opportunities for prosperity, collaborating with partners for an equitable city, and creating vibrant neighborhoods and communities. The agency's values—Love Portland, Make a Difference, Do Excellent Work, Build Partnerships, Advance Equity, Honor the Public Trust, Innovate—are the foundation for PDC's work, as it makes good on its commitments, shapes its future course, works with partners and redefines its business model.

The Communications Strategy provides a framework for a new, more consistent way to talk about the agency's work and explain its strategic direction in a manner that resonates more clearly with the community.

To deliver on its commitment to better connect the community to PDC's new strategic direction, PDC issued a Request for Proposals in October 2016 seeking a consultant to provide strategic communications consulting and project management services that included participation and stakeholder interviews and outreach in the process to update PDC's identity, tag line, logo, and/or key messages.

PDC received five responses and interviewed all five firms, ultimately selecting the team of Weinstein PR and Brink Communications (Weinstein/Brink) to lead the Communications Strategy. Representatives from Weinstein/Brink will attend and present findings at the April 12, 2017 PDC Board meeting.

Public Participation and Feedback

Following its selection, the Weinstein/Brink team conducted an extensive research phase to understand how PDC is perceived by the diverse communities with whom we on a regular basis. This research included in-person and online interviews with 60 key stakeholders and conversations with partners and staff. In addition, working in collaboration with DHM Research, the team held three focus group meetings (two with local residents of color and one with local business owners of color) and conducted a city-wide phone survey of 400 Portlanders.

At the PDC Board Retreat in December 2016, Weinstein/Brink presented the results of that work, including a summary of key findings and recommendations on how to better communicate and engage the public in the context of PDC's Strategic Plan and future.

Key Findings

Weinstein/Brink's research revealed that a majority of participants were not familiar with or aware of PDC. Those who were at least somewhat familiar were neutral to positive in their perceptions, which presents an opportunity to better communicate PDC's work, partners, and priorities. Most of the participants were more positive toward PDC after learning about its work. Participants were also somewhat unfamiliar with PDC's role in the Portland economy.

Research participants were mostly in accord with PDC priorities and assigned significant importance (7.8 on a 1-9 scale) to creating and keeping family-wage jobs in Portland and to supporting small businesses in Portland neighborhoods (7.6 of 9). Other ranked priorities were to support minority- and women-owned businesses, support business in clean tech, software, athletic, outdoor, manufacturing and healthcare, and focus on neighborhoods most in need of growth. The redevelopment of areas like the U.S. Postal Service site and Lents Town Center received a ranking of 5.8.

The Weinstein/Brink team identified the need to address the following perceptions: that PDC's strategic direction is window dressing; that PDC is only about big real estate deals; that PDC is contributing to (or not addressing the impacts of) displacement and gentrification; and that PDC is reactive and responsive to the loudest and most influential voices.

The team also found that PDC needs to communicate differently: to better explain and simplify the new strategic direction and focus in resident-friendly ways; to bring together the real estate and jobs/equity sides in communications and practice; to ensure that the work matters to more than PDC's traditional stakeholders; and to focus on what PDC does best and eliminate agency programs that do not support the current direction.

The identified perceptions and communications needs called for a significant shift in PDC culture: to move outside current circles of influence and build stronger relationships with communities of color, women-owned businesses, and low-income neighborhoods; to hire more people of color and needed expertise; to implement strategic operational change that is authentic, transparent, and clear; to build a framework for communicating that resonates with more people; and to shift the way PDC engages with the public to create meaningful relationships.

Recommendations, Current Work and Next Steps

The Weinstein/Brink findings called for an evolution of the agency that demonstrates the values of the Strategic Plan and recommended the following strategies to achieve that evolution:

- Create Clear Outcomes with Meaningful Metrics
- Create New and Streamlined Formats for PDC's Strategic Direction
- Tie Multiple Programs Together with Words and Visuals
- Create New Connections in Communities

- Go Beyond Reporting “News” to Storytelling
- Rebrand for the Next Era of Portland

Weinstein/Brink noted that a new name for the agency would better reflect the work that has been underway since the Strategic Plan was adopted. The team has proposed several potential names, taglines, and key messages to convey PDC’s strategic direction which will be discussed at the PDC Board Meeting on April 12.

The key messages include:

- Growing middle-income jobs
- Advancing opportunities for prosperity
- Collaborating with partners for an equitable city
- Creating vibrant neighborhoods and communities

Internally, the PDC Public Affairs team has formed a Strategic Communications Advisory Committee with members representing multiple PDC departments to provide feedback on proposed names and messaging. PDC Executive Director Kimberly Branam has shared updates on the strategy and rebranding work at PDC staff meetings and with the PDC Leadership team as well as both Mayor Wheeler and members of City Council.

On Friday, April 7, PDC staff collaborated with the Weinstein/Brink team to present the strategy work to a joint meeting of the Neighborhood Economic Development Leadership Group and Central City Budget Advisory Committee; at the April 12, 2017 meeting, staff will report back to the PDC Board on those groups’ feedback.

Concurrent with the Communications Strategy work, the Public Affairs team has been working on a redesign of the PDC website to improve functionality and mobile accessibility and to enhance existing messaging and storytelling that aligns with the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan. The launch of the redesign will correspond with the implementation timeline for the Communications Strategy and is consistent with the consultants’ recommendation to create streamlined formats for PDC’s strategic direction.

ATTACHMENTS

None.