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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Thomas A. Golden, Jr., City Manager 

FROM: Mirán Fernandez, Chief Information Officer

DATE: January 30, 2023

Re: **INFORMATIONAL REPORT:** Leveraging social media as a community information portal through which to connect constituents, voters, and supporters throughout the City of Lowell around common interests, causes, issues, and events.

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This memo is intended to provide general information on how the City of Lowell plans on leveraging social media as a source of community updates through which to connect constituents, voters, and supporters throughout the city around common interests, causes, issues, and events.

As a government entity with a “.gov” domain, the City of Lowell’s online presence carries considerable weight as a credible source of information. As social media has evolved, its use within government organizations has too. Unfortunately, the use of social media within many government organizations has grown organically, often with limited direction, and subject to inconsistent use due to personnel changes, often leading to “orphaned” content and audiences. Couple this with the proliferation of “unofficial” city sites/ pages – which can be started by anyone anywhere and be loaded with questionable content – and the city’s ability to deliver timely and relevant information is continually diluted. Due to a lack of resources, the use of these social media services is rarely an integrated part of a municipality’s overall communication strategy.

Recognizing there are many social platforms available to choose from, MIS proposes the use of Facebook Groups as the communications platform of choice for educating and engaging the public about the city’s work, services, and general community updates, while simultaneously combating disinformation. While Facebook has long been used as a platform for connecting people, leveraging Facebook Groups on the city’s official, “verified”, and public Facebook page allows the city to refine its communication efforts by allowing information to be easily targeted at specific audiences who seeking specific content, all from a verifiable source.

By leveraging lessons learned from other communities, MIS believes that Facebook Groups would provide the most flexibility and audience reach at both a neighborhood and operational level. Groups will allow key city personnel to easily post information targeted at specific neighborhoods(e.g., construction, roadwork, road races, waste and recycling issues, etc.), while also allowing information related to specific operational areas to easily be delivered(e.g., job postings, small business materials, senior issues, etc.). Information posted to Groups can also easily be shared at the city’s primary Facebook page, allowing for a constant stream of fresh and

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relevant posts there, while allowing visitors to “deep dive” into more targeted areas of interest. Examples of proposed Facebook Groups include:

- *Neighborhood (District #)*, e.g., *Pawtucketville (Districts 1, 4)* – Each neighborhood will have its own group which will also indicate its district number(s). City related updates impacting the neighborhood (e.g., construction, traffic, paving, events, etc.) will be posted here in order to help everyone know about municipal matters related to or going on in their neighborhood.
- *Employment Opportunities* – Information about city job postings will be posted here to further expand the reach regarding employment opportunities within the city.
- *Health & Human Services* – Information about health and human services issues (e.g., vaccination clinics, homeless/unhoused initiatives, etc.) will be posted here.
- *American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)* – Information about the city’s ARPA recovery plans will be posted here.
- *Waste & Recycling* – Information about solid waste and recycling issues will be posted here.
- *Public Safety & Emergency Operations* – Information about police and fire related issues, as well as matters related to preparing for and guiding the community through emergency related matters (e.g., missing people, inclement weather, disaster planning, etc.) will be posted here.
- *Economic Development* – Information about the economic development efforts (e.g., funding opportunities, success stories, new businesses, etc.) throughout the city will be posted here.

While many of these materials may already exist in some capacity or another, they are not housed on official or verified pages/ sites, often go for weeks or months without posts, may have been created by anyone (including members of the public), and may contain disinformation. Benefits of establishing Groups within the city’s verified Facebook page include:

1. A single set of verified municipal resources for constituents, voters, and supporters to access common interests, causes, issues, and events relevant to them, while attempting to reduce disinformation.
2. Group posts may easily be cross-posted to the city’s primary Facebook page, allowing city’s primary Facebook page to be more engaging, relevant, and current.
3. Because the city’s verified Facebook page is a public one, the content doesn’t require a visitor to have a Facebook account to access it, so it can be viewed by anyone.
4. By managing groups as a part of the city’s primary page, the risk of orphaned pages is eliminated, allowing for the continuity of information to the public.
5. All content is indexed and searchable via Google.
6. Posting materials on Facebook has no “cost” to the city, which allows us to keep growing costs on the city’s website from spiraling.

MIS hopes to begin the process of implementing Facebook Groups as soon as possible. Existing Facebook pages which the city has access to will be decommissioned and archived with a post directing visitors to the new Facebook Groups.