Members & Objectives

- Committee established by a Resolution of the Township Committee on Feb. 12, 2018.

- **Goals were to:**
  - Improve communications with residents and its methods for delivering information to residents
  - Facilitate two-way communication
  - Perform a communications survey, inventory and review of best practices

- **Residents Appointed:** Taylor Buonocore, Peter Dumovic, Dana Feldman, Rachel Harrison, Gretchen Holquist, Paul Miller, Debra Nails, Meredith Ogden, Martin Slayne, Monica Smith, Tina Okun Smith, Ann Van Voorhis, Hilary Wilder, Jeanne Woo

- **Staff:** Township Administrator Deborah Bonanno, Recreation Director Steve Eisenstein, Police Chief Ross Johnson, Melanie Politi

- **Elected Officials:** Committeewoman Amalia Duarte
# Process & Areas of Focus

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<th>Resident Survey</th>
<th>Inventory of Channels</th>
<th>Website Review</th>
<th>Best Practices</th>
<th>Two-Way Communication</th>
<th>Emergency Communications</th>
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<tr>
<td>Created online survey for residents ages 16+, open 4/17 to 5/16</td>
<td>Reviewed current print, social media, Website, town-wide mailings and video</td>
<td>Google Analytics implemented</td>
<td>Spoke to elected officials &amp; staff at five municipalities: Chatham Twp., Chester Twp., Denville Twp., Randolph Twp. &amp; Town of Newton</td>
<td>Reviewed survey results</td>
<td>Met with Police Chief to discuss current tools</td>
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<tr>
<td>500+ responses received</td>
<td>Compiled statistics on usage and frequency</td>
<td>Reviewed navigation, site structure and homepage elements</td>
<td>Recommended actions to Ad Hoc Committee for implementation</td>
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<td>Asked 25 questions; five open-ended for verbatim feedback</td>
<td>Gave preliminary recommendations to development team</td>
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Executive Summary

- Residents are generally satisfied with township communications, and there are areas for improvement.
- Residents are interested in receiving information from the town, across a variety of channels.
- Residents are generally more satisfied with their ability to get information from the town than to give input to the town.
- Best practices vary across towns based on the needs of the local community and established communications channels.

There are four recommended action areas:

- Improve the ability for residents to get the information they want, when they want it through an improved Website.
- Establish consistent “push” communication with a regular newsletter that gives residents visibility to community news and the good work being done for our town.
- Create more in-person opportunities to engage with the Township Committee and each other to build even greater community.
- Create a standing Communications Committee that would be responsible for overall communications objectives & strategy, developing some of the ad-hoc pieces and provide suggestions and solutions as this area evolves.
Survey Results: Key Takeaways

- There were 549 responses and 85% of respondents opted-in to receive town communications, nearly doubling the number of residents on the list.
- Residents are generally satisfied with communications, but there are areas for improvement.
- Residents are interested in regular communications from the township.
- Opportunities to improve include Website improvements, structured regular communications on town information, and informal events/polls to increase input into the town.
- E-mail, followed by the town Website and the “About Mendham” (unofficial) Facebook page are the top sources for information and awareness.
- Recreation, recycling and the Township Committee are the top areas of interest.
- Nearly half (44%) of respondents use the Website at least monthly, and most (52%) found it “somewhat helpful,” yet many found it hard to navigate or could not find the information they needed, necessitating calling Town Hall.
- Residents are generally more satisfied with their ability to get information from the town than their ability to give input to the town.
54% of survey respondents live in households with children under the age of 18.

About 30% of respondents have lived in Mendham for 20+ years.
Residents gave 1,810 verbatim responses with ideas and feedback

- Overall, township is doing well.
- Attending Town Halls regularly is not realistic given that I have young children. I’m not sure how else my input would be readily heard.
- Resident "meet and greet" with members of MT office, at the Library or Municipal Building, to give faces to our community.
- It has been easy giving feedback to Township Committee members.
- An email suggestion "box" or surveys like this that are sent out when viewpoints about critical issues are desired would be great.
- I found out about the email system by accident. Make it more publicized.
- I don't know how to give the town feedback.
- You have to hunt and dig for some information.
- Almost always find the information I am looking for.
- Overall goals published for the year and progress updates against those goals on Website.
Best Practices from Comparable Municipalities

- **Print Newsletters**
  - Published approx. four times per year

- **E-mail Blasts**
  - Sent approx. once per week

- **Town’s Official Social Media (Facebook; Twitter)**
  - Use to post information about events

- **Town Website**

- **Mayor’s Regular Office Hours**

- **Mayor’s Regular Video Updates**
  - Posted on town Website or Facebook

- **Town Manager/Town Administrator’s Regular Blog**
  - Posted on town Website

- **Press Releases to local print and electronic media outlets**

- **Outdoor Digital Sign**

- **Automated Phone/Text Messages (e.g., Everbridge, Smart911)**
  - Telephone calls and messages to cell and land lines. Used for emergencies, major changes to services and announcements of important events.

- **Town Manager/Town Administrator’s E-Mail and Telephone Interactions with residents and business owners**

- **Electronic Surveys (e.g., SurveyMonkey)**
  - Used to collect information from the public

- **Town Council Meetings**
  - “Open to the Public” Communication Forum

- **Town Halls/Community Presentations**
  - Mayor and Council and Town Manager/Town Administrator presentations to community groups. These events are targeted, focused and more informal than Town Council meetings.
Recommendations
Recommendation 1: Update Website

Huge opportunity uncovered: Citi-e-Net is redesigning Websites to make them mobile-phone friendly.

The cost of this project is estimated by Citi-e-Net at $500, versus estimate of $20,000 from other vendors.

A sub-group of the Ad Hoc Committee and Melanie Politi are already working on a redesign of the Website with a new look and more user-friendly navigation, based on data from Google Analytics.

As part of the redesign, the sub-group is investigating the following:

- Adding an Alerts/Hot Issues button with a possible link to Facebook or other social media.
- Consolidating news on the homepage
- Updating the FAQs page and archiving
- Creating a form to submit events
- Adding a new service request form that can be tracked to promote accountability
- Adding photos/bios of Township Committee members; information about how the Committee works and what it oversees (ordinances, etc.)
Current Website & Draft Mockup
Recommendation 2: Regular Newsletter

- Launch a consist, professional looking e-newsletter and send bi-weekly
  - Estimated Fall 2018 start, aligning with Website redesign

- Create an online submission form for town boards/committees and other groups to submit events for inclusion in the newsletter.

- Use Constant Contact software tool

- Simultaneously post information on Website and Facebook
Recommendation 3: Increase in-person opportunities for two-way communication

- Overall survey shows that residents want more engagement with the Township Committee outside of regular meetings.
- Activities suggested to facilitate two-way communication included Town Hall meetings, presentations, informal gatherings, and surveys seeking input.

**Suggestions for Township Committee to consider:**

- Hold informal meetings twice a year, leveraging other events or key topics of interest
  - Examples: Opening of Ralston Playground to celebrate the town’s success
- Schedule Town Halls on specific topics (ex: recreation; budget) and videotape for future viewing and/or record minutes.
- Add voicemail boxes at Town Hall for Township Committee members
- Send out occasional surveys on specific issues (e.g. Pitney, Recreation ideas/events)
Recommendation 4: Communications Committee

- Create a standing Communications Committee of residents with professional experience and others with varied backgrounds to offer suggestions and create communications structure & annual plan.

- Evaluate opportunities for more efficient communications:
  - Digital road signs and/or a sandwich board at Town Hall for announcements.
  - Write and send press releases to local media
  - Create short videos showcasing each town department/government
  - Review social media statistics and how to best optimize time spent on updates by staff.
  - More detailed review of verbatim responses for additional recommendations
  - 6-month check-in, after recommendations are implemented
Recommendation 5: Social Media

- Leave it alone for now, and evaluate the role for the future
- Most town boards/committees do not engage in social media or do very little of it.
- Once created, it must be managed for responses and have a strategic purpose.
- Residents turn to the “About Mendham” (unofficial) Facebook page (3,146 members) to ask questions and share information on just about everything from events, bear sightings, lost dogs, shopping, doctor and plumber recommendations, etc.
Next Steps & Costs

- Update Website to improve residents’ ability to obtain information on demand
  - Development underway
  - $500 estimated cost for entire project (vs. $20K from other vendors)

- Develop regular newsletter to give residents visibility to township news
  - Develop template using Constant Contact for launch in Fall 2018
  - Ad Hoc Committee members available to assist with creation of template
  - $540 cost, annually for up to 2,500 e-mails (possible 20%-30% nonprofit discount)

- In-person activities to foster even greater community
  - Township Committee to identify one opportunity that can be attended this year as a kick-off
  - If leveraging other event, e.g. Ralston Playground opening or Clambake
  - $0 cost

- Creation of a standing Communications Committee
  - Township Committee would need to adopt a founding ordinance
  - $0 cost