

Mayor-Elect Caroline Simmons Transition Policy Committee Reporting Document

Committee Name: Citizen Services

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As defined by the staff and the organization chart at Government Center, Citizen Services (CS) is defined as services covered by FixIt Stamford and 203-977-4140. Our committee broadened the definition of CS to include all services provided by all branches of government in Stamford. We encourage continued conversations around some of these expanded ideas from our meetings and have included in the appendix our meeting notes and the Stamford Arts and Cultural Commission's Strategic Plan.

Additionally, we agreed that improving City communications is integral to CS. The list of communication recommendations was extensive, so we separated those items into a separate category. The committee strongly emphasizes the need to integrate solutions for these two very important areas. This suggestion was echoed by Josephine Carpanzano.

Citizens Services Bureau (CSB):

The Citizens Services Center's mission is to ensure residents and visitors receive timely and efficient responses to their requests by ensuring the methods of communication are innovative and dynamic. This department is responsible for the implementation of efficient online service solutions with a comprehensive work order system to ensure accountability, predictability, and streamlined service processes in an ever changing modern city. The Center works with City departments to provide insights into the needs of residents while helping to confirm quality service is consistently delivered. The Department strives to optimize communication between City Departments and the residents on a daily basis. [This mission statement was provided by Josephine Carpanzano on December 1, 2021].

Evolution and History of the Citizens Service Bureau

- Opened in 1996, led by Frank Fedeli.
- From 1996-2002, it was a paper-based system.
- From 2002-2012, a system called "Q-Alert" was used.
- From 2012-2017, "GOVQA" was utilized and implemented by Frank Fedeli.
- From 2017-2018, still using "GOVQA," "FIX-IT" was redesigned and rebranded
- From 2018 - October 2021, FIX IT 2.0." was developed.
- From October 2021 through the present, staff is working to continually innovate and develop the current VEOCI "FIX IT" platform.

CSB is now on its third automated platform. Currently, requests have Service Level Agreements (SLAs). This is an agreement in which a department commits to a length of time for the task

completion. When the original system was developed in 2017, the historical data was used as a baseline for establishing SLAs. The latest version of this platform was developed with the purpose of providing transparency and metrics for CS to facilitate ongoing improvements and efficiencies.

For example, “potholes” may have an SLA of 4 days during the season, but they are completed on average in 40 hours from receipt/notification in the system to the department (happens automatically). A “blight” request, on the other hand, can take an average of over 90-180 days if blight is found on the property due to regulatory requirements and the legal process.

The committee agrees with staff recommendations that CS should be included in management and performance meetings.

1. How do you propose the Simmons Administration should prioritize the policy goals in this area, and on what timeframe?

- The Administration must "open" CSB on Google Business (it currently says Permanently Closed).
- Meet with staff to learn about the current output metrics and to understand the experiences and interactions of the FixIt service.
- The committee recommends to recentralize the supervision of the Fixit system, and ideally, have the “Supervisor” work directly with the Mayor/within the Mayor’s cabinet.
- We recommend a city-wide implementation of a constant feedback loop for iterative improvement; it is important to the success of FIX-IT.
- Establish technology training for Directors and leadership.
- Staff are delivering a lot of priority services for the community, but the public is unaware of the services. Additional communication resources are needed.
- We need more bilingual employees.
 - Work with the unions and HR to create a directory of bilingual employees, for those employees voluntarily willing to participate. (There seems to be a real demand for Haitain Creole speakers, in addition to Spanish speakers.) We learned that one union already provides a small bonus for bilingual workers.
 - Look at simultaneous translation services for meetings and perhaps for over the phone. (May want to see what the BOE is doing in this regard.)
- Evaluate the staffing levels and the training resources and their impact on response time.
- The staff (beyond the FixIt department) needs training in a customer service mind-set.
 - Working with HR, review current professional development options. Establish a continuous learning culture among all employees.
 - Currently, the principles of “Lean Six/Lean Sigma” are taught to managers, and some middle managers. Other employees should be included.
 - Continually reexamine training needs, and adapt as necessary.

- At the discretion of the Supervisor of CSB, allow appointments, on a limited basis, for those who would benefit from in-person communication (elderly, limited English proficient, etc.).
- Review Accessibility services (ADA)
 - Develop or revise current accessibility plan as needed (ensure that access to sign language interpreters is readily available)
- Provide FixIt outside of the Government Center
 - Partner with other City Departments (Senior Center, Social Services, Public Health, etc.) and outside agencies to host special FixIt office hours
 - Place FixIt Kiosks at library facilities and Community Centers

2. Which goals are achievable in the first 100 days of the Administration?

- We believe those items in red can be completed within the first 100 days.
- Look immediately into special/additional appropriations or additions to the 2022-2023 budget in order to beef up staffing in CSB, and anywhere else it's needed to improve city government.
- Work with the CIO to broadcast BOF/BOR/BOE meetings on channels 78 (BOE) or 79 (city government).
- Mayor's Night Out/In, Neighborhood Association tours, or district walks w/city reps. The Administration should make themselves aware of upcoming improvements to CS from the latest developments of the ERP platform; including the scheduled new permitting platform
- Fixit reports by district given to BOR's so that they can monitor requests for their districts and/or train BOR to generate their own reports
- Review all open FixIt requests to see what outstanding requests can be fixed or need to be moved forward or closed. Track these items and create a list of all fixits accomplished in first 100 days

3. Which goals will require legislation to move forward? Which items can be advanced through the actions of the Administration alone? What is the fiscal impact of these legislative or executive actions?

- The majority of items in our response to Question 1 can be done without legislation.
- There will need to be appropriations and or budget additions to fund the staffing, training, and communication strategies.

4. Are there specific challenges you can identify with regard to achieving the Simmons Administration's goals, and how would you suggest addressing those?

Additional appropriations or budgetary additions are always challenging. You need a clear, well-articulated vision for any new position or service in order to get Board approval. All incoming department heads should learn about the budgeting process, from start to finish. No one should assume that departmental leaders know these

things, without the proper training. We recommend that a Guide to Budget Preparedness and presentation be developed for new managers.

All additional line items/positions in the budget should be backed up by job descriptions and clearly articulated reasons for adding a new position/line item to the budget. Job descriptions should be up-to-date for current processes, but flexible enough to allow for adaptation to new processes.

5. What examples of success from other states, countries, or the private sector in this policy area should the Administration study?

The City of Stamford has looked to expertise from the city of Grand Rapids, Michigan in regards to improving its citizen services.

Here are other examples for guidance:

A Mayor's Dashboard for the city can highlight data information for residents. Norwalk example: <https://www.norwalkct.org/1818/Mayors-Dashboard>

"Your Ideas at Work" space on city website. Example:

<https://www.mecknc.gov/CountyManagersOffice/Pages/Your-Ideas-at-Work.aspx>

Implement Open Checkbook for Stamford. Hartford example:

<https://checkbook.hartford.gov/#!/year/2021/>

<https://www.cityofithaca.org/>

<https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home>

<https://www.sanjoseca.gov/your-government/departments-offices/customer-service/san-jose-311>

Open Data Projects

<https://data-avl.opendata.arcgis.com/>

<https://louisvilleky.gov/government/transparency>

<https://govlaunch.com/projects>

6. Are there any other issues/considerations you would like to highlight regarding this policy area?

- Phone system: can messages be available in different languages? Can the message be streamlined?
- Website: Add LGBTQ friendly city to website
- Provide free compost to residents from leaf pick up and/or food scrap compost program
- Add "Under construction" update information to city website for updates on road projects
- Infrastructure: sidewalks and potholes; plant more trees
- Storm drain hotline
- ++ (see Wendi Hoak's email)

- Update City's web services with arts and cultural institutions accessible to all citizens--improving their quality of life and bringing national visibility to Stamford
<https://www.choosestamford.com/why-stamford/stamford-tourism-map>

Research and Helpful Links:

[*A Practical Guide to Workflow for Government - Developing a Roadmap for IT Modernization*](#)

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<https://bloombergcities.jhu.edu/news/introducing-10-americas-newest-mayors>

<https://www.cityleadership.harvard.edu/research-and-resources/public-value-tool-kit>

<https://bloombergcities.jhu.edu/mayors-challenge-ideas>

<https://www.nlc.org/article/2020/08/31/three-keys-to-speed-in-government-service/>

Communication

CITY COMMUNICATIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

Ideas

To improve our Citizen Services, we need to also improve our Communications. They are interdependent.

Prioritizing transparency (to build trust between local government and residents) should be a priority and guiding principle.

The City needs a thoughtful and purposeful Communications Strategic Plan. This will guide us through the development needed - but should also allow for modifying solutions as we implement and learn. (Ongoing iterative process improvement,)

For a city our size, your strategic plan should include bringing on more Communications Staff with better defined roles and goals. Communications staff in different departments of city government should collaborate and coordinate (Education, Health, Police, EconDev, etc.)

Identifying constituencies and developing communication solutions for as many residents as possible should be part of your strategic plan (varied media and messaging). We need more language solutions in the Communications Strategic Plan. We must integrate inclusive solutions and messaging.

Modify the weekly newsletter so that it is more accessible. Break it down into smaller pieces, reduce word count, and use bullet points, highlight priority elements. Create a regular and accessible summary of the Boards' activities.

There are many ways to improve our city website. We provided some initial requests in our Citizen Services responses. We recommend assembling an ongoing feedback group that purposefully engages with the site and provides ongoing feedback and a list of possible improvements.

A Mayor's Dashboard for the city can highlight data information for residents. Norwalk example: <https://www.norwalkct.org/1818/Mayors-Dashboard>

"Your Ideas at Work" space on city website. Example: <https://www.mecknc.gov/CountyManagersOffice/Pages/Your-Ideas-at-Work.aspx>

Our City's Intranet is currently publicly accessible: <http://staminet.org/> -- it should be available by restricted login only.

Implement Open Checkbook for Stamford. Hartford example:

<https://checkbook.hartford.gov/#!/year/2021/>

Articles

How to Improve Government to Citizen Communication - 9 Steps to Digital Communications Success

<https://www.govtech.com/archive/how-to-improve-government-to-citizen-communication.html>

Mecklenberg County (North Carolina) Communications Plan

<https://www.mecknc.gov/PI/Documents/Mecklenburg-County-Communications-Plan.pdf>

Importance of Strong Communications in Local Government

<https://insights.diligent.com/board-communication-local-government/importance-strong-communication-local-government/>

Strong communications work to connect residents in a city - connected residents are inspired by each other and can collaborate and solve problems on their own - creating an innovative and sustainable city. Communications are not the only way that residents connect in a city... infrastructure, public spaces, transportation all contribute to connecting people.

<https://smartgrowth.org/social-sustainability-putting-heart-urban-planning/>

What about the people? The socially sustainable, resilient community and urban

development “This report unites three major strands of cities research and policy of interest to governments, planners, designers, architects, social scientists and others – Urban Development, Social Sustainability and Community (Social) Resilience to the impacts of global warming and climate change. Its topic: planning, designing and constructing urban built environments that support the behavioural and psychological aspects of a socially sustainable, resilient community, thus promoting its core strengths to act, is a relatively unestablished strand in urban planning, design and development research, policy and practice. This initial report is intended to put our ideas and recommendations out into the public and professional domain with the aim of soliciting feedback from interested parties whilst additional publications are underway for different audiences. Author contact details can be found on the Acknowledgements page.

The report should be read as the full story of the research project, and a complete guide to the subject. The first half presents a theoretical framework that demonstrates how urban planning, design and construction can support socially sustainable, resilient behaviours and psychological responses through urban form and public participation. The second half applies this framework to practical case studies from “real world” urban development projects from around the globe to identify their effects on communities. A set of recommendations through which the framework can be applied in practice using a four stage “socially-aware planning process” is offered at the end. These can be read as a stand-alone guide for urban development

stakeholders seeking implementation advice, rather than the conceptual background of this project.”

https://anthro.web.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/anthro/documents/media/what_about_the_people_report_baldwin_king_2017-brookes.pdf

Citizen Services: Specific Recommendations

The committee felt very strongly that one of the best ways to improve Citizen Services was to develop a communication plan for the City both to inform and be informed. The following outline captures many of the suggestions and ideas from our meetings.

- Develop a Communication Plan:
 - Rework the weekly City newsletter. Include a “digest” of happenings in city government (BOR/BOF/BOE).
 - Seems like the Communication department needs more staff - hire professionals!
 - Veoci (VEE OH SEE) has a messaging system within it that can utilize texts, robocalls, etc. We recommend the administration use this as much as possible.
 - Send monthly FixIt reports for BOR’s districts and offer to instruct the BOR on how they can utilize the VEOCI system to keep track of district level requests themselves.
 - Develop a plan for communicating with different demographics, various digital abilities and access, English Language Learners and is ADA compliant.
 - Combination of Social Media, email, and “traditional” communication methods.
 - Hold a focus group to review current website usability (what buttons and prompts would make the website more intuitive?)
 - Recommend that website be managed at the Mayor's office level nested within the communications team.
 - Create a one page flyer directing people to the right department (mail in tax bill). (May want to consider putting this information on a magnet as well.)
 - Bring back Mayor’s Night Out/In.
 - When a public survey is being sent out, if a person is not on social media, how will people know? Can we do call campaigns?
 - Ensure all of the Board meetings are broadcast on either Channel 78 or 79 (BOF,BOR,BOE).

Appendix
Meeting Minutes and Notes

Mayor-Elect Caroline Simmons Citizen Services Policy Committee

November 10, 2021

UCONN Stamford

- Citizen services could mean that the government is responsive and more transparent to constituent concerns.
- Number one thing complaints were condition of the roads in Stamford
- Communicating a plan on how this will be addressed and what services are available
- Need better communication with the public
- Garbage pickup issues, such as previously having free compost, getting a garbage toter
- Sidewalks are lacking in Stamford, specifically with strollers
- System needs work for a senior citizen if they are not computer savvy
- Phone system said voice mailbox was full but you could leave a text message
- Leaf pickup is a constant issue
- Food scrap collection and composting is a great start but could be improved such as North Stamford locations for drop off
- Immigrant services could be instituted such as for helping Spanish speaking people register children for schools
- Mayor Martin phone calls for COVID-19 were very useful
- Needs to redesign Mayor's newsletter
- Businesses owners are citizens as well
- ChooseStamford.com is effective for business information
- New apartments going up but how do you reach those people
- Nonprofits are struggling with fundraising
- Needs to be effective for homeowners and apartment renters alike
- Streamlining the permitting process
- People feel the staff at the city are not polite when they call and they don't feel
- City staff need training for phone etiquette, there is no customer service.
- Is frustrating for residents
- Some things are better discussed over the phone instead of on fixitstamford
- Language is a barrier, but citizens services speaks Spanish which is good
- Customer service should be key
- People need to be held responsible for helping citizens
- Fixit is fantastic for some and not for others
- If issue isn't addressed in x days, there is a threshold for a response for the issue
- City should release metrics about how responsive they were in the past year for issues being fixed
- Fixit platform is only in English, but should also be available in Spanish otherwise other communities are not getting their issues reported. We need to triage issues.
- Public safety issues need to be a priority
- City could do a better job is triaging and identifying problem areas where things are getting missed, and metrics are coming out, customer service is backburner
- Customer service needs to be created as workforce development training
- The city needs to use social media to get info out there that people want and in a way they will understand
- Contact apartment buildings staff and building developers to interact with residents
- Communication and training is key
- Need to train city workers with six sigma. A better workflow is necessary.

- Need an evaluation process for its employees
- Senior citizen services & Immigrant services
- Soft infrastructure could be improved on South End and West Side
- Need a better connection between citizens and police
- Redevelopment of police commission
- There are many great resources here in Stamford, but there's not an easy way for people to know
- Need a central repository for data and information
- Better communication in Stamford
- A monthly focus group to talk about how to continually develop solutions
- Constant reevaluation of processes
- Redeveloping the west side, a school and better transport
- Need more lighting on the west side to help reduce crime and make people feel
- Parks need to be cleaned better
- Analysis of what's being done, and do reporting
- Mayor's night out/in
- Mayor do neighborhood walk to see issues first hand
- City website isn't intuitive
- Central location to access main services
- Channel 78, 79, FB Live should be used to broadcast city board meetings
- Use FB Live for providing updates

11/17/21

First 100 days:

- On day one, the Simmons Administration can "open up" CSB on Google. -The first thing we should do is take a look at staffing. How can we build up staffing, in order to effectively communicate better with the public?
- Make a plan to recentralize the supervision of the Fixit system.
- Work with HR to make a plan to train staff on a customer service oriented mindset, and to examine other ways where staff training needs to happen.
- We need to start planning for how best to utilize social media, but also remember that many members of the public prefer more traditional methods of communication. -How can we expand communication access to include those with ADA needs? Could we have sign language interpreters? People should know how they can request them ahead of public meetings.
- Rework the newsletter.
- Make a plan for how to best communicate with different demographics (whether we're talking about the digitally savvy, those with less digital know-how or access, non-native English speakers, those with ADA needs, etc.)
- Some groups may be best reached through robocalls, while others may be best reached through text messages.
- Work with the library, as the library has a grant for digital navigators. These digital navigators can help the public better access the city website.
- Work with the Senior Center to help our elderly residents with a concern/complaint about a city issue with filing a fixit ticket.
- Make a plan to potentially have fixit kiosks at the library and at community centers throughout the city.
- Sit down with a focus group, consisting of volunteers from the public, and have them take a look at the current city website. Ask them to take a look at the different features to see how it could be improved. What buttons and prompts would make the website more intuitive?
- When updates are made to the fixit system or CSB, let the public know about it.
- Could we have fixit/CSB office hours, by appointment for members of the public? -One of the

city's union agreements allows workers who are certified in a second language (now just Spanish) to receive \$25/month extra in pay. The city should examine other languages to add to this agreement, such as Haitian Creole, Mandarin, Bengali, etc. -The city should make a directory of people that speak various languages on staff. -Could we implement an IVR system for the fixit phone line? (i.e. press "1" for English, "2" for Spanish, "3" for Haitian Creole, "4" for other)

-Could you we use simultaneous translation services on the phone for someone who doesn't speak a language that a CSB staff member is fluent in? (Research what SPS does on this.) -Data from the fixit tickets should be examined, as well, in order to better assess how to make improvements, and to understand what is going well. What issues remain outstanding and unresolved on Fixit?

-Weekly fixit reports should be analyzed.

-Could we get a QR code for fixit, that we put on stickers, magnets, all throughout the city??

Questions to ask about fixit:

-Currently, a fixit ticket receipt is emailed to a user. That user sometimes gets a follow-up when the ticket is complete. However, what if the ticket cannot be completed? What if the person calls up to report a problem, do they also get follow up on the ticket, once complete?

-Once a fixit ticket is closed, can a user automatically be sent a survey on their satisfaction on the resolution of the ticket?

-What is the response turnaround on fixit for various types of requests?

-What further research needs to be done?

-Alice will make a google spreadsheet so that people can improve verbiage and also volunteer to take on research assignments.

Ideas Collected from the Board of Representatives

- 1) Improve senior services. We need a Commission on the Aging.
- 2) The new city website has the function to allow residents to opt-in, and district reps should be able to send their constituents e-mails.
- 3) If we e-mail constituents using a city database, the e-mails should be meaningful and sent sparingly.
- 4) Have the mayor do neighborhood walks 1x a year with the district reps to see the issues in all the districts firsthand.
- 5) Have the Mayor do Mayor's Night Out & Mayor's Night In 1x a month.
- 6) Fixit Stamford - once the problem is transferred to a department, it sometimes registers as being complete, even if it's not actually complete. The survey for feedback on the website offers "yes"/ "no" options and does not have a place for real feedback.
- 7) The city's website is not intuitive, even for people who know what they're doing. The "key word" search on the city's site often does not give the best results.
- 8) Have a central place where people can access city services. (For example, the city should have a BMR database as opposed to each individual building having a separate application.)
- 9) There should be more information, on the website and elsewhere, distributed in Spanish as we have a very large Latino community.
- 10) Channel 78 , Channel 79, & Facebook Live should be utilized more by the city to broadcast city/BOE meetings. NextDoor should be utilized more by the BOR, BOF, BOE, etc. to give general announcements.
- 11) The Mayor should consider giving video broadcast updates on Facebook Live/Channel 79 periodically, not just during Covid.
- 12) If BOR members have computer issues, they should be able to have the city tech people help them out as tech is essential for the job, and for communication with constituents. Moreover, we should have city computers that BOR members can borrow so that they can participate in Zoom meetings, as not everyone has the latest technological equipment at home.
- 13) Put an insert in the tax bill telling people where they can go for specific problems? "If you're having an issue with x, call this number." Everyone reads their tax bills, and the only additional costs on this would be for printing an extra page of information. Additionally, let's get magnets that say the same thing, and have them available at the government center, and give them out to city reps to hand out in the neighborhoods. Also, let's get feedback on any change we make with the neighborhood associations to make sure it's making the right impact.
- 14) We need to instill a sense of pride in city workers.

Hi Megan and team,

It was great meeting everyone last week. I'm so excited to be part of this team.

Megan I really like the idea of providing information in citizens tax bills.

After our meeting I have discerned that Citizen Services includes two aspects:

The overall process by which Citizen Services are communicated and acted upon;

The actual services provided

It seems that we need to both improve the process by which services are communicated and delivered as well as look at the actual services offered and see if others need to be added.

I found the McKinsey article very useful. I really like the idea of measuring how citizens rate their experiences with the city. There are many services that make this easy and possible to do. I also think feedback from city employees about obstacles that impede their ability to deliver services needed would be useful.

Some ideas of services or improvements to services or just city improvements (in no particular order):

- Streamline the CS phone # message - it has a long list of additional #'s to call if you have particular issues. These could also be on the website. The message was so long I gave up listening.
- Opt in or out to various forms of communication from the city (txt, email or phone messages)
- add LGBTQ friendly city to city website
- Provide free compost to residents from leaf pick up and/or food scrap compost program
- provide additional drop sites for food scrap composting
- Fix sidewalks especially in neighborhoods where kids walk to school
- Plant more trees
- Storm drain hotline

- Drive in movies at Cove
- Historic walk with plaques around downtown
- Community garden spaces
- more murals
- is there a program with schools that discusses city art walk projects?
- Continuing education classes at JM Wright Tech
- Shuttle to train station from High Ridge park & ride
- Apprenticeship programs for training to employment
- Whats our presence on ctvisit.com - can we improve links with this site
- Around Town page on site could list upcoming events in Stamford
- Shop local campaign for small businesses