



REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

DATE: Regular Meeting of January 28, 2025

TO: Mayor and Members of the City Council

SUBMITTED BY: Dante Hall, City Manager

SUBJECT: Programs and Initiatives to Encourage Residents to be Involved in Civic Affairs

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

It is recommended that the City Council receive this report, discuss the information contained, and provide direction to staff.

BACKGROUND:

As part of the adopted 2024-2026 Hercules City Council Strategic Goal Workplan, the City Council established a goal to Improve Community Transparency and Communication. One objective of that goal is to "Encourage residents to be involved in civic affairs." This report is intended to identify tools currently used to promote community engagement and ideas for enhancement for the City Council's discussion and consideration.

ANALYSIS:

While there are some technical problems that city government may be well equipped to address without extensive engagement, there are few public problems that city government can solve all on its own. Interacting with citizens as collaborators rather than customers can lead to more mutually satisfying and productive engagement. Authentic civic engagement is not one-way marketing to citizens by their government. Nor is it a one-way demand lodged at the government by its citizens. It is a two-way partnership where citizens work with and through government to improve their community. There are no standards or precise definitions of how this should work. But, if done correctly, civic engagement can foster a sense of belonging, promote active participation, and build stronger connections among residents.

In Hercules, several tools are currently used to engage the community, such as recreational activities, community events, workshops on essential topics, digital/social media publications, and volunteer programs. These tools work collaboratively to increase citizen participation in public affairs by connecting neighbors to each other, raising their awareness of City issues, and fostering trust. The chart below identifies a partial list of the tools used by the City in the recent past to engage its residents.

ENGAGEMENT CATEGORY	TOOLS
Cultural and Recreational Events	National Night Out
	Cultural Festival
	Trunk or Treat
	Holiday Tree Lighting
	Fourth of July Fireworks
	Annual Crab Feed
Community Meetings, Workshops, and Pop-Ups	Parks Master Plan,
	State of the City
	Budget Workshop
	Local Road Safety Plan
	Beechnut Park Design Pop-Ups
	Refugio Park Shade Structure Design Pop-Ups
	Business Roundtable
Online and Printed Engagement Platforms	Facebook
	NextDoor
	Instagram
	Hercules Herald
	Hercules Connect
	Hercules Activity Guide
	Community Surveys
Volunteer Programs	Community Clean-Up/Household Hazardous Waste Event
	Team Up To Clean Up
	Bay Trail Clean Up
	Adopt A Park And Adopt A Trail
	Senior Center Volunteers
	Rotary Club Interact Program
	Herculean Mile Volunteer Recognition Program

Staff recommends that the City continue and enhance many of the engagement activities listed in the chart above. Should the City Council desire to provide more opportunities to engage the community, staff proposes the following ideas for discussion:

Citizen Academy

Many cities have established citizen academies to encourage active participation. Citizen academies have helped acquaint and inform residents about municipal operations, local public agency services, key community issues, and the multiple perspectives framing those issues.

The City could establish a citizen academy through interactive sessions primarily focused on City services, leadership, and quality of life issues. Bringing diverse residents together in a learning environment can foster connection, build a more united community, and empower them to take on community leadership roles.

A potential curriculum for a citizen academy could include topics such as City Governance 101, City budgeting and finances, leadership development, public safety, emergency preparedness, and critical infrastructure. The program could be delivered through in-person and/or virtual workshops, City facility tours, and guest speaker presentations from City staff.

Neighborhood Connections

Homeowner Associations (HOAs) can play a crucial role in promoting civic engagement within communities. Part of the city's civic engagement strategy could include fostering more engaged and connected neighborhoods by encouraging active participation, transparent communication, and collaborative initiatives through HOAs. The City could work with interested HOAs to facilitate better communication and engagement through targeted social gatherings, regular "check-ins," and information sharing. Should the City Council desire to explore this option further, it could start with a meeting (or group of meetings) with HOA representatives to discuss community concerns, upcoming projects, city services, community events, and volunteer opportunities in areas that improve their neighborhoods and the community. By engaging with HOAs, the City can create a more cohesive and responsive community, addressing local issues and promoting active participation among residents.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with receiving this report. If the City Council directs staff to pursue any conceptual idea presented in this report, staff will return with refined programmatic details and financial impact information for the City Council to consider.

ATTACHMENTS:

None