
**CITY OF SAN ANTONIO
OFFICE OF THE CITY AUDITOR**

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
AUDIT OF COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH
PROJECT NO. AU24-035
NOVEMBER 4, 2024

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CITY AUDITOR



Table of Contents

Table of Contents 1

Executive Summary..... 2

Background 3

Audit Scope and Methodology 4

Audit Results and Recommendations..... 5

 A. Inconsistent Project Communication 5

 B. Citizen Complaints and Resolution..... 6

Appendix A – Staff Acknowledgement..... 8

Appendix B – Management Response 9

Executive Summary

As part of our annual Audit Plan approved by City Council, we conducted an audit of Public Works Department (PW), specifically the public communication and outreach process. The audit objective, conclusions, and recommendations follow:

Determine if resident and business communications regarding Public Works projects are adequate, timely and citizen feedback is addressed.

Short term project communication efforts were adequate and timely. PW adequately provided notice to stakeholders prior to project initiation with informational fliers. In addition, long term project design phase meetings were conducted and stakeholder concerns were addressed.

However, opportunities for improvement were identified. We identified long term projects that had inconsistent communication efforts. Additionally, citizen complaints received by City Council staff and their resolution are currently not logged in the 311 system for tracking.

We provided recommendations to management to strengthen controls and resolve identified issues. PW management agreed with the audit findings and has developed positive action plans to address them. Management's verbatim response is in Appendix B on page 9.

Background

Public Works (PW) Department oversees and directs the development and maintenance of the publicly owned infrastructure of the City of San Antonio. Furthermore, PW's department goals include providing effective communication to citizens/businesses as well as accurate and timely responses to stakeholder requests. Stakeholder requests generally occur during a public meeting forum or via calls to 311 or council representatives and are followed up by PW staff either individually or with another public meeting to discuss project changes.

To accomplish their goal, PW's Communications and Engagement Team manages all forms of mass communication with the public about department projects and activities. The Communications and Engagement Team's focus is to strategically communicate accurate information to San Antonio residents and other relevant stakeholders to keep them informed on projects and initiatives that will affect their daily routines. Additionally, the Communications and Engagement Team works closely with Capital Project Officers (CPO's) regarding direct communications to project stakeholders.

CPO's are responsible for managing project stakeholder communications. They prepare and disseminate information to residents, businesses, and City officials concerning upcoming or current projects. CPO's are the primary staff assigned to ensure that affected citizens are informed and updated about PW project plans, status updates, and resolve relevant issues and complaints as they arise. CPO's are assigned to various divisions and work under the project management team for each project they are assigned to. Currently, there are 15 CPO's assigned to PW. Furthermore, to allow for more immediate communication to stakeholders, PW launched online project dashboards in February 2024. The dashboards provide project information such as project area, budget, phase, contact information and up to date construction start and end dates.

The frequency and type of stakeholder communication is dependent upon a number of factors including public interest and project budget. However, the length of time a stakeholder will be impacted is a primary driver for the communication measures taken. Long-term projects are those that will impact stakeholders for more than one year and include public meetings (mainly in the design phase), along with social media updates, email updates, door hangers, flyers, mailers, and face-to-face communication. Short-term projects last less than one year and are generally limited to door hangers, flyers, signs, and face-to-face communication.

Between October 2022 and June 2024, Public Works managed 359 projects and infrastructure programs with a total budget of approximately \$2.4 billion.

Audit Scope and Methodology

The audit scope covered active projects from October 2022 through May 2024. It included compliance with Public Works (PW) policies and procedures, communication efforts with resident and business stakeholders, and review and effectiveness of 311 and City Council liaison complaint resolution process.

We interviewed PW management and staff to obtain an understanding over project communication efforts with resident and business stakeholders. We also interviewed City Council liaison staff to obtain an understanding of how complaints and feedback are tracked and resolved. The primary criteria for this audit included PW's policies and procedures for the project communications process.

We assessed internal controls relevant to the audit objective. This included a review of policies and procedures, system generated reports, and supporting documentation. In addition, as part of our testing procedures we examined the following areas:

- Confirmed public meeting announcements and project signage included accurate Capital Project Officer information,
- Verified stakeholder feedback received during the design phase was documented and adequately addressed,
- Determined if stakeholder communication efforts (both prior to construction commencement and once behind schedule) were adequate,
- Confirmed citizen complaints received via 311 and City Council liaison staff were resolved timely.

We relied on computer-processed data in the 311 system to obtain citizen complaints and the resolution of those complaints. Our reliance was based on performing direct tests on the data rather than evaluating the system's general and application controls. We do not believe that the absence of testing general and application controls had an effect on the results of our audit.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Audit Results and Recommendations

Short Term Projects

Communication efforts for short term projects are adequate and timely. We reviewed 10 short term projects from the Street and Sidewalks Division and verified they had adequately provided notice to stakeholders prior to project initiation with informational fliers. In addition, we verified the stakeholders were provided the project notice two weeks prior to the project start.

Long Term Projects

PW is conducting design phase meetings and addressing stakeholder concerns. We verified design phase meetings occurred and stakeholders were present during the meetings for 14 long term projects. In addition, for 6 long term projects with more than one design phase meeting, we verified that PW addressed the concerns noted by stakeholders by reviewing meeting minutes and slide presentations for the public meetings. Furthermore, we attended a design phase meeting in person and observed interaction between PW and project stakeholders. We subsequently confirmed the accuracy of meeting minutes for the meeting we attended.

However, opportunities for improvement were identified as it pertained to consistency in communication efforts for long term projects.

A. Inconsistent Project Communication

PW did not consistently communicate project information to stakeholders for long term projects. These inconsistencies are attributed to noncomprehensive policies and procedures. Without consistent communication efforts, there is potential for stakeholder complaints due to lack of communication.

The following paragraphs provide specific examples.

Communication Efforts

Communication efforts were inconsistent for long term projects. We reviewed 14 long term projects to determine if design phase meetings were announced. We confirmed public meeting announcement for all 14 of the projects, however, the communication methods varied from project to project. Announcement methods included one or more of the following:

- Social media posts,
- Emails to stakeholders,
- Notice of public meeting in a newspaper,
- Mailers, and/or
- Door hangers

The Residential Communication and Engagement Plan states that regular updates will be provided to stakeholders but does not specify specific methods of communication that should be utilized for projects.

Project Signage

Project signage was not adequate. As part of the audit, we performed site visits to locate white boards, which should be posted at construction sites and include information such as Capital Projects Officer (CPO) contact information, project budget and funding source. We tested a sample of 15 projects and determined that one project did not have signage with CPO contact information. Additionally, for 7 projects, we could not locate a sign along the project area.

Per PW's Public Communication and Resident Engagement Plan, project signage should be posted in the project area after the 40% design phase meeting.

Recommendation

Public Works Director re-evaluate necessary communication efforts by updating policies and procedures and providing training to all CPO's to promote consistency.

B. Citizen Complaints and Resolution

Citizen complaints received by City Council Liaison staff and their resolution were not logged in the 311 system.

PW and City Council staff work together to address citizen complaints received directly by the respective districts and help coordinate resolution. We selected a sample of 25 citizen complaints received by City Council Liaison staff across all 10 districts. We determined 18 out of 25 complaints were not logged into the 311 system. Furthermore, while City Council liaisons did a good job of responding to citizen complaints and forwarding to applicable PW staff, for 10 complaints we could not determine if final resolution/further investigation was performed. For example, for one complaint PW staff responded they would investigate a concern and report back with their findings, but we did not see evidence of this.

Currently, there is no policy in place that specifies where complaints should be logged or the level of detail that should be maintained. Creating a 311 ticket would benefit the citizen by providing a complete record from the date the complaint/inquiry was made to final resolution.

Recommendation

Public Works Director continue to work with 311 Customer Service and the City Council staff to ensure all citizen complaints are submitted in the 311 system.

Appendix A – Staff Acknowledgement

Abigail Estevez, CPA, CIA, CISA, Audit Manager

Danny Zuniga, CPA, CIA, Auditor in Charge

Rudy Carrasco, Auditor

Lillian Rivera, Auditor

Appendix B – Management Response



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO

SAN ANTONIO TEXAS 78283-3966

October 9, 2024

Kevin W. Barthold, CPA, CIA, CISA
City Auditor
San Antonio, Texas

RE: Management's Corrective Action Plan for Audit of Public Works Communication and Outreach Audit

The Public Works Department has reviewed the audit report and has developed the Corrective Action Plan below corresponding to the report recommendations.

Recommendation					
#	Description	Audit Report Page	Accept, Decline	Responsible Person's Name/Title	Completion Date
A	Inconsistent Project Communication Public Works Director re-evaluate necessary communication efforts by updating policies and procedures and providing training to all CPO's to promote consistency.	5	Accept	Nicholas Olivier, Public Relations & Marketing Manager	May 31, 2025



Action plan: The Public Works Department acknowledges that its public engagement efforts can always be improved and it continually strives to be better. The audit scope covered active projects from October 2022 through May 2024. Beginning February 2024, the Department started rolling out a series of major improvements to its communications and engagement efforts.

New initiatives include:

- Launched a series of five digital dashboards in February 2024 that provide information on more than 3,500 projects, including timeline, budget, map locations, and contact information.
- Created individual web pages for more than 200 large projects where residents can get additional project information, sign up for email updates, and provide feedback.
- Installing new QR code signage at the construction site for the City's 2022 Bond projects that directs people to the appropriate project web page.
- The Department has special access to the Waze navigation app that allows staff to input road closures. Updates made in Waze are incorporated into Google Maps.
- The City experimented with an AI chatbot for the Lower Broadway 2017 Bond project. The public could scan a QR code, ask questions, and get immediate answers 24 hours a day.

The Public Works Department has also improved and standardized its existing engagement efforts, to include public meetings, email updates, and mailers and door hangers. The Department recently created a supervisory position over the Capital Projects Officers within the Project Delivery division. This has created more consistent staff training and public engagement. Construction notice flyers for street maintenance projects have been revamped to be more concise and standardized. The Public Works Department has increased coordination with the Economic Development Department to provide business owners with more consistent and comprehensive engagement.

The Public Works Department appreciates the work of the Office of the City Auditor. It has helped the Department take a holistic view of its engagement efforts, see these efforts from an outsider's perspective, and identify areas for improvement. The audit has highlighted the need for better documentation of performed communications and engagement efforts, more specific policies for public engagement, and improved coordination with Council District Staff.

In February 2024, the Public Works Department revised its Public Communications and Resident Engagement Plan, which last received a substantial update in 2019. This plan will be made more specific to include minimum outreach and signage requirements, quality control measures, and relevant policy documents. The plan update will require a Project Team Member meet with the contractor before construction begins to determine the location of project signage and then to conduct regular signage checks during construction.

The goal moving forward will be to provide more consistent public engagement efforts across the Department. The Public Works Department manages a large number of projects of all sizes each year. Each project does not require the same combination of public outreach tools. The Department will more clearly define which tools and efforts are required for certain types of projects by updating the Public Communications and Resident Engagement Plan. This plan will be reviewed annually and updated as needed. Any updates to the policy plan and procedures will be introduced in-person to staff and included in the training of new employees.

Recommendation					
#	Description	Audit Report Page	Accept, Decline	Responsible Person's Name/Title	Completion Date
B	<p>Citizen Complaints and Resolution</p> <p>Public Works Director continue to work with 311 Customer Service and the City Council staff to ensure all citizen complaints are submitted in the 311 system.</p>	6	Accept	Razi Hosseini, Director	May 31, 2025
<p>Action plan: The Public Works Department receives resident feedback via numerous channels, including 311 tickets, phone calls, emails, social media, and other online forums. The Department has a City Council Liaison Team that is comprised of four employees when fully staffed. Each year, the team receives up to 4,000 instances of resident feedback or concerns requiring response. Many 311 ticket categories have Service Level Agreements that require action or resolution within a certain amount of time. For example, pothole tickets should be addressed within two business days.</p> <p>Resident feedback is often sent to the Department via City Council District Staff. In a 2019 audit of the Department's public engagement, the Department pledged to work with 311 Customer Service to train Council District Staff on how to create and monitor 311 tickets. That training is meant to guide District Staff to input resident feedback into the 311 system as they receive it. That 311 ticket can then be brought to the attention of Public Works staff, who can help provide a response. Currently, 311 tickets sent from Council District Staff to the Council Liaison Team are flagged as VIP. The VIP flag indicates that the ticket was entered by Council District Staff, but it does not necessarily mean each of these tickets will receive an escalated response.</p> <p>The Public Works Department, specifically the Council Liaison Team, pledges to continue working with 311 Customer Service and Council District Staff to have resident feedback entered into 311 <u>at the earliest opportunity</u>. For example, if the resident feedback is sent to the Council Liaison Team directly, the Liaisons will enter the feedback into 311. If the resident feedback is sent to Council District Staff directly, Council District Staff will be expected to enter the feedback into 311. Council District Staff are still encouraged to alert the Council Liaison Team of this feedback, but to also include the 311 ticket number for reference. This may mean returning resident feedback to Council District Staff until it has the corresponding 311 ticket number.</p> <p>The goal is to improve consistency, transparency, and accountability. Properly logging resident feedback in 311 will prevent feedback from getting lost in the shuffle and more clearly identify the staff responsible for closing out the ticket. This will improve response time and provide a clearer resolution for the resident.</p>					

Audit of Public Works Department
Communication and Outreach

We are committed to addressing the recommendation in the audit report and the plan of action presented above.

Sincerely,



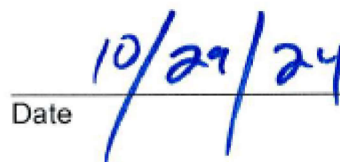
Razi Hosseini
Director/City Engineer
Public Works



Date



John Peterek
Interim Assistant City Manager
City Manager's Office



Date