CALL TO ORDER:
The Marion County Board of County Commissioners met in a workshop session in Commission Chambers at 3:19 p.m. on Tuesday, April 5, 2016 at the Marion County Governmental Complex located in Ocala, Florida.

INTRODUCTION OF WORKSHOP BY CHAIRMAN KATHY BRYANT
Chairman Bryant advised that the workshop was scheduled this afternoon to address public information initiatives.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of our Country.

ROLL CALL
Upon roll call the following members were present: Chairman Kathy Bryant, District 2; Vice-Chairman Carl Zalak, District 4; Commissioner David Moore, District 1; Commissioner Stan McClain, District 3; and Commissioner Earl Arnett, District 5. Also present were County Attorney Matthew G. Minter and County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes.

STAFF PRESENTATION – BARBRA HERNANDEZ, APR, PUBLIC INFORMATION MANAGER:
Public Information Manager Barbra Hernandez, Office of Public Information, presented a 1 page Agenda; a 33 page handout to follow along with the PowerPoint presentation and a 1 page handout amending the alternative options recommended by staff (page 33 of the PowerPoint). She noted the objectives today are to update the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) on the Office of Public Information initiatives and seek Board direction for future efforts (page 2).
Commissioner McClain out at 3:20 p.m.
Ms. Hernandez advised that staff recently performed a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) analysis; a citizen’s survey relating to public communications; as well as a Department Director/Senior Leadership survey to examine the internal perception of the Office of Public Information. She noted that due to its highly specialized nature of the public information and education duties, Marion County Fire Rescue (MCFR) has maintained its own Public Information Office.
The Office of Public Information was established in 2009 and consolidated from multiple departments in 2011 for consistent public information and messaging. Primary goals include: 1) delivering public information; 2) managing media relations; and 3) coordinating public records and sunshine notice disseminations (page 3). This offers the county transparency, accountability and consistency by providing responsible, timely, accurate, relevant and engaging communications (page 4).
Commissioner McClain returned at 3:22 p.m.
The Office of Public Information has 3 employees who coordinate with 22 departments and offers 51 specialized services (page 5). Service examples include writing (media releases, talking points, speeches, reports, policies, etc.); design (books, fliers,
brochures, advertisements, logos, billboards, etc.); and management (media relations, public relations/education, branding, crisis communications, etc.) (page 6). County communication avenues include: 1) county website and email; 2) E-newsletter, "County Connection"; 3) Facebook page, "Marion County Florida"; 4) Twitter page, "Marion County Florida"; 5) County Commission meetings; 6) community events/meetings; and 7) printed publications (page 7).

Page 8 addresses earned media (local newspapers, radio, television (TV), magazine, social media and web outlets) versus (vs) paid media (Facebook advertisements and departmental media buys). Ms. Hernandez commented on the good relationships the department has with local and regional media partners, including the South Marion – Marion Oaks Mirror Publications.

Page 9 addresses policies/handbooks that guide the department, including the Florida Sunshine Law, Florida Public Record Law, media/public information handbook, social media policy.

Page 10 addresses the department’s communications approach to strategic public relations, which includes research, planning, implementation and evaluation (RPIE) to help determine the return on investment (ROI). For example, the BCC Sales Tax Informational Campaign had 4 targeted/paid ads on Facebook with various engagement objectives, which reached nearly 72,000 users and achieved an average post “relevance” score of 9, with 10 being the highest possible score (page 11).

Page 12 addresses the ROI as it relates to the Procurement Services Department’s "Bids for Business" campaign, which increased the number of local business directory registrants by 35 percent (%) and local vendor motivation to participate in the county’s bidding process increased by 76% after the campaign.

Page 13 provides another example of the ROI as it relates to the Office of the County Engineer (OCE) “Discover Our Water Resources” youth campaign. The campaign helped increase student knowledge of stormwater concepts by 50%, with 16% more students reporting they have adopted a water conserving behavior as a result of interacting with the campaign publication.

Pages 14 through 17 provide an overview of the increase in services and overall tasks provided by the Office of Public Information from 2009 through 2016. Staff has kept up with the increase in services and technology utilizing the same number of staff and at the same budget level by streamlining services whenever possible (e.g. developing generic graphic design templates for department use).

Pages 18 through 21 address the departments SWOT analysis. Department strengths include: 1) BCC, senior leadership and departmental support for public information and relations services; 2) multi-skilled employees with years of experience in Marion County; 3) award winning strategic campaigns; and 4) implementation of cost saving strategies (page 18). Department weaknesses include external perceptions of the public relations function and ever increasing “hard deadline” driven workload with limited staff (page 19). Opportunities by the department to: 1) better serve citizens 2) increasing community trust; 3) positively impacting public awareness through facts and proper context; 4) further streamlining information flow; 5) telling untold stories while continuing to reflect transparency (including the opportunity to localize national news to the community) (page 20). Items that threaten the department include: decreased budgets due to decreases in property tax revenues; increase in larger scale messaging by external paying advertisers; as well as misleading, out of context and inaccurate communications by opposing public voices (page 21).
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Pages 22 through 28 provide information relating to the department's citizen and internal customer surveys. Ms. Hernandez advised that the citizen survey was advertised on the county's website and on Facebook with surveys being mailed to County Connection subscribers, which received 286 responses in 1 week. The survey reflects that the most used communication avenues are the county's website (53%), County Connection (41%) and the county's Facebook page (26%). She noted the average time a citizen spends interacting through one of these avenues is 30 minutes or less per month. The rankings of county communications overall performance are as follows: effective - 69% agreed or strongly agreed; customer friendly - 65% agreed or strongly agreed; accurate - 63% agreed or strongly agreed; high quality - 60% agreed or strongly agreed; and transparent - 46% agreed or strongly agreed. The preferred avenue for receiving county information ranks as follows: 74% prefer Email; 47% prefer the county website, 41% prefer local newspapers; 28% prefer Facebook and 27% prefer local TV. The survey reflects that the preferred communication layout is text/graphic design combination (81%), with 21% preferring short videos (1 minute or less). The survey also shows that preferred county topics are: 1) Parks and Recreation programs (63%); road project news/updates (59%); county budget (59%); BCC meeting action (54%); economic development updates (52%); library programs (52%); public service announcements (PSAs) (49%); and Fire Rescue/water quality/Animal Services (45%).

Ms. Hernandez stated an internal Department Directors survey was also performed, noting the department received 17 responses. She advised that a majority of the county's senior leaders interact with the Office of Public Information on a weekly basis with regard to media relations, written materials, and assistance with public records requests, public relations and education campaigns, as well as graphic design. The Department Director survey ranks the overall county communications as follows: effective - 88% agreed or strongly agreed; customer friendly - 88% agreed or strongly agreed; accurate - 88% agreed or strongly agreed; transparent - 88% agreed or strongly agreed; timely - 88% agreed or strongly agreed; and high quality - 82% agreed or strongly agreed. This survey also shows areas where management staff feel the department should increase services, which includes marketing and training, community outreach, video production and graphic design.

Pages 29 through 32 address opportunities the Office of Public Information can utilize today and in the future. Opportunities today include maintaining the level of service (LOS) to other departments; offering permanent media relations training more frequently; increase messaging for top citizen topics via existing channels; and better define communication "pillars" (customer service, fiscal responsibility, economic prosperity, natural resources, public safety and infrastructure). Future opportunities include two key areas: 1) increasing public relations and community outreach; and 2) increasing marketing activities. Ms. Hernandez addressed the opportunity to increase outreach to Homeowners Associations (HOA) and Property Owners Associations (POA), as well as residents in rural areas. She commented on the possibility of an active Speakers' Bureau to reach out to communities and have a constant presence to update the public face-to-face about government services. Ms. Hernandez addressed the possibility of holding an annual signature event, such as "Marion County Day", similar to "Government Day" held in The Villages, which provides various government agencies the ability to handout information and talk with citizens about services available to the community.

Ms. Hernandez commented on the option of increasing future marketing activities, but noted this can be challenging from a budget perspective. Increases in marketing activities
include paid advertisement on social media and traditional forums, as well as the opportunity to increase video production online. She noted the department also has the opportunity to implement a comprehensive marketing campaign similar to the Sales Tax Initiative.

Ms. Hernandez referred to the 1 page handout amending the alternative options (page 33), noting the page was updated just prior to the workshop. She stated 3 alternatives are being presented: 1) no change in service or budget; 2) contract with a private marketing vendor and graphic design vendor to expand the department's capabilities; and 3) hire in-house, both a Multi-media Specialist (graphic design, video production) and a Public Information/Relations Director with expertise in marketing.

Ms. Hernandez advised that as part of the research/cost analysis for Option 2, staff issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for marketing and public relations firms, as well as for graphic design firms. She stated there were 2 responses to the marketing and public relations RFP, noting both responses provided general information about their services. Ms. Hernandez advised that both firms (Formulated Lines, LLC and Paradise Advertising and Marketing) have dedicated staff to perform social media, public relations, graphic designs, etc., and as a team they can tackle a marketing concept. She noted their access to resources are also higher than county staff can achieve internally. Ms. Hernandez advised that both firms listed their fee schedules as hourly rates as opposed to specific costs of running a marketing campaign. For example, the rates for a Public Relations Manager range between $120 and $200 per hour; a Graphic Designer between $105 and $150 per hour; and a Social Media Manager between $115 and $200 per hour. In regard to graphic design firms, staff received only 1 response to the RFP from Formulated Lines, LLC, noting the firm also listed the fee schedule as hourly rates for graphic design/photo journalism services (video journalist $136 per hour, copy editor $100 per hour, production manager $152 per hour; etc.).

Ms. Hernandez advised that staff also reviewed the costs associated to hire an in-house Multi-media Specialist, noting if the county hired this position it is estimated to cost approximately $55,000 annually (pay grade 17).

BOARD DISCUSSION:
Commissioner Zalak opined that the rates in the RFP's need to be negotiated per specific Scopes of Service. He recommended the Board allow the County Administrator to review Options 2 and 3 and bring back a recommendation for consideration. Commissioner Zalak noted the biggest challenge is to be able to communicate complex issues with citizens (i.e., budget process) in a transparent forum. He opined that it may only be necessary to utilize private sector business firms for specific projects, similar to the engineering consultants utilized by the Utilities Department.

County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes advised that staff can review a hybrid approach that will have a private firm on contract on an as needed basis for specific projects at a negotiated price. He requested the Board allow staff time to review and develop the Multi-media Specialist and Public Information/Relations Director job descriptions.

Commissioner Moore stated his preference is to remain in-house with Public Information staff rather than utilize the private sector.

Commissioner Arnett opined that his preference is to seek applications for the Multi-media Specialist.

Chairman Bryant opined that with Ms. Hernandez leaving, the BCC should seek her replacement first and allow that person to be a part of creating a new department plan.
In response to Mr. Bouyounes, Chairman Bryant noted it is important to find a Public Information Director with some marketing experience. Ms. Hernandez concurred, noting there are so many short term tasks performed by staff every day that it is important to also be able to meet long term strategies (planning and marketing campaigns).

In response to Commissioner Zalak, Ms. Hernandez stated she is currently tasked with video production, noting Public Information Officer Elaine McClain is tasked with much of the graphic design projects and Public Information Specialist Stacie Causey handles media relations and web management.

Commissioner McClain excused at 4:05 p.m.

Commissioner Zalak opined that the private sector can help manage part of the workload until the county has the opportunity to fill the new Director position.

Commissioner Arnett suggested utilizing the services of iplacement, Inc., dba Source2, until the position is filled internally.

Chairman Bryant suggested staff contact Tourist Development Executive Director Loretta Shaffer, Ocala/Marion County Visitors & Convention Bureau (VCB) to discuss the possibility of piggybacking on their contract with Evok Advertising (firm providing advertising services for the VCB).

General discussion ensued.

**CLOSING COMMENTS:**

Chairman Bryant advised that it is the general consensus of the Board to direct the County Administrator to review the option of negotiating a contract with a private vendor to assist staff in the Office of Public Information and develop the Multi-media Specialist and Public Information Director job descriptions and bring the information back for Board consideration.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Mr. Bouyounes stated he is reorganizing several departments throughout the county and has found the money to fund the extra position for the Office of Public Information.

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting thereupon adjourned at 4:13 p.m.

Attest:

[Signature]

Kathy Bryant, Chairman

[Signature]

David R. Ellspermann, Clerk