



Ted Wheeler, Multnomah County Chair

501 SE Hawthorne Blvd., Suite 600
Portland, Oregon 97214
Phone: (503) 988-3308
Email: mult.chair@co.multnomah.or.us

To: Board of County Commissioners

Fm: Ted Wheeler

Re: Social Media Coordinator

Dt: May 12, 2009

In the last few days, media outlets around the world have devoted considerable attention to a recent Multnomah County job posting. While the free advertising is likely to generate a record number of applications, that was not our intention.

I am committed to providing more and better information about what we do and how we do it because I believe that work is integral to improving the accountability of government. I am concerned that the private sector and other governments are doing a better job than we are at utilizing modern media. Therefore, I have directed Chair's Office and Public Affairs staff to increase the use of new technologies to better communicate and interact with the public we serve.

We began a process to hire a person to support a broad range of communication strategies with funding from combining salary savings in the Chair's Office with salary savings in the Public Affairs Office. In an effort to capture the attention of potential applicants the job posting featured a few of the duties included in the new position. Nobody should be the least bit surprised that lots of people are talking about Twittering and other networking technologies, and in a way, it proves the point.

Nevertheless, while we are committed to exploiting new technologies, I am concerned that the timing of this new hire sends the wrong message to our employees who might be laid off as a result of budget cuts. Therefore, we will instead look at more creative and thoughtful ways to use the communications resources we have in place in the near term.

We will continue to expand the County's presence on the web using all the tools that are currently available. Multnomah County will soon have a new home page and we are adding content daily. With the decline of the news media, we have to take responsibility for sharing the "news" of the county with the public in order for them to participate in important decisions and hold us accountable.

I have received considerable input (via Twitter and Facebook) from individuals who are experts in social media technology and some of them have volunteered valuable advice. In the coming weeks I will take that advice and solicit the involvement of social media communities in the design and implementation of new communication strategies.

Years ago, people came to the county courthouse to find property tax information in large bound volumes. Now, most of that information is provided electronically. Taxpayers can see our budget online and they can find performance measurements, jail bed occupancy and many more useful tools for holding government accountable on our websites. They have to look for it, but we're making that easier.

We need to do more. Accountability doesn't work if people aren't paying attention. We have to find ways to deliver information that taxpayers need to hold government accountable. In some cases, that may mean doing it in increments of 140 characters or less. We'll keep working on that.