

2021 Fall All Committee Workshop

Summary and Key Takeaways

Date: October 28, 2021, 7:00 - 8:30 pm

Topic: Effective Communication to Build Relationships and Influence Decision-Makers

Panel discussion with:

- Alison Gu, Burnaby City Councillor
- Kate Berniaz, Project Lead for Climate and Active Transportation at MoTI
- Stephen Hui, Communications Manager at Real Estate Foundation of BC

Main takeaways and learnings

1. **Map out council to see where they stand (Power Mapping).** Focus on potential allies in order to get a majority. Visualize what each councillor cares about, and tailor your message for them, linking their passions to cycling.
 - a. You can help link councillors and form alliances
 - b. Some will always support your cause, some will never. **Focus on the ones in the middle.**
2. **Don't alienate your allies.** Be respectful—don't bash them in one breath and ask for a favour in another. Lots of councillors are personally attached to their work. Even if you don't agree with the work, always be forward-looking. Respecting their legacy can improve relationships moving forward. Always be respectful, be it with elected officials, staff, or journalists.
3. **Email** is the best way to get in contact with your councillors, and email them individually rather than in group messages.
4. **Build relationships with staff.** Staff have much more knowledge and influence over projects, budgets, and plans—council votes on them, and have lots of other stuff on their plates
5. In the case of MoTI—they have the *what* (the targets they need to reach) but don't have all the details on the *how*, which is what our expertise as cyclists can help with.
6. A good approach in reaching out to staff and council is to frame it like this:

“Here are the gaps, here's how we can move forward, and here's how we think that you can make it happen. **We are here to help you in whatever way that we can.**”
7. Op-eds are a good tool to use to raise awareness. Look for a political or economic angle to stories.

Panel Q&A

Do you think if a local committee were to put a story out there that is not so favourable towards city council, would that push that towards action, or jeopardize the relationship?

Alison: Context is important. If they've repeatedly declined your meetings and have no desire to collaborate, that's fine. Public pressure is good. Similarly, email campaigns are good, especially before an election. If you have a relationship with the councillor, it would be best to not jeopardize the relationship that you have.

Jean: Timing is also important—in the lead-up to an election, there is more scrutiny and attention on the media. If they've just been elected, it might not be the best time.

Do you have best practices for when you're tweeting at a journalist, or saying something publicly. Do you have guidelines for how to do that in a way that's professional and respectful

Stephen: Be friendly and professional. It's like dealing with the government; you can't slam them one day and then come back the other day and ask them for a favour. Get to know their twitter feeds, interact with them.

Are videos okay to send to journalists?

Stephen: Having visuals help a lot—they might just embed your video in their stories. You never know.

How do you find the right source of information for budgets, projects, etc? Do you go to staff or councillors?

Kate: Depends on the level of government. Provincially, there is stuff going on that isn't public, whereas municipally it's much more iterative, with a draft budget going to council. Lots of pre-work gets done for the Provincial budgets. Ask staff first and they will give you what they can.

Alison: Go to staff—councillors don't have all the information that staff would have.

Do you find messages with individual stories to be most effective, or something short and to the point

Stephen: Good to have a story but make sure it's the right story. You want diverse spokespeople and show that people from different backgrounds, ages, like to cycle. Speaking to the business impacts.

Kate: A mix—stats about how great cycling is can become noise. Speaking to business impacts, in Victoria there is a restaurant that opened a bike drive through window that got great coverage. It was a window, it was not amazing, but they branded it well and it got great coverage; and great coverage for the protected bike lane the city had just built there.

When a cycling/walking gap involves multiple jurisdictions, how can you get it solved in a timely fashion?

Alison: Reach out to the different jurisdictions concurrently. When they inevitably say it's not their jurisdiction, tell them that you're already connected with the other jurisdictions and set up a meeting where they're all at the table.

Kate: Having more conversations with more people. Understanding and acknowledging that different jurisdictions have different interests. Finding the common ground to move things forward.

What are some effective social media tactics to strengthen relationships with councillors, staff, or getting the message out there?

Stephen: Celebrate the successes. Acknowledge what's been done before. If you spend a year lobbying for something, you better celebrate that for more than a day. It's important for the government to know you will defend it against detractors and celebrate it.

Alison: I come from an organizer/activist background. To me, social media is most useful to galvanize the public to take action. City council is a part-time job with no pension, and councils are largely made of retirees who do not pay attention or weight on social media.