News Release

Full citizen engagement is goal of interactive program
MindMixer solution designed to encourage fruitful conversations

MUPRHY (March 23, 2015) The 'us vs. them' mentality that often characterized dealing with municipal governments, giving rise to the old adage that 'you can't fight City Hall ' is rapidly becoming a thing of the past, says Murphy City Manager James Fisher.

"Our efforts are increasingly devoted to developing a deeper and richer relationship with residents," he said. "Through the power of digital technology and social media, we are putting an emphasis on connecting, sharing, listening and implementing."

Murphy's IT department, headed by Manager Wendle Medford, is on the leading edge of that concerted effort, implementing programs that encourage a constant interaction between Murphy residents and their local government.

Already in place are a presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest along with a mobile app for iPhone and Android that allows users to easily access the City's website and all its information. On the near horizon are live-streaming of Council meetings on mobile and desktop devices, and a Community Blog which will provide an open forum for discussion and conversation.

And, while pushing information outwardly is critically important, Fisher has tasked Medford and the IT staff to develop a system that is truly interactive, allowing residents to actively and easily submit ideas, comments, suggestions, questions and observations on topics related to City services.

To meet that challenge, Medford and his staff are adding a software program into the inventory that will do exactly that.

"It's called MindMixer," said Medford. "MindMixer is a way for the community to interact, carry on dialogues, talk about ideas, share their impressions and open up new topics of conversation. It's like an informal meeting being conducted online."

The City Manager knows that many good ideas from community members never make it to his desk. "Good, informed ideas are out there, but because of time, access or the feeling that the idea won't be heard, they never get expressed. We're convinced that MindMixer can create an online engagement process that gets beyond these obstacles."

Similar in some ways to an online forum, the MindMixer solution takes that kind of unstructured conversation and brings a sense of order to the interchange.

"Topics of a high value to the City administration or the Council take a high priority," said Medford. "Once introduced, the topic forms the basis for questions, comments and other input. Discussion with other contributors and City officials creates a lively and productive marketplace of ideas."

As people submit ideas and comments, these are listed on an activity page. On this page, participants can sort, rate and add their own comment all in one place. Other features include votes and ratings on ideas and topics, surveys, map siting, photos and other highly interactive activities.

As an added benefit, the MindMixer solution has the ability to augment periodic citizen surveys by facilitating feedback from citizens year-round, giving citizens the advantage of submitting ideas, suggestions and reactions without waiting to receive an annual or biennial survey.

"And, the real value is that everyone will know who's listening, who's participating, who's engaged," added Medford. "When you know that the Mayor, a Council member, the City Manager or a department director is listening and interacting, the discussion is taken to a higher level. That's when action occurs."

To participate, once MindMixer is fully implemented, citizens will be required to create a profile and use that identity to participate. The program will be activated over the next few weeks and will be ready for full implementation after initial testing.

"This will add another way for residents to participate in their governance," said Fisher. "Our goal has always been full transparency and comprehensive citizen engagement. These tools are a way for us to get there."

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ABOUT MURPHY -- Murphy is a fast-growing community located in Collin County. The population is approximately 18,020, generally characterized as highly educated with a median household income above the state average. With more than 70 percent of the land developed, the community is dominated by single-family residences. City planners strive to preserve a country feel while exhibiting an aggressive economic development stance. The centrally-located municipal complex includes four buildings that house Fire, Police, City Administration and Public Works. Money Magazine has dubbed Murphy as the 27th Best Place to Live in America for small cities, and D Magazine placed Murphy as the fifth best suburb in the 2014 list, where it has consistently ranked in the top 10.