

CITY REPORT

Prepared by the Woodland Hills Transparency Committee

OCTOBER 18, 2021

NOTE: Opinions and information published by the Transparency Committee are not official City positions. They represent the perspective of the Transparency Committee, and of the person(s) quoted or interviewed. While we strive to publish the most accurate information possible, plans and decisions can change quickly as new information is acted upon by City officials. Accordingly, the following information is accurate as of the date of publication, but beyond that time some details may become outdated.

Is the Transparency Committee really “transparent?”

Why ask this question?

Because some residents have asked it. So as chairman of the Transparency Committee – and at the mayor’s request – I’ll share my specific vision of Woodland Hills City transparency.

Why do we have a Transparency Committee?

In August of 2019, tax and budget concerns prompted our residents to demand more “transparency.” That is, they wanted to know more about what the city was doing and why. In response, the city formed our committee in November of that year.

What do we mean by “transparency?”

These days, the term “transparency” can have multiple definitions. In our case, many residents felt like there was a wall between them and city business. They couldn’t see what the city council did or understand why they did it.

I see our job as installing a window in that wall, so that residents can look through and get a better understanding of challenges facing the city, reasons for decisions and so on. In our specific context, that’s what “transparency” means.



What things does our role *not* include?

Some residents may want us to put something else (other than what the city’s doing) on the other side of the window. They may want us to do a thorough examination of a current issue, or investigate every aspect of a

resident grievance.

In my view, that's not our role. We are not a watchdog group, nor are we investigative reporters. Those groups begin with a premise of mistrust – that their subjects have something to hide. That's not our premise. We trust city personnel, we get our information from them, and our role is simply to make that information more available to residents. To clarify that role, we changed our publication's name from "Transparency Report" to "City Report" in September of 2020.



Are we a public relations group?

No, I don't see us that way. Although the city is the source of our information, we're empowered to ask difficult questions and we don't try to sway public opinion. We just put information out there, and residents either like what the city is doing or they don't. If they don't – to speak bluntly – it's not our job to help them feel better about it.

Do we publish “city propaganda?”

Because the information we publish comes from the city's perspective, some have labeled what we do as “propaganda.” I disagree. Certainly, not everything representing a specific perspective is propaganda, which carries with it the connotation of being misleading and promoting a nefarious agenda. I don't believe we have ever done that, or ever will.

How do we choose the topics for our reports?

Some are requested by the city, others we choose ourselves. We try to pick topics that will be of the most interest to the widest number of residents. Many are topics to be covered in upcoming public hearings. We have also done some videos, like those we produced on the 2022 budget and ranked-choice voting.

What steps do we take to ensure accuracy?

Before publication, everything we do is reviewed for factual accuracy by those who provided content and by the mayor. If a mistake is spotted after publication and the city requests a correction, we will publish one.

How are we organized?

We are a volunteer city committee reporting directly to the mayor. We began as part of the Communications Committee that publishes the city newsletter, but to fulfill our purpose more effectively we became a separate group in July of 2020.

Currently we have just two members and are short-handed. My co-member is Chris Jensen, who has engineering and trucking background, drives a city snowplow and acts as our liaison to the public works department. We are always looking for help from residents with writing, interviewing or audio/video skills.

In conclusion...

There will always be those who disagree with how our committee operates, and we respect everyone's right to his or her opinion. For our part, we remain dedicated to helping residents understand what the city is doing and why in the most effective ways we can.

This report was authored by Glenn Anderson for the Woodland Hills Transparency Committee.