

Best Practices

From City Hall to City Streets: Rolling Town Halls do More Than Grease the Squeaky Wheel

By Fort Worth Mayor Betsy Price

To most Americans, civic engagement means voting, writing letters to their elected officials, or attending city council meetings—but not in Fort Worth (TX).

As the 16th largest city in the United States, Fort Worth is looking far beyond the tired town hall lecture to reach citizens. If a resident has something to talk about, all they need to do is strap on their helmet and hop on their bike!

We started our “Rolling Town Halls” in 2011 and we’ve shaken up expectations about how city government connects with its citizens. I quickly learned that if you’re willing to wear your spandex in front of strangers, they will tell you just about anything! And in a state with more than 30 percent of the population overweight, it’s important to use every opportunity to promote healthy, active living.

As all mayors know, you can’t govern very well behind a desk. You’ve got to be out listening to the needs of citizens and talking about solutions to challenges. With more than 50 rides so far and nearly 1,000 riders joining us on the bike trails and streets of Fort Worth over the last year, we’ve had a lot of conversations about streets, homelessness, gas drilling, animal shelter overcrowding, public education, traffic congestion and so on.

It’s been an energizing experience to promote government accessibility while leading the charge toward healthier lifestyles.

Several issues raised during our bike

rides have led to positive change. After two riders wondered why apartment buildings don’t recycle, we now have a multi-family recycling program set to take effect soon. Some riders complained about problems with egrets in several neighborhoods, so we worked with Code Compliance to educate residents about how best to address these bird infestations. There are lots of similar stories.

Citizens are responding enthusiastically to the opportunity to be heard and have fun in the process. What’s great is that we’re not just hearing the negative comments typical at traditional town hall meetings. People are using our Rolling Town Halls to work together on solutions and explore new ideas to improve our city.



My husband, Tom, and I have been cycling all over the state of Texas for years. It was always part of our commitment to each other to stay active and healthy. We’ve ridden thousands of miles on the Trinity Trails here in Fort Worth. We “took it to the trails” in the Rolling Town Halls in 2012 with fast, long rides with a lot of success. But in 2013, we are transitioning to a more casual, fun for-



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mat. This year, we will be in the neighborhoods, slowing down a bit, using city streets, and hoping to appeal to a wider variety of recreational riders and families.

Also, because of the success of our cycling excursions, we introduced “Walking Town Halls” this year to also reach out to those who would rather take a walk instead of riding a bike. We’re getting great results.

Our rides and walks also draw attention to the city’s comprehensive bike and pedestrian transportation plans. As Fort Worth continues to respond to the rapid growth, it’s crucial that we give citizens transportation options—including cycling and walking. We’re using our Rolling and Walking Town Halls to raise awareness and interest in bike and pedestrian-friendly alternatives to our congested roadways.

As we start the 2013 season of Rolling and Walking Town Halls, we look forward to new adventures as we get people involved in solving the challenges of our day, encourage healthy lifestyles and promote the need for bicycle and pedestrian transit options.

Mayors are invited to submit the “Best Practices” of their cities to U.S. MAYOR. Contact Public Affairs at 202-293-7330 or send e-mail to usmayor@usmayors.org

