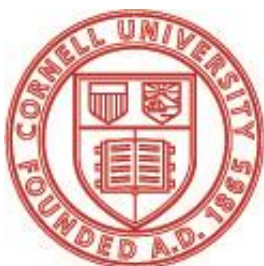# Government Communication in Lake Placid and North Elba, New York:

A study into effectiveness, transparency, and information technologies in government

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Acknowledgements

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1. Executive Summary

The Town of North Elba, New York, and The Village of Lake Placid, New York, located in the Adirondack Mountains, came together in 2014 to develop a joint Comprehensive Plan to guide the future of development in the area. This plan focused on various goals, objectives, and implementation strategies for the municipalities including the economy and tourism, community facilities, mobility, housing, the environment, and land use and design. Of importance for this report, is the section on Government Structure and Function. The vision for this section was to increase government efficiency at all levels to reduce costs, and to become a leader in smart growth and sustainable living by increasing the role of alternative, renewable, and self-sufficient energy sources. The first goal: to improve the operation of all village and town government departments to optimize efficiency. The last objective to reach this goal is to enhance efficiency, transparency, and access to municipal information and records. The identified implementation measures to achieve this objective are to increase transparency in government by providing information technology (IT) capabilities at town hall for various activities, and to redesign the meeting rooms with presentation technology. Over the years following the publication of the Comprehensive Plan, the Lake Placid and North Elba Community Development Commission (Development Commission) have been working to implement these changes throughout the community.

Information technology (IT) capabilities and the availability of systems for governments has increased over the years, and there is a growing demand from constituents for increased transparency and opportunities for public engagement. The Development Commission has recognized these as areas of improvement for the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid and sought to develop a report focusing on public awareness of government operations and improving access and streaming capabilities of public hearings. As the report developed, a service information gap in the municipal websites was discovered therefore, an additional theme of government communication and capabilities was added as an objective of this report.

First, a literature review spanning topics related to participatory government, citizen engagement, municipal social media pages and websites, and public meetings and video accessibility was conducted. Important ideas emerged from the literature about the core components of good governance and efficient public service delivery being rooted in

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transparency, accountability, and participation. Additionally, engagement between citizens and public officials was found to be increasingly effective due to the rise of technology and opportunities to create online dialogues and communities. Increased engagement and two-way communication channels has been used to foster increased public trust and have a positive impact on citizen satisfaction.

The author used a mixed-methods research design to conduct primary data. Individual interviews were conducted with seven government officials in various departments from both the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid to gain an initial understanding of the relationships between government officials and residents, as well as their communication methodologies and styles. Themes of poor community outreach, a disconnect in media between the Town and Village, and opportunities for coordination emerged from the interviews. An online survey was published for members of the community with questions concerning government communication, transparency, and effectiveness. Forty-four (44) survey responses were collected and analyzed for response trends. The majority of respondents reported being active in the community in terms of participation in recreation programs, arts and culture events, and general Town or Village events, but reported low attendance at public meetings. Low use of municipal websites as a source of information about the Town and Village was also reported. Most notably, was the strong feelings of dissatisfaction with the current communications of the Town and Village. Key themes revealed in the survey are related to feelings of fairness in government representation, concerns of transparency and a lack of engagement, and opportunities for consistency and synergies between the Town and Village. Many respondents also favored the opportunity to watch a live stream of public meetings, as long as they have the ability to engage virtually.

Detailed recommendations were designed for the Lake Placid and North Elba Development Commission as a foundation moving forward. A user-focused website re-design based in a positive and modern user experience, as well as a complementary and consistent style guide for both the websites and social media pages would be beneficial for the community. The use of municipal email notification systems and virtual public meetings was also discussed. The report concludes with recommendations to bolster public engagement through informal communication, transparency, and the deliberate use of citizen feedback.

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2.   Introduction

Lake Placid, New York is a small village located in the Adirondack Mountains, known for hosting the 1932 and 1980 Winter Olympic Games, among other winter sports championships. Surrounding Lake Placid lies the Town of North Elba, home to 8,957 residents as of 2010 (City Data, 2020).

The Lake Placid and North Elba Development Commission was created in August 2014 by the municipal boards of the Village of Lake Placid, and Town of North Elba. The Commission's purpose is to "facilitate the implementation of the Lake Placid and North Elba Comprehensive Plan," and serve in an advisory capacity to the municipal boards (Lake Placid and North Elba Community Development Commission, 2014). The 2014 Comprehensive Plan was put forth to update and replace the previous 1996 Plan, with a focus on the new needs of the aging and retiree population, as well as focus on new technological advancements for the area, and an emphasis on environmental awareness.

As part of the 2014 Comprehensive Plan, a sub-committee report on Government Structure and Function was created to define a vision, and goals, objectives, and implementation measures for the future of Lake Placid and North Elba. The vision created by the sub-committee is to increase government efficiency at all levels to reduce costs, and to become a leader in smart growth and sustainable living by increasing the role of alternative, renewable, and self-sufficient energy sources. The first goal of the sub-committee is to improve the operation of all village and town government departments to optimize efficiency. The last objective to reach this goal is to enhance efficiency, transparency, and access to municipal information and records. The identified implementation measures to achieve this objective are to increase transparency in government by providing IT capabilities at town hall for various activities, and to redesign the meeting rooms with presentation technology.

The Village of Lake Placid and the Town of North Elba are looking to increase public awareness and promote increased transparency within public meetings through the incorporation of technology to improve government functions. Residents in the area feel unaware of town proceedings and feel a lack of transparency from government officials. The Village of Lake Placid and Town of North Elba Development Commission want to focus their efforts on public

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awareness within the government and improve access and streaming capabilities of public hearings. At time of publication, there is currently no product feasibility or implementation plan to ameliorate these issues. The guiding research question for this report will be to define the best practices in government transparency using technology, and to discuss policies needed to improve the effectiveness of citizen engagement in the Lake Placid and North Elba, New York area.

The following report focuses on the use of technology within governments to improve engagement and involvement of citizens with the government. Examples of participatory government, citizen engagement, and e-government will be examined to determine the viability and scalability of the practices into the context of Lake Placid and North Elba. Social media engagement strategies for governments will be analyzed to improve knowledge sharing of government proceedings. Additionally, the feasibility of web streaming town meetings will be discussed. As additional implementation measures are identified throughout the research and project development process, they will be included to create a full picture for increasing government transparency in the area. Interviews conducted with public officials in both Lake Placid and North Elba were conducted and is analyzed for overlapping thematic areas for improvements and recommendations. An online survey of residents was also conducted, and the resulting analysis and feedback is used to shape the final recommendations for the governments in question.

This report was developed at the request of the Development Commission and Chairperson, Dean Dietrich, through a partnership with the Cornell University, Cornell Institute of Public Affairs (CIPA) graduate Master of Public Administration Program.

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3.   Literature Review

Transparency, accountability, and participation are core components of good governance and efficient public service delivery (Sören Gigler & Bailur, 2014). Public participation is the outcome of combined action from those who engage in collective action and decision making, the communication between involved parties and the discussions that link policy with public action (Sören Gigler & Bailur, 2014). Transparency can be defined as the outcome of placing – the attempt to place – information that was previously inaccessible into the public domain, and its resulting ability to be accessed by citizen groups and policy makers alike (Sören Gigler & Bailur, 2014). Accountability is comprised of two components: answerability and enforcement. Answerability refers to the obligation of public officials to inform the public and explain their actions, while enforcement is the capability of the general public to impose sanctions on those who have violated their obligations as civil servants (Sören Gigler & Bailur, 2014). While some argue that there is a triangular relationship between transparency, accountability, and participation, there are varying conditions under which transparency can lead to greater accountability, and therefore varying levels of participation and empowerment of citizens (Sören Gigler & Bailur, 2014).

The following section contains a review of relevant literature related to participatory government, citizen engagement, social media and website use by governments, and an analysis of public meetings and video accessibility. Each topic is referenced and analyzed with respect to the context surrounding capability in Lake Placid and North Elba, New York. The literature is then used to build the following survey questions and to influence the recommendations.

3.1   Participatory Government

Citizen participation in municipal decision-making is a strategy that can be used to create better and more sustainable development, and regulate best practices in governance (Oh et al., 2019). The United Nations (UN) cites citizen participation as "one of the most important policy tools contributing to sustainable development through democratic governance in the decision-making process" (Oh et al., 2019). Benefits can be normative in that they increase accountability and legitimacy of governmental decisions, or instrumental in that they improve organizational performance, quality of life for residents, and can create economic growth and financial

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soundness (Oh et al., 2019). Traditional approaches to decision-making often allow for little opportunity for full and open discussion of ideas (Cooper et al., 2006).

However, when taking a more deliberative approach, joint action across all sectors of society and seeking consensus in actions through deliberation, can create a dialogue among diverse populations and create shared responsibility for outcomes (Cooper et al., 2006). A deliberative approach can be realized through public forums and face-to-face discussions, or alternatively though questionnaires, which are particularly useful and effective in getting a large number of participants (Cooper et al., 2006). For example, more than 60,000 people throughout the United States participated in a National Park Service multistage deliberative planning process via mailed questionnaires and forums regarding a Yosemite General Management Plan throughout the late 1970s (Cooper et al., 2006). The resulting draft management plan relied heavily upon the responses received. Albeit effective at garnering feedback, administrators may be reluctant to embrace consensus-based processes due to a fear of forced commitment to decisions made by non-experts (Cooper et al., 2006). Cooper (2006) cites that this fear may be rooted in the assumptions about individual citizen knowledge and therefore failing to recognize the needed citizen input or advance learning about citizens' needs. Fortunately, these fears can be overcome by pursuing meaningful consensus-based action through collaboration between governments and their stakeholders (Cooper et al., 2006).

The methods of garnering citizen participation are only as effective as the strength of the belief that the citizens' preferences and inputs will influence decision-making (Oh et al., 2019). When participation actions are routinely used, they become part of the "institutional infrastructure" of an area (Oh et al., 2019). However, mandating public participation by design may not actually increase numbers of public participation even if the participation channels are required to be opened. Accountability pressure from citizens placed onto public managers, delays in decision-making, and administrative costs can be burdens to adoption of participation mechanisms by governments (Oh et al., 2019). As a result, public participation mechanisms and their authenticity are often called into question as a simple attempt to use citizens as a "passive target in one-way communication" (Oh et al., 2019). They key to citizen participation, therefore, is less about the sheer number of participation mechanisms used, but rather in their effective operation and ability to become a functional tool to reflect citizen voices and be translated into

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municipal authority and policy (Oh et al., 2019). Additionally, Federal policies such as Freedom of Information Act and National Environmental Policy Act serve as avenues for citizen participation in discretionary decision-making and government deliberation and should be considered for further guidance outside of the scope of this report (Act (FOIA), n.d.; EPA, 2018)

3.2   Citizen Engagement

Comparable to a participatory governance structure, is the notion of leveraging citizen engagement. Engagement, however, requires an active and intentional dialogue between citizens and public decision makers, initiated by governments in order to illicit feedback in a formal nature to involve citizens in decision-making (Lodewijckx, 2019). There has been an increasing demand by civil society for citizens to have a greater say in public decision making, just as many governments are wanting to become more inclusive and responsive to their constituents' needs (Sören Gigler, 2016). This is not a new concept, as public deliberation by citizens dates back to ancient Greece (Carpini et al., 2004), but the rise of technology has provided citizens with seemingly unlimited opportunities to engage with their public officials. Local governments can use information and communication technologies to foster citizen engagement by providing timely and actionable information, facilitating the formation of social networks, and helping citizens get more involved with public life (Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2014).

A key distinction is to be made between exchanges with citizens and citizen engagement. Governments can exchange information with citizens through providing information and inviting input or surveying citizens (Svara & Denhardt, 2010). These activities help get citizens involved but should be viewed as one-way interactions (Svara & Denhardt, 2010). Engagement, on the other hand, provides the opportunity for citizens and governments to "listen and learn from each other and work together to address issues or problems" (Svara & Denhardt, 2010). Examples of engagement in the decision-making process can include community forums to set goals and the formation of citizen advisory committees. In delivering services, engagement can include citizen campaigns or a neighborhood revitalization effort (Svara & Denhardt, 2010). In government-citizen exchanges, citizens are informed and consulted, while the government provides and responds to the issues. However, in engagement activities, citizens are incorporated in policy making, and co-produce collaborative, and empowering decisions (Svara & Denhardt, 2010).

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Information and communication technologies can be used to reduce the distance between governments and citizens by providing greater access to decision makers and information (Sören Gigler & Bailur, 2014). By creating platforms for citizens to raise issues and concerns, governments enable horizontal (citizen-to-citizen), downward (government-to-citizen), and upward (citizen-to-government) flows of information which allow all parties to be held to transparency and accountability norms. Through the use of technology, opportunities to interact with information and provide feedback is available in real-time, therefore creating an improved delivery of government services (Sören Gigler & Bailur, 2014).

Internet and Social media technologies can be used to engage with citizens, from Facebook pages used to post comments and respond to users, using Twitter to provide breaking news and important information, or using public data on visualization software, such as Google Maps; or the development of specific websites for citizens to identify and alert officials to problems in the community (Svara & Denhardt, 2010). These services can allow governments to better identify, prioritize, and ultimately solve their community's pressing issues. Through increased engagement, citizens become active in the work of the government and hold stake in enhancing the civic life of their communities. Better yet, as seen in a 2009 case in Hawai'i, citizens were able to repair a bridge to a State Park for which the State Department of Land and Natural Resources did not have the finances (Svara & Denhardt, 2010).

Before governments can begin engaging their citizens through technologies, they must first clearly articulate their goals to be achieved through the use of technology and determine at what level they wish to engage. A clear explanation must be give to citizens about how their input will be used in decision-making, requiring public officials to consider all mechanisms and nuances of the activities so that citizens feel that their feedback is being not only received, but processed and considered (Svara & Denhardt, 2010).

3.3   Social Media and Websites

Social Media is a powerful took that governments must be able to embrace and leverage as a tool to connect with their communities. Hootsuite, a social media management platform used by over 16 million people in over 175 countries, works with all levels of government to develop strategies for governments to take advantage of the new forms of communication on social media sites (Tran & Bar-Tur, 2020). Social media can be particularly useful in crisis communication

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messaging. During times of crisis, people look to governments not just for information and directions and guidance, but to set a tone for coping with the situation at hand. Governments must ensure that their messages are clear, concise, calm, and professional when giving updates (Tran & Bar-Tur, 2020). Additionally, social media can help governments build public trust through empathy and willingness to respond and engage with followers and create online opportunities for dialogue (Shibu, 2019). Just like brands and businesses use social media to build authentic relationships with their customers, governments can do the same by remaining clear and transparent. When public trust is built, not only does it provide the ability to "humanize" government and public officials, it provides additional avenues for citizen engagement (Tran & Bar-Tur, 2020). The app Nextdoor is a social media platform for neighborhoods, limiting the network to those in the surrounding area, and is a great way for residents to engage with each other and build a sense of community (Tran, 2018). Governments can also use the Nextdoor platform to organize town halls, educate citizens on relevant issues, and engage with community groups in different ways than other forms of social media may provide (Tran, 2018).

The nature of social media opens channels for two-way communication between governments and citizens. Social media encourages participation by its users, and can have a great impact on democratic processes through the promise of an open dialogue (Cinus, 2019). By tracking feedback and monitoring communication, government agencies can use this data to improve their projects and initiatives, and receive feedback in real-time (Cinus, 2019). Responding to individuals directly can have a positive impact on citizen satisfaction, as well as regularly sharing content to engage with the public. In particular, the use of "stories" on Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat is becoming more popular than sharing posts to the traditional social media feed (Shibu, 2019). Stories are seen as more spontaneous and personal than text posts alone and this type of short video content is on the rise. The City of Frisco, Texas posted one short video every day for 100 days in 2018 to highlight different services, departments, and news across the city, and won the Savvy Award[1] for Best Social Media Campaign, resulting in a dramatic increase in followers and content for the city (Shibu, 2019).

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[1] The Savvy Awards is a yearly competition put on by the City-County Communications and Marketing Association (3CMA), with awards given to governments who excel in communication and marketing tools, and processes, and graphic design and photography (https://3cma.org/59/Savvy-Awards).

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Social media provides governments the ability to interact with users on platforms in which they are familiar and comfortable using. Users also expect website content to provide a "seamless digital experience," with intuitive user interfaces and good design (Lurie, 2018). User experience is essential for governments to understand as they build websites that meet the needs of the community. Understanding their audience and how and why they access and municipal website can allow governments to optimize the user experience and create more user-friendly design (Lurie, 2018). In fact, more than 50% of government website users access the sites from a mobile device, and this needs to be considered when designing graphics and content so that is it accessible across all devices (Lurie, 2018). Across 100 city and county websites, the most frequented reasons for users to access a government website were to seek information about jobs, parks and recreation, online payments, and court information (Lurie, 2018). Collecting and analyzing this type of data from users will allow for more complete, and citizen-centric optimization of the municipal website and in turn, improved government service delivery.

3.4   Public Meetings and Video Accessibility

As short videos become more popular than text posts on social media sites, governments are using longer videos to share press-conferences, community events, school sporting events, and even board and council meetings. Videos are a great way to interact with the community, whether through live, or recorded videos (CivicPlus, 2020). YouTube has over 1 billion users worldwide and is the third most visited website behind Google and Facebook, and has options for both pre-recorded uploads, and streaming live content (CivicPlus, 2020). Facebook has an easy-to-use live streaming service that allows users to broadcast 60-minute videos, with the capability for followers to interact and respond to the videos in real-time. Facebook Live videos are saved to the user's profile after the stream has ended and can be watched as a recorded video as well. Instagram has a large following with younger demographics and can allow governments the ability to engage with this population that shifted away from Facebook. Recorded and live videos can also be embedded onto municipal websites to reach citizens that do not use social media sites (CivicPlus, 2020).

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4.   Methodology, Research Design and Data

This study was conducted from January 2020 through May 2020. The author, working with the Lake Placid and North Elba Community Development Commission, conducted individual interviews with key members of the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid governments on January 16 and 17, 2020. These interviews were structured for the author to gather an initial understanding of the relationships between government officials and residents, as well as their communication methodologies and styles. From the interviews, a survey was developed for residents of the Town and Village to express their attitudes towards communicating with their respective governments. The survey was published online from March 16 to March 31, 2020. Although there were limitations to an online survey, discussed further below, the author received over 45 responses and new insights to bring to the Town and Village, as discussed in the recommendations and conclusion below.

4.1   Mixed Methods Research

For her research, the author conducted mixed methods research using stakeholder interviews and an online survey to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Mixed methods research provides a better understanding of the research questions, and can help researchers gain breadth and depth in their understanding (FoodRisc Resource Centre, 2016). This approach allows for a more complex and thorough analysis of the issues facing the Town and Village and can pinpoint specific areas to target improvement. The nature of a mixed methods approach allows for more relationships to be discovered within the data and can help better explain the findings (FoodRisc Resource Centre, 2016). The interviews and survey conducted allowed for specific needs and opportunities to be identified within the governments from those involved; and by also reaching out to the residents, their survey responses can be compared to those by the government officials, in order to conduct a gap analysis. A gap analysis is used to assess differences in performance to determine whether requirements are being met, and if not, what steps need to be taken to ensure they are met (Rouse, 2019b). Relevant targets identified by the Town and Village in the 2014 Comprehensive Plan include improving operation in all Town and Village departments, enhancing efficiency, transparency, and access to municipal information, and fostering strong relationships among all government entities (Lake Placid and North Elba Community Development Commission, 2014). The interview and survey questions were developed to seek

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answers to these questions and expand upon proposed implementation measures from the Comprehensive Plan.

4.2   Individual Interviews with Government Officials

The author, using guidance from the 2014 Development Commission plan, developed a series of questions to ask members of both the Town of North Elba, and Village of Lake Placid governments in order to gain insight into the communications structures and frameworks of each municipality. Interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

The author traveled to the Lake Placid area on January 16 and 17, 2020 to interview members of the government. A total of seven interviews were conducted, based on identification of interested parties trough guidance from members of the Development Commission, and availability of the public officials.

Although there was a list of questions for the interviews, the author framed the meetings as a casual conversation, seeking to discover additional insight into the workings of each government's communication structure, and therefore results and the information gained varies. While a limitation to the research, the author did discover common themes throughout each, discussed below in section 4.1: Interview Observations and Findings.

Each interview began with a framing question, asking the interviewee to describe their view of successful communication. This can mean many things to different people, and the author found it important to uncover the different meanings of successful and unsuccessful communication as a whole. Then, the author asked what successful communication from a government looked like to the interviewees, in order to gain an understanding if there was a different set of expectations from governments in communication styles.

Next, the interviewees were asked what communication methods are essential to the function of their jobs. This question was developed to determine which methods are used most common between the different departments in North Elba and Lake Placid. The author also asked about what information each department communicates to the public, and how that information is spread. The author also sought to determine if the interviewee thought that the current methods of dissemination are effective, or if there are methods that are more effective than others. These questions were used to help gain an understanding of the flow of information from the

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government to the public. This question led into questions about platforms for two-way communication with the public, current or future. The author also asked what the interviewees wanted the public to gain from the information they distribute, and what information is critical to spread within the community.

Then the interviewees were asked to discuss forms of communication that currently make, or could make, the operation of their job easier, or more efficient. While a contentious question when discussing optimization of jobs through technology, the author believed this question to be important as there is a push from constituents to engage more with governments virtually and in real-time.

A more advanced technological future in terms of streaming and communication is part of the 2014 Comprehensive Plan, and the interviewees were asked to detail their visions for the technological future of the area. This question also leads into a discussion about perceived barriers to achieving this future, from a governmental standpoint. This information will be particularly useful for the author to develop the recommendations, understanding that budgeting and personal can be institutional barriers that may not be recognized by the public. Other barriers the author asked about include general barriers to successful communication, and difficulties implementing new technologies and frameworks.

The author concluded the interviews by asking about which methods of communication are currently showing success and if there are any methods the interviewee believed could be enhanced to maximize communication between the public and the government.

4.3   Online Survey

The questions concerning government communication, transparency, and effectiveness are not new to North Elba and Lake Placid. Through her research, the author discovered similar reports from other towns across the US and Canada, from which questions were drawn to apply to develop the survey questions (Brennan, 2017), (Westfall, 2017), (Town of Parker, 2017). These reports were successful in garnering anonymous public opinions that could potentially be critical of their respective governments and using the results to inform the administrations of feasible changes. The World Bank Group cites citizen engagement activities are useful to "capture diverse experiences, assess lessons learned, and outline methods and entry points to

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provide a results-focused approach" for policy making, and the survey was structured with similar goals in mind (World Bank Group, 2014). Citizen engagement can also help governments achieve improved public service delivery governance and social inclusion and empowerment (World Bank Group, 2014). The Lake Placid and North Elba Development Commission, as part of the 2014 Comprehensive Plan for the Town and Village, identified goals that align with citizen engagement principles, including optimizing government efficiency at all levels by enhancing efficiency, transparency, and access to municipal information and records (Lake Placid and North Elba Community Development Commission, 2014).

The survey was hosted using the Cornell University Qualtrics survey website. Qualtrics is a user-friendly survey tool used by over 11,000 companies and many universities to conduct research. The tool allows for many types of question formats, including text entry, matrix tables, multiple choice, and multiple answer selection, all of which were used to gather a variety of data types to analyze. Data gathered using Qualtrics is stripped of any identifying information, including IP address and user location, and is stored securely through a two-step login. Due to the potential sensitive nature of the data being collected, for these reasons, the author chose Qualtrics over a more recognizable (Google Forms, Survey Monkey, etc.) hosting site.

The survey was split into six sections: demographics, general communications, the Town and Village Social Media pages, the Town and Village Websites, communications about Public Meetings, and overall Town and Village communications. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix B.

4.3.1 Demographics

The most important question in this section was asked to determine if a respondent lived in the Town of North Elba, or the Village of Lake Placid. While geographically, the two blend together as one jurisdiction, it was critical for the author to distinguish which municipality the respondent lived in. Questions about residency status (full-time or part-time) were also included due to the varying needs of each population. Additionally, respondents were asked to identify their age group. Across generations, there are varying degrees of use of internet, technology, and social media (Vogels, 2019) and it was important to the author to be able to sort responses to questions by age group, to compare to overall North Elba and Lake Placid demographics, to recommend best practices for the area.

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4.3.2   General Communications

This section began by asking respondents for their agreement or disagreement to statements regarding their informedness to Town and Village operations, if the governments welcomed citizen involvement, gathered feedback from residents, or listens to its citizens. These questions were important to ask in the beginning to frame the survey as it can provide context for the following questions (Pew Research Center, 2020b).

This page also asked respondents to identify from where they receive their information about happenings in the Town and Village. An extensive list of sources was provided, including but not limited to official websites, social media pages, email mailer lists, local media, and attending meetings. A fill-in-the-blank box was also provided to determine if there are additional sources not previously considered. The next question asked respondents to indicate their level of interest in different types of public communications, such as news about upcoming public meetings, upcoming town events, municipal budgets, emergency alerts, government affairs, among others. This question also included a fill-in-the-blank box for respondents to add their own preferences. Circling back to the 2014 Comprehensive Plan, the next question asked about likelihood to use future additional ways for the governments to engage with residents – virtual town hall meetings, live-streaming public meetings – among other suggestions for two-way communication channels, text message notifications, or a dedicated mobile application. The Comprehensive Plan includes an implementation measure to increase IT capability at the Village and Town Hall to live stream meetings and re-design meeting rooms with presentation technology, so these options, among others are crucial for the governments to gain an understanding of resident opinions on the matter.

4.3.3   Town and Village Social Media Pages

This section began by asking respondents to identify which social media platforms, if any, they currently use. This is important to gather a baseline to contextualize the remainder of the questions in the section. Knowing which social media platforms are most widely used by residents will allow the town to focus their efforts onto those sites. Next, respondents answered their frequency of use of any Town or Village social media pages. This was included because as a high-frequency visitor destination, page follows, or interactions might not reflect true numbers from residents only. The next question asked residents to indicate their agreement or

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disagreement with statements about effectiveness of communication on social media use, meeting expectations, and response-time, among others. Social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter allow for an ease of communication and make it easier for citizens to voice their opinions about their governments, however in a 2016 index survey by Sprout Social, a leading social media management software company, average social media response time from governments was among the slowest at 10.7 hours, with an average response rate of only 9% (Sprout Social, 2017). The author wanted to use this question to determine residents' opinions about communicating with their government on social media and to look for areas of improvement.

This section also included an open-ended text box for respondents to write any comments or recommendations regarding the Town and Village's use of social media. The presence of this optional open-ended questions allows respondents to anonymously voice their opinions further than through the questions being asked and allow for new ideas and recommendations to be brought to the author's attention.

4.3.4   Town and Village Websites

Similar to the social media section, this part of the survey asked which of the official Town or Village websites, along with the Development Commission website, the respondent has used, and at what frequency. Here, however, the respondent was also asked to explain why in an open-ended text box if they responded to having never used one of the official websites. The reasoning for this was to determine respondents reasonings behind non-use of the official pages and to identify any common themes or factors that resulted in the pages not being accessed by the residents.

Next, this section asked respondents to agree or disagree with statements regarding the websites' ease of use, the informativeness of information provided on the sites, and site usefulness. The respondents were also asked to identify for which reasons they were accessing the websites, including information about utilities, law enforcement or the courts, recreational purposes, news, and development permits, among other options. This question also included a fill-in-the-blank option for respondents to add additional uses not previously considered. This section also included an open-ended text box for additional comments or recommendations for the Town and Village websites.

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4.3.5 Communications about Public Meetings

This section asked respondents to agree or disagree with statements concerning official public meetings for the Town and Village. Questions asked respondents to identify how informed they feel about the governments' meetings, and the governments' decisions.

Referring back to the Comprehensive Plan, this section also asked respondents how likely they would be to watch a live video stream of a Town or Village meeting; or a video recording of the meeting made available after the meetings have concluded. These questions will be critical to the governments as they further develop their implementation measures from the 2014 plan.

4.3.6 Overall Town and Village Communication

The final survey section asked three important questions. The first, to agree or disagree with a statement that the Town and Village governments are dedicated to communicating openly and honestly with its citizens. This question is key in determining perceived government transparency by citizens. This question was included at the end of the survey in order to not create bias while providing responses to the above questions (Pew Research Center, 2020b). For the same reason, the next question asked about overall satisfaction with the communications of the Town and Village. Lastly, the survey asked respondents to fill an open-ended text box with any comments, feedback, or ideas regarding communications for the Town and Village. The aim for this question was to allow respondents to have an additional space to voice their final opinions about the topics above. This type of question invites respondents to consider the questions they just answered and speak more on items they felt needed additional space. Thoughtful open-ended responses allow the author to garner additional feedback and insights into the Town and Village.

4.4 Data Collection

The survey was published on cornell.qualtrics.com on March 16, 2020. A shortened link provided through *bit.ly* was used (bit.ly/lakeplacidgovcomm) in a press release published in the local newspapers. A link to the survey was also included in the twice-weekly Lake Placid Insider email mailer. The survey was set to close on April 1, but due to the changing news cycles related to the spread of Covid-19 in New York State, the survey was kept open an additional two weeks until April 13, 2020.

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4.5   Limitations

The author recognizes that an online survey is limited in its reach. While there has been an increase in internet surveys in the last 10 years, they come with biases related to under coverage and nonresponses (Pew Research Center, 2020a). While online surveys are convenient for respondents to complete on their own time and at their own pace, not everyone has access to the internet and the demographic differences between those with and without access are significant. In Lake Placid and North Elba in particular, there are many rural residents, and residents over age 65, both of which are categories that are underrepresented among internet users (Pew Research Center, 2020a).

Additionally, the distribution method relies on a convenience sample, opposed to random sample, of internet users that see the survey invitation online. However, in a survey focused on online use of municipal sites, the author recognized that there will be bias in the questions and not a true representative sample. This means that there is no basis for computing or reporting a margin of sampling error, and therefore no feasible way to estimate how representative the sample is of the population as a whole (Pew Research Center, 2020a).

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5.   Observations and Findings

5.1   Individual Interviews

The author interviewed seven government officials in both the Lake Placid and North Elba governments, across various departments and levels. Each interviewee had specific goals and visions for the future of communications in the area, but the author did identify three (3) common themes from the conversations. Each theme is discussed below.

5.1.1   Outreach

Many interviewees expressed concern about community outreach within the region. They acknowledged that the North Elba and Lake Placid populations is skewed to an older age range, and many residents are experiencing varying levels of poverty. There is also poor internet and phone connectivity throughout the area, and region, which adds a level of difficulty when reaching the community. Additionally, some interviewees expressed concern that there is not much interaction between the government and the visitors to the area, who support much of the economy. Visitor communications are handled by the Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism (ROOST), which is a separate entity from the Town and Village Governments. The author does see an opportunity for a partnership between ROOST and the Town and Village Boards to advance communications throughout the region.

5.1.2   Media Disconnect

The author interviewed representatives from seven departments within the Town and Village, and each utilized a different platform to communicate with the public. Some information is mandated to be published on the official websites by law – public meeting agendas and minutes, for example. However, some departments communicate heavily through forms of social media, while others focus on phone conversations to handle business with the public. Other departments told the author that much of the information they disseminate to the public comes from word-of mouth among citizens.

Some interviewees expressed concern about a lack of desire within the department to communicate with the public and have open and available forums for two-way communication. Others believed that there was no way to "over-communicate" with the public and expressed desire for increased public engagement. Many departments spread information through the local

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newspapers or posting on bulletin boards throughout the area. Concerns were again expressed by many about switching to all-online communication medias, for fear of the lack of internet connectivity in the region.

5.1.3   Coordination

An overwhelming majority of interviewees expressed desire for increased coordination and connection between the Town and the Village in their communications. Interviewees told the author about a lack of inter-Town and Village interaction, and even lack of regional interaction between governments. This separation results in public confusion, which the author recognizes as an area of growth and opportunity for the Town and Village. One interviewee envisioned a future quarterly news report that included information from all departments across the Town and Village as a means to improve intergovernmental relations and coordination.

5.2   Online Survey

The online survey was accessed by 49 individuals between March 16 and April 13, 2020. Of those, only 44 respondents consented to the survey per the Cornell University Institutional Review Board Data Collection Consent Form at the beginning of the survey, and only those 44 respondents were able to move on and take the survey. However, most questions only received between 30-38 responses each. All data analysis were conducted out of number of responses to the individual question at hand.

5.2.1   Demographics

Not surprising, the demographic breakdown of survey respondents was as follows: 3% ages 19-24, 18% ages 25-39, 42% ages 40-60, and 37% ages 61 and older. No respondents indicated they were age 18 or younger. According to CityData.com, as of 2018, the median age in North Elba was roughly 40 years old, so we can infer that the population breakdown of survey respondents is indicative of the greater population (City Data, 2020). Of the respondents, 50% live in the Village of Lake Placid, and 37% live in the Town of North Elba, with 13% selecting "other" as their home residence. Those that indicated their location as "other" include neighboring towns, and other U.S. states. Full-time residents of the area make up 87% of respondents, with an additional 3% being part-time. The remaining 10% of respondents indicated that their residency status was "other," or that they were a frequent visitor of the area.

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Next, the survey asked respondents "How Often in the past 12 Months" they participated in varying activities. For ease of visualization the *Very Frequently* category is quantified as "daily," *Frequently* as "2-3 times a week," *Occasionally* as "once a month," and *Rarely* as "once every 2-3 months." Graphical visualizations of key responses to this question can be found below.
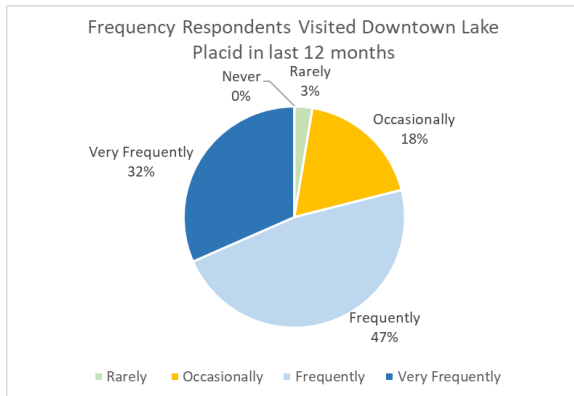

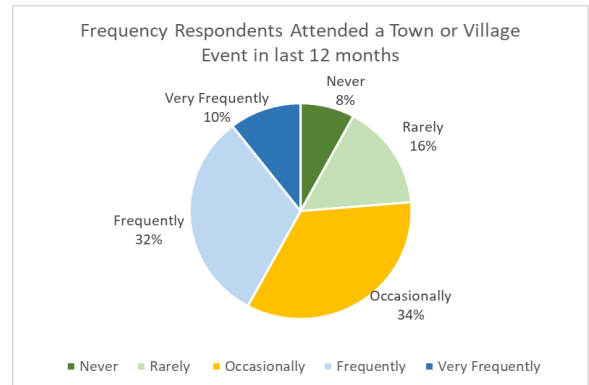*Figure 5-1: Frequency Respondents Visited Downtown Lake Placid in last 12 months*

Figure 5-2: Frequency Respondents Attended a Town or Village Event in last 12 months
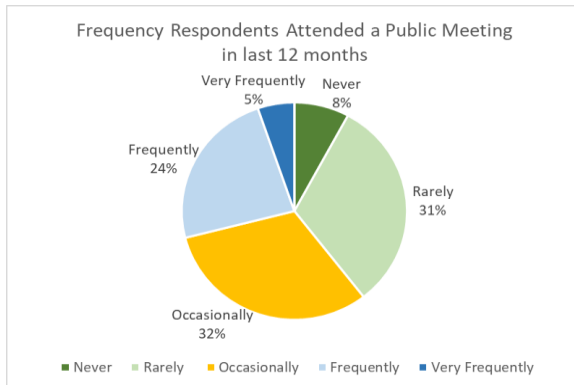
Figure 5-3: Frequency Respondents Attended a Public Meeting in last 12 months
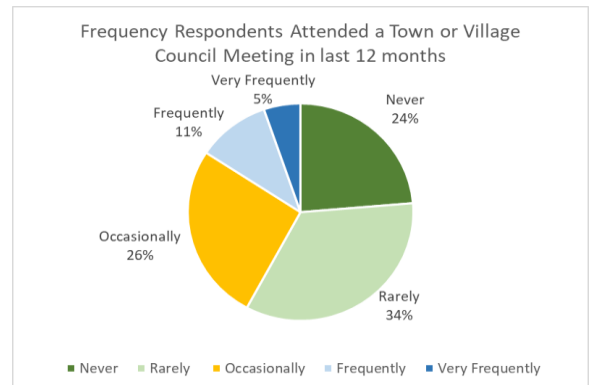
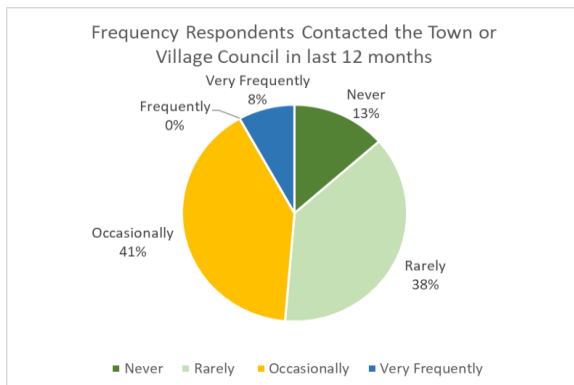*Figure 5-4: Frequency Respondents Attended a Town or Village Council Meeting in last 12 months*

Figure 5-5: Frequency Respondents Contacted the Town or Village Council in last 12 months
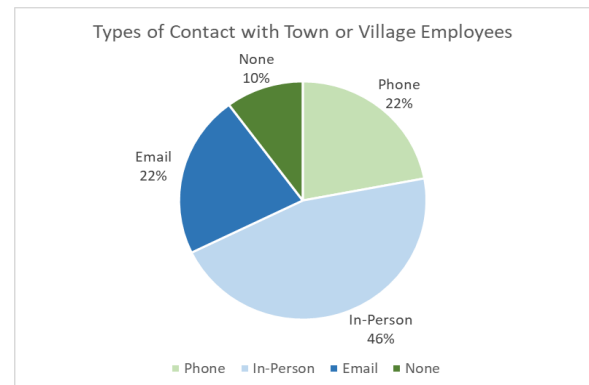

Figure 5-6: Types of Contact with Town or Village Employees

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From the graphs, we can infer that many of the respondents are active in the Town and Village in various ways. Nearly 80% of the 44 respondents had visited Downtown Lake Placid, with 32% of those stating that they visit daily *(figure 5-1)*. No Respondents state that they have never been to the Downtown Lake Placid area. Town and Village events, recreation programs, and arts and culture programs are also widely experienced by the respondents *(figure 5-2)*. In the last 12 months, 8% of respondents reported that they had never been to a public meeting *(figure 5-3)*, but 24% responded that they had never been to a Town or Village Council Meeting *(figure 5-4)*. Of those that had been to a Town or Village Council Meeting, 34% responded that they attended once every 2-3 months, 26% attended once a month, while only 11% reported "frequent" or "very frequent" weekly attendance. In the last 12 months, 41% of respondents answered to contacting the Town or Village council once a month, while 38% indicated that they contact the Councils once every 2-3 months *(figure 5-5)*. Thirteen (13%) percent of respondents indicated that they had never contacted the Town or Village Council in the past year. In-person contact with Town and Village employees is most common, at 46%, with email and phone both being 22% of interactions *(figure 5-6)*.

5.2.2   General Communications

Next, the survey asked about general attitudes about communications with the Town and Village Governments. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with the statements below in each graph.
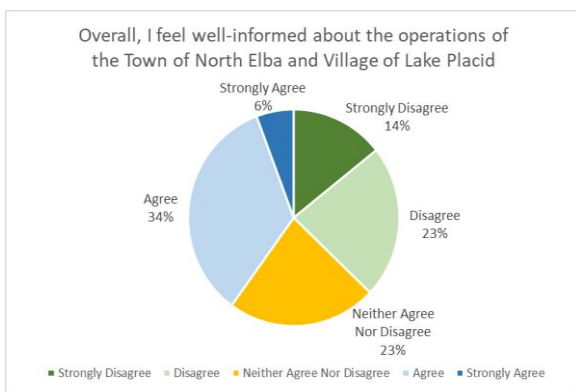

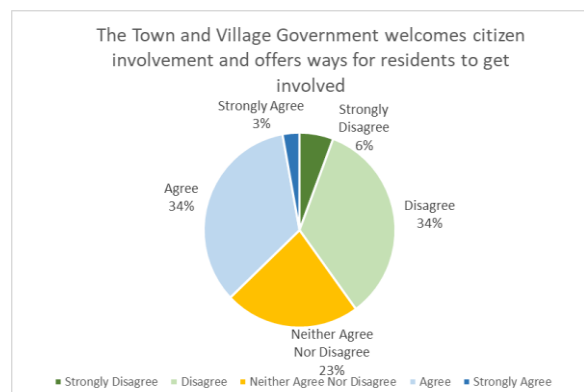*Figure 5-7: "I feel well-informed about the operations of the Town and Village."*

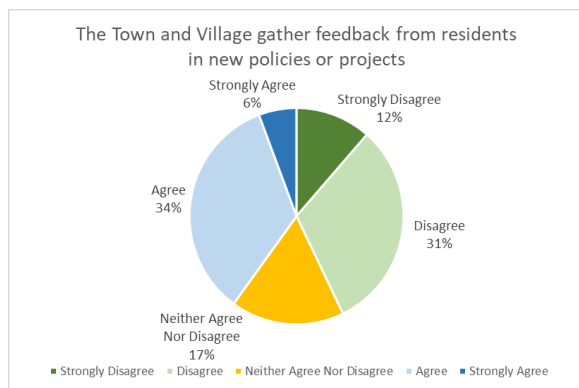*Figure 5-8: "The Town and Village welcome citizen involvement."*

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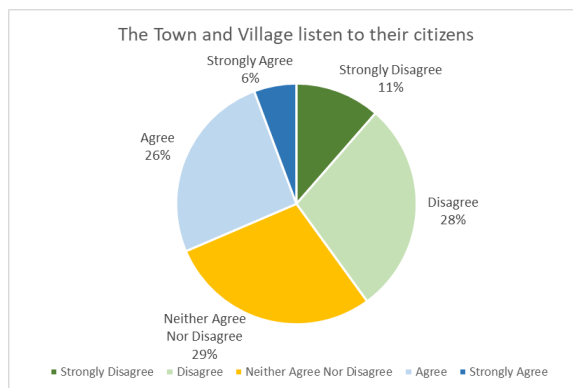Figure 5-9: *"The Town and Village gather feedback from residents."*

Figure 5-10: *"The Town and Village listen to their citizens."*

While 40% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed to feeling well-informed about Town and Village Operations, 37% either disagreed or strongly disagreed (*figure 5-7*). In terms of citizen involvement, 34% of respondents agreed that they felt the governments offered ways for residents to get involved (*figure 5-8).* However, the same percent of respondents, 34% disagreed to the same question. Six (6%) percent of respondents strongly disagreed with the government welcoming citizen involvement. In the same vein, 12% of respondents strongly disagreed, and 31% disagreed that the village gathered feedback from residents in new policies or projects (*figure 5-9).* However, 40% of respondents still agreed or strongly agreed to this statement. When asked if they agreed to a statement that the Town and Village listen to their citizens, 28% disagreed and 11% strongly disagreed (*figure 5-10).* The largest response to this question was in the neutral category at 29%. For this question, still 26% of respondents agreed, and 6% strongly agreed that they felt listened to as a citizen. From these questions, we can tell that there is a high variability in citizen attitudes towards their relationship and engagement with the governments of Lake Placid and North Elba. While outside the scope of this report, the reasons why the number of agreeing and disagreeing respondents are nearly equal would be useful in future studies and reports.

The graph below shows the sources that respondents use to receive information about the Town and Village (*figure 5-11).* Most frequently used are local print media, with 29 respondents reporting that as a used source. Next, are the Town and Village Facebook Page with 20 respondents. Attending Council Meetings and Word of Mouth are used equally by 19 respondents to receive information. Thirteen (13) respondents get their information from the

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official Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid websites. The Lake Placid Insider email newsletter, as well as local broadcast media are used by ten respondents each. Only two (2) respondents reported receiving information from the Town or Village Twitter pages.

Figure 5-11: Information Sources in the Town and Village

The respondents were then asked to indicate their interest in receiving more information about various topics related to the Town and Village governments and operations. More than half of respondents indicated they were interested or very interested in hearing more information about the following: council and public meetings, upcoming Town or Village events, upcoming Town and Village projects, Town and Village Budgets, recreation events and news, road construction updates and news, traffic pattern changes and updates, waste collection updates and news, snow removal updates and news, severe weather updates and news, emergency alerts and notifications, government affairs affection Town and Village operations, by-law and code information, law enforcement, and judiciary and court information. The only information type over half of respondents were not interested in hearing more information about was employment opportunities, which is not surprising as many respondents indicated they were retired or currently employed in the area.

Next, respondents were asked to consider additional, new ways by which they could communicate with their public officials. Of the new methods listed, respondents indicated their likelihood to use each system if implemented. Graphs of likelihood of use for each are below.
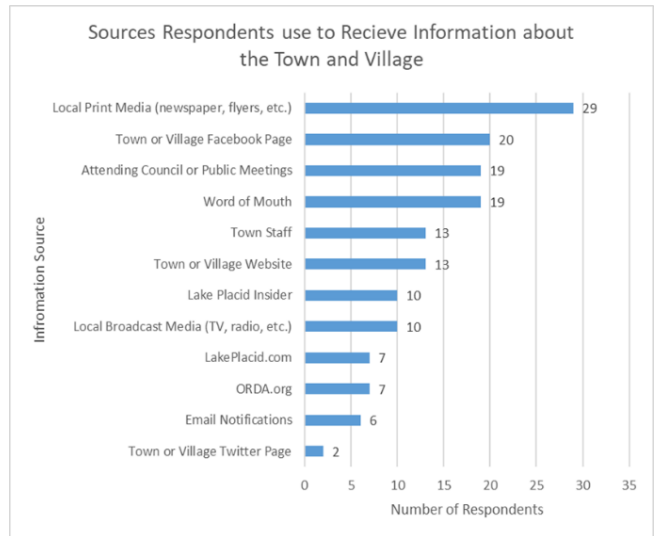

Figure 5-12: Online Feedback System
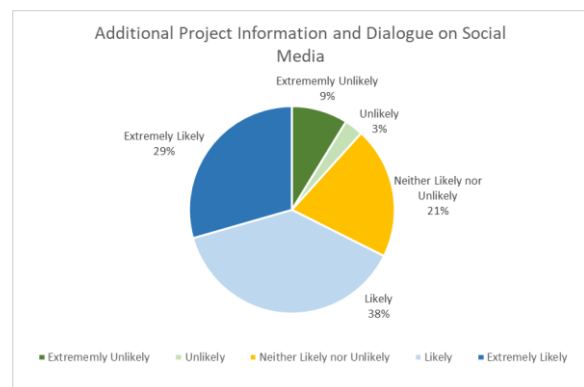
Figure 5-13: Additional Information and Dialogue on Social Media
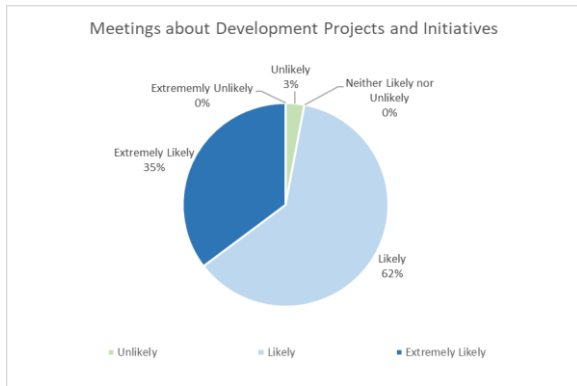
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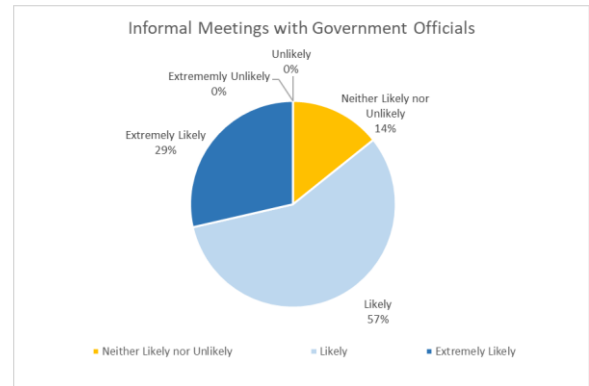Figure 5-14: Meetings about Development Projects and Initiatives

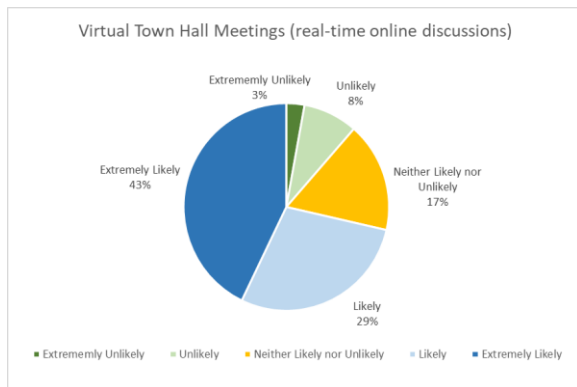Figure 5-15: Informal Meetings with Government Officials

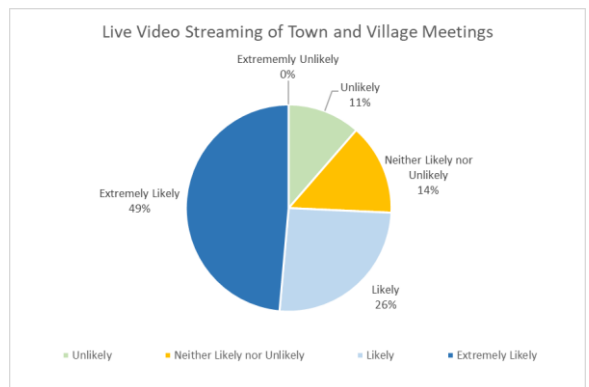Figure 5-16: Virtual Town Hall Meetings

Figure 5-17: Live Video Streaming of Town and Village Meetings

Regarding a system to provide online feedback on Specific Projects and Initiatives, 57% of respondents reported that they would be extremely likely to use, while 40% said they would likely use (*figure 5-12*). If the government were to provide additional project information and dialogues on social media, 29% of respondents reported that they would be extremely likely to engage in this way (*figure 5-13*). For the same question, 38% of respondents said they would likely use this communication method; 3% reported it would be unlikely used, and 9% it would be extremely unlikely to be used. This is not surprising, however, because 19% of respondents reported later in the survey that they do not use social media. *Figure 5-14* asks about the likelihood that a respondent would attend a development project or initiative specific meeting. Nearly all respondents responded positively to this option, with 62% reporting likely attendance, and 35% reporting extremely likely to attend. If the Town and Village were to implement informal meetings with public officials for citizens to bring ideas and concerns, 57% of respondents would likely attend, and 29% would be extremely likely to attend (*figure 5-15*). The suggestion of virtual town hall meetings as real-time online discussion forums resulted in 43% of respondents reporting that they would be extremely likely to use (*figure 5-16*). For the same

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question, 29% reported that would likely use. A live video stream of Town and Village meetings received similar results: 49% extremely likely to use, and 26% likely to use (*figure 5-17*).

5.2.3   Town and Village Social Media Pages

The survey then asked respondents to answer questions about their usage of the Town and Village official social media pages. Six (6) respondents self-reported to not using social media and their responses are excluded from the data in the following questions. Even still, the responses to the following questions responses are skewed in favor of the "neutral" categories, which brings the question of frequency of "normal" use of social media for the respondents. Of the social media sites, most frequently used by respondents is Facebook, being used by 26 respondents. Ten (10) respondents each said they use Twitter, and YouTube; and 11 respondents each said they use Instagram and LinkedIn.

The respondents then reported how often they access the Town and Village social media pages on any platform. Excluding the 6 respondents (19%) that reported above to not using social media, we can see the frequency of access by respondents to the right (*figure 5-18*). Most respondents, 34%, view the social media pages several (4-6) times per week, and 17% access the pages daily. Still, 33% access the Town and Village social media pages once a month.
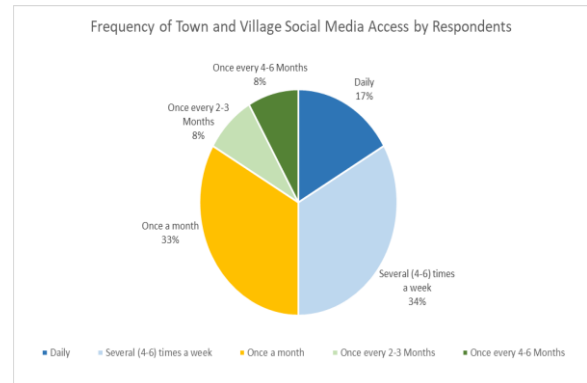

Figure 5-18: Frequency of Town and Village Social Media Access

The next questions and graphs also exclusionary of those who do not use social media. Here, respondents were asked to report their agreement with statements regarding the Town and Village communication styles and use of social media.
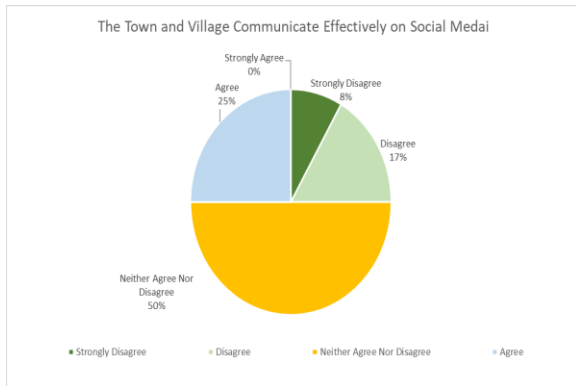
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Figure 5-19: The Town and Village Communicate Effectively on Social Media
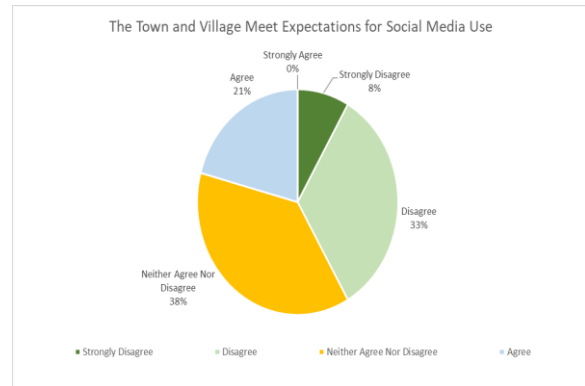

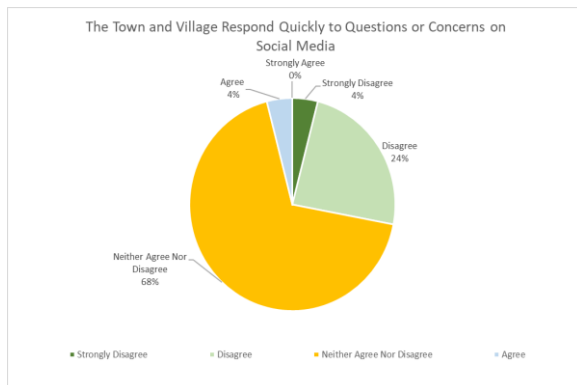*Figure 5-20: Town and Village Meet Expectations for Social Media Use*

Figure 5-22: The Town and Village Respond Quickly to Questions or Concerns on Social Media
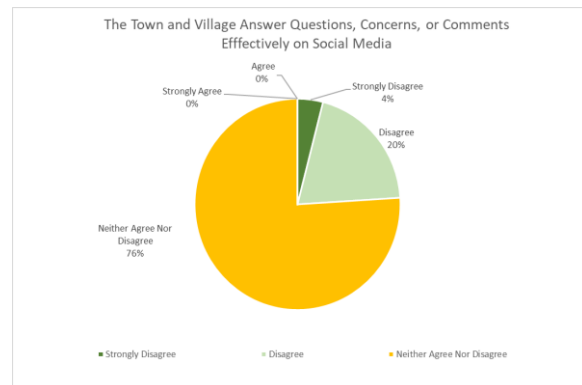

Figure 5-23: The Town and Village Answer Questions, Concerns, and Comments Effectively on Social Media

While half of the 44 respondents responded neutrally to a statement about the Town and Village communicating effectively on social media, we can still see that 17% of respondents disagreed with this statement and 8% strongly disagreed *(figure 5-19)*. The same number of respondents, 25%, agreed to this statement, but no respondents strongly agreed. We can see in these questions that there is a large divide in respondents' feelings about the Town and Village social media pages and it would be worth future research into the reasoning behind the responses to these questions. Next, respondents answered if they felt that their expectations for social media use were being met by the Town and Village *(figure 5-20)*. Although social media expectations were not defined in the survey text, 33% of respondents felt that their expectations were not being met. Eight (8) percent of respondents strongly disagreed with this statement, and again no respondents strongly agreed. However, 21% agreed that their expectations were being met. Further exploration of social media expectations would be an opportunity for future researchers to understand this question and variation in response. The next questions and their respective responses heavily favor the neutral category. However, the author finds it important to

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note that 24% of respondents disagreed to a statement about the Town and Village responding quickly to questions or concerns on social media *(figure 5-22),* and 20% of respondents disagreed to a statement about their questions, concerns, and comments being effectively answered on social media *(figure 5-23).* As detailed in the literature review, social media can be a powerful tool for governments to have time-sensitive and meaningful interactions with their citizens, and from these responses, we can infer that the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid are not using social media to their advantage in this regard.

Respondents were also asked to provide open-ended written feedback about the Town and Village social media pages. Overarching themes within the feedback show a consensus among residents that information needs to be available on all channels – social media sites, as well as the official websites and any other platform used. In addition, some respondents voiced concern that social media may not be the best way to reach the greatest number of residents in the area. However, respondents did acknowledge that the governments need to keep up with current trends towards increased social media use, although some expressed concern about the management of the pages.

5.2.4   Town and Village Websites

Next, the survey asked respondents about their usage of the official Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid websites. Thirty-one (31) respondents said that they had previously visited the Town of North Elba site (northelba.org), 30 respondents had visited the Village of Lake Placid site (villageoflakeplacid.ny.gov), while only 20 had visited the Lake Placid and North Elba Development Commission website (futurelakeplacid.com). Next, respondents were asked to select reasons why they were accessing the government websites from a list provided. A graph listing the choices and respondents' selections is to the right *(figure 5-24).* The most sought-out information on the Town and Village
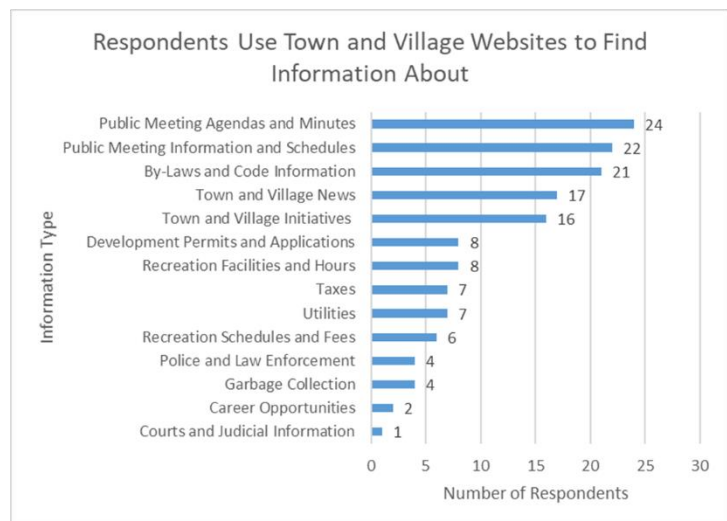

Figure 5-24: Use of Town and Village Websites

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websites by 24 respondents are public meeting agendas and minutes. Next most frequent is public meeting information by 22 respondents, and by-law and code information by 21 respondents. Seventeen (17) and 16 respondents each previously sought out information about Town and Village news and initiatives, respectively. One respondent selected the "other" category for this question and self-reported using the websites for information from the local Department of Transportation.

The survey also asked respondents to quantify how informative – or uninformative – they felt the information provided by the Town and Village websites is currently. This graph can be found to the right (*figure 5-25).* While no respondents thought the information on the websites to be very informative, 44% believed the information was informative. However, according to 37% of

Figure 5-25: Informativeness of Town and Village Websites

respondents, the information on the government websites is uninformative, and 3% believe the information to be very uninformative. This split in responses is seen throughout the survey and future researchers should seek more information as to the reasoning behind the divide in attitudes.

Respondents were also asked to state their agreement – or disagreement – with statements about the Town and Village websites. Graphs detailing the statements and responses are below.
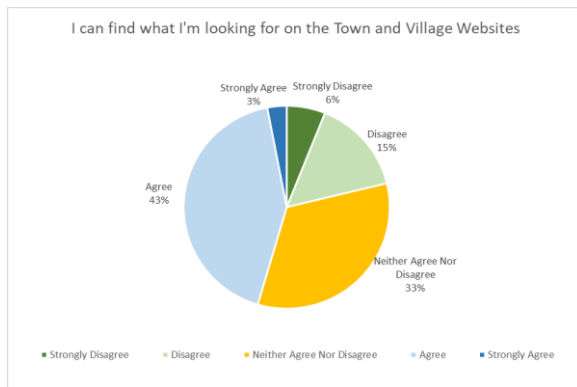

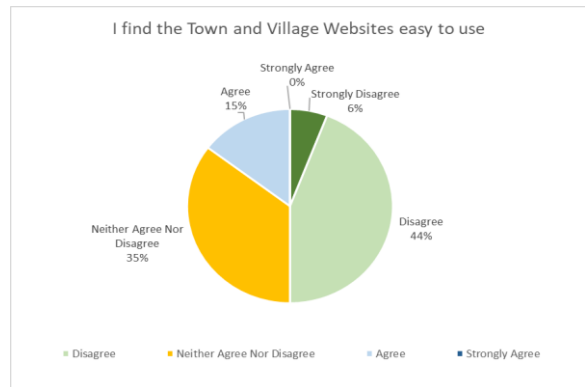*Figure 5-26: I can find what I'm looking for on the Town and Village Websites*

Figure 5-27: I find the Town and Village Websites easy to use

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From these questions, we can see that 46% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they can find what they are looking for on the Town and Village websites *(figure 5-26)*. However, more respondents (6%) strongly disagreed to the same question than strongly agreed (3%). Fifteen (15) percent of respondents disagreed to this statement. While respondents were able to access the information they sought, only 15% of respondents believed the websites were easy to use *(figure 5-27).* No respondents strongly agreed to this statement, and 50% of respondents either disagreed (44%) or strongly disagreed (6%).

When asked for specific feedback about the Town and Village websites, 10 respondents mentioned that the websites were not up-to-date and not intuitive or user-friendly. Respondents also wrote that information on the websites is not searchable and information is difficult to locate. In addition, the information is currently sorted by department, rather than topic, which is difficult for users to navigate. Multiple respondents also suggested that the Town website be linked to the Village website and also organized in a similar manner for ease of access. Multiple respondents also voiced their desire for an organizational map of the structure of the governments, and a directory of elected officials for each municipality.

5.2.5   Communications about Public Meetings

The next section of the survey asked about respondents' perceptions and agreement to statements about the Town and Village's public meetings and decisions.
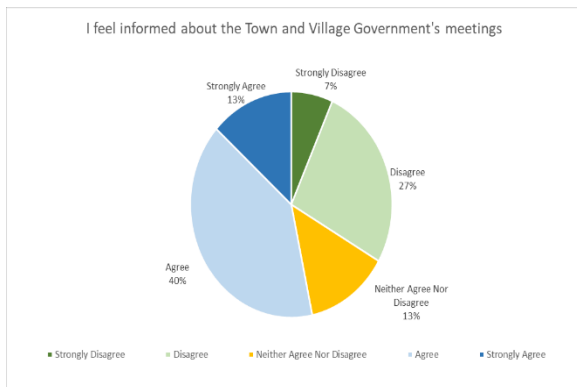
Figure 5-28: I feel informed about the Town and Village Government's meetings
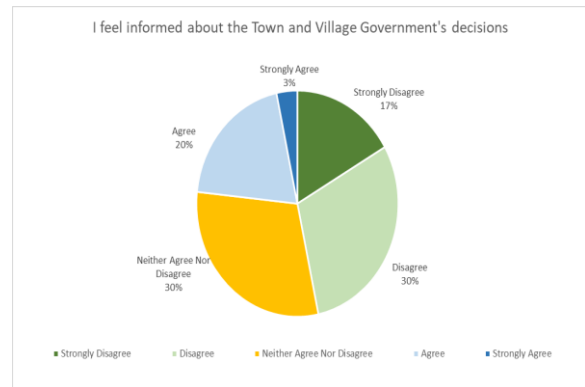
Figure 5-29: I feel informed about the Town and Village Government's decisions

When asked if respondents felt informed about the government's meetings, most (40%) respondents agreed, and 13% of respondents strongly agreed *(figure 5-28)*. Not unsurprisingly, 27% of respondents disagreed with this statement, and 7% strongly disagreed. This split between agreement and disagreement is similar to that found in other questions in the survey. The next

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question, about feeling informed about the government's decisions, saw a greater number of respondents responding neutrally *(figure 5-29)*. However, more respondents answered negatively to this question, with 30% disagreeing, and 17% strongly disagreeing. Only 20% of respondents agreed to feeling informed about the government's decisions and only 3% strongly agreed.

Next, respondents were asked the likelihood that they would watch a live video stream, or video recording of a Town or Village public meeting. These graphs are below.
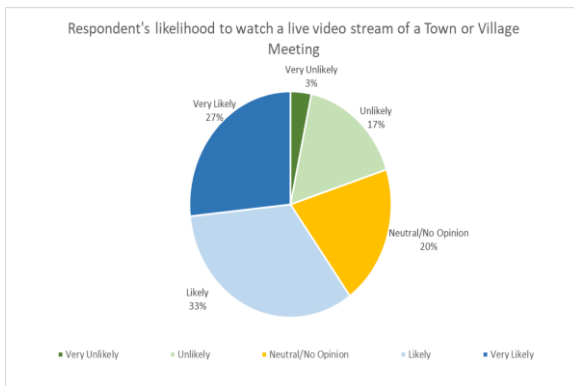
Figure 5-30: Respondent's likelihood to watch a live video stream of a Town or Village Meeting
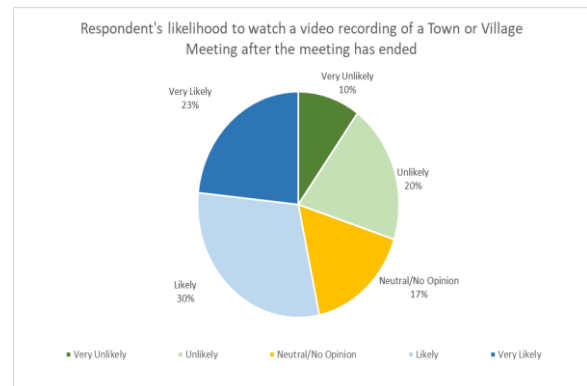
Figure 5-31: Respondent's likelihood to watch a video recording of a Town or Village Meeting

The responses to these questions were majority positive. When asked about a live video stream of the public meetings, 33% of respondents said they would likely tune-in, and 27% said they would very likely watch *(figure 5-30)*. While 20% of respondents were neutral about a live stream, 20% were also either unlikely or very unlikely to watch. On the other hand, if the Town or Village posted a video recording of public meetings after they have concluded, only 30% of respondents would be likely to watch, and 23% would very likely watch *(figure 5-31)*. Here, 20% would be unlikely to watch a recoded meeting, and 10% of respondents would very unlikely watch the recording. Comparing these results, we can infer that a live stream of public meetings would be preferred to a recording posted after the meeting has ended. This is not entirely surprising, as live video streams allow for more interaction from viewers and immediate feedback in a virtual setting.

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5.2.6   Overall Town and Village Communication

The final section of the survey asked respondents for their agreement with statements regarding the overall communication structure of the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid governments. The respective graphs are below.
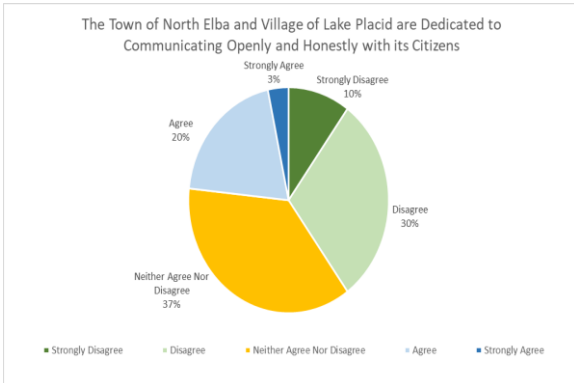
Figure 5-32: The Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid are dedicated to communicating openly and honestly with its citizens.
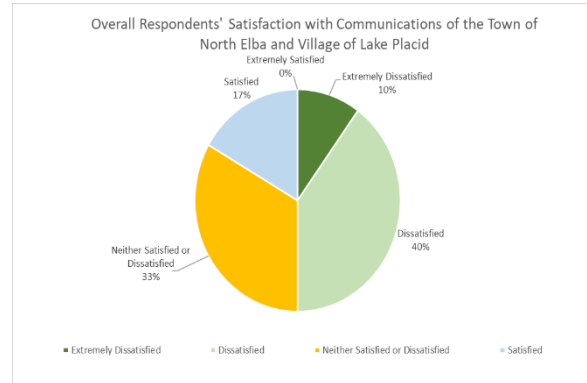
Figure 5-33: Overall satisfaction with the communications of The Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid

When asked if the Town and Village governments are dedicated to communicating openly and honestly with their citizens, 20% of respondents agreed, and only 3% strongly agreed *(figure 5-32)*. While the majority (37%) of respondents responded neutrally to this question, still 30% disagreed and even 10% strongly disagreed. Respondents were then asked to reflect on their overall satisfaction with communications from the Town and Village *(figure 5-33)*. Again, a large percent (33%) responded neutrally, but it should be noted that the majority of respondents, 40% responded that they are currently dissatisfied with government communications in the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid. An additional 10% of respondents answered that they are extremely dissatisfied with the communications structure. Only 17% of respondents reported that were satisfied with communications overall, and no respondents reported feelings of extreme satisfaction.

Lastly, respondents were again given an open-ended space to provide their individual written feedback. The survey asked respondents if they had any comments, feedback, or ideas regarding future communications for the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid. Looking at common themes from the responses a few key points emerge. First, members of the community feel that they are not represented fairly, and that public officials are not transparent in their communications. Additional concerns were raised multiple times about the composition of the public boards not being inclusive. Next, many respondents feel that elected officials do not listen

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to the public or engage with the public before making decisions. This lack of engagement leads to "significant frustration" for many. Respondents also offered suggestions for the governments, including keeping all communication sources current and updated, as well as using multiple forms of media and digital communication. Government communications also should be consistent across platforms, and between the Town and Village governments. Many respondents also favored the opportunity to watch a live stream of public meetings, as long as they have the ability to engage virtually.

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6.   Recommendations

6.1   User-Focused Website Design

The term "user-experience" refers to how a person feels when interacting with a system, or any human-device interaction (Gangadharan, 2019). Meaningful website design and positive user experience can define the customer experience and make the end user's lives easier (Gangadharan, 2019). The facets of user experience can be broken into seven components: useful, useable, desirable, findable, accessible, credible, and valuable (Morville, 2004). This means that information must fulfill a need (*useful*), the site must be easy to use (*useable*), and the design elements should be used to evoke emotion and appreciation (*desirable*). Additionally, content must be easily navigable (*findable*), the content must be accessible to people with disabilities (*accessible*), and ultimately, elicit trust in the organization by the user (*credible*). Based upon findings in the survey responses above, and literature review, the author recommends a website re-design for both the Town of North Elba and the Village of Lake Placid, focused on a positive user experience, incorporating elements of a modern interface, searchable terms, and an intuitive information display.

6.1.1   Modern Interface

In order to achieve a modern website design, the website design must focus on anticipating what users might need to do, and ensure that the interface has elements that are easy to access, understand, and use in order to facilitate those actions (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014). Modern internet users have become accustomed to certain interface elements behaving in a certain way, so being consistent and predictable in design is key to help achieve efficiency and satisfaction from users (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014). Below are four key considerations when creating a modern user interface.
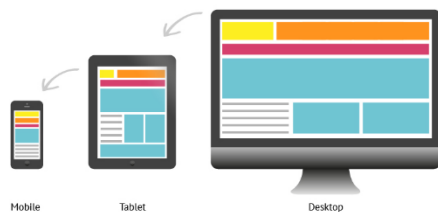

Figure 6-1: Responsive Website Design (Bocetta, 2018)

Responsive website design (*figure 6-1)* refers to the ability for all elements of a web page to "fluidly react to changes in screen dimensions or orientations" (Bocetta, 2018). As discovered in the literature review, more than 50% of government website visitors access official webpages from

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their smartphones (Lurie, 2018), responsive website design will be critical for the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid moving forward. Additionally, a purposeful page layout that considers page structure can be used to draw attention to the most important elements and information on the page. By using common interface elements, users will be more comfortable when accessing the site (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014).

Images and whitespace need to be optimized for the end user. Fonts, icons, and visual elements should be consistent, well organized, and easy to read. If the website interface has too much content in a single view, visitors may become overwhelmed and have a poor experience on the site (Bocetta, 2018). Color and textures should also be used strategically to direct attention towards important items.

The website **interface menus and navigation systems** should be clear and simple. A tabbed menu system, which dynamically makes navigation menus appear is becoming increasingly popular in modern website design (Bocetta, 2018). Tab design is extremely common in interface design and also resembles an "old-fashioned" file-folder, which is a widely understood organizational method allowing for ease of use by all users (Esser, 2019). Tabs also keep interfaces clear of clutter as each tab navigates the user to a separate webpage or section of the site. By organizing tabs in the same region of the website (usually left side or the page, or at the top), users can skip from one section to another by clicking onto the next needed tab, therefore saving time and prompting easy exploration of the website (Esser, 2019). Best practices for tab design include first establishing how the content within each tab will be divided and sorted. Site developers should look to the user experience and consider common and intuitive placement of resources within the tabs. Next, all tabs must be arranged to border one another (either horizontally, or vertically depending on placement) to decrease time spent when skipping between tabs. Most commonly, tab bars are spread across the top width of the page. Additionally, tabs should be distinct from the content on a page, and be in a consistent style and placement between pages and sections. Users are more likely to make mistakes when navigating through a website if the tabs change place between pages (Esser, 2019). Site developers should also track data on user browsing activity to understand how they move between pages and what information is consistently being accessed to help optimize the setup of tabs and menus.

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Website security needs to be built-in to reduce vulnerability to cyber-attacks. The most common type of cyber-attacks are Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS), where hackers target a server or website and cause a "denial of service" for users, causing the system to crash and denying future access to the site (Rouse, 2019a). Malware is another common type of attack, most commonly spread (92%) through phishing emails that appear to be sent from authorized sources, but contain viruses that can access the victim's personal information (Stevens, 2020). In fact, the public sector is increasingly being attacked through email: according to the 2019 Symantec Internet Security Risk Report, one in every 302 emails received by public employees in 2020 has been a scam (Symantec, 2019). The Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid need to place a great importance on their website security as hackers become smarter and the rate for municipal data breaches increases.

6.2.1 Information Architecture

In addition to a modern user interface, the information displayed on both the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid websites should be built using the information architecture framework. Information architecture focuses on organizing, structuring, and labeling content in an effective way, with the goal to help users find information and complete tasks (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014). The information architecture framework can be implemented to determine what content is most important for users, and therefore creates a "story" for users to follow as they access the available content.

There is an inherent interdependent nature between context, content, and the user, which can be optimized through organization structures, labeling systems, navigations systems, and search systems. A successful government website leverages these systems and puts its users at the forefront of the experience. Below are six benchmarks to ensure a successful municipal website (Nguyen, 2017).

First, in the planning stage, **clear objectives** must be set to define the purpose of the new website. The Town and Village must consider if they will simply be providing information to users, and how they want users to engage with information provided. Additional considerations should be how the site is used, and what experience each municipality wants to convey for users. Next, a **sitemap** must be created to allow Google and other search engines to find content within the website. By using key phrases on the sitemap and showing how the website is organized, will

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help the website rank higher in search engine results. Each website should also be searchable in and of itself, by employing the use of "tags" on each page for users to navigate between pages. **Responsive design**, as discussed in detail in section 5.1.1, is essential to increase accessibility of the websites and must be implemented by the Town and the Village. Additionally, the use of an **Open Data Portal,** or an interactive map using data integration, is a powerful way to inform and engage with the community (Nguyen, 2017). These interactive maps can be used to provide updates on local services, amenities, news, and events, which from the survey results, is important to residents of the area. Next, the Town and Village websites should be **updated regularly**. Outdated content can be frustrated for users, as exemplified by the survey results. Next, a successful government website should have **language change capabilities.** This means employing a software program to change the text of the website into any language, or several if needed based upon the demographics and languages spoken in the area.

As the Village of Lake Placid is located within the Town of North Elba, the two municipalities should also consider complimentary website design to develop a recognizable brand. This can include similar imagery, text, font, color, and design elements across both websites. From the survey results, many residents also expressed interest in a link between the Town and Village pages to easily navigate between the two. This can be especially useful for residents who live in North Elba, and work within Lake Placid – or vice versa – and need to access content on both pages regularly.

6.2   Social Media

As identified in both the literature review, interviews with government officials, and the survey, social media is a growing business for municipalities and must be leveraged accordingly to fit the needs of the community. The author recommends a social media strategy, and email strategy to best fit the needs of the local and visiting populations.

6.2.1 Consistency

As recommended above in section 5.1.2, the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid social media pages should be linked and managed in a similar manner to promote consistency and community among users. The municipal websites should serve as a "home base" for information, and social media pages as a "digital network" of supplemental information (Hunt, 2013). The website should serve as the primary location for all content, with links to the various

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social media pages, which should be used to convey different types of information. For example, Twitter can be useful, through hashtags, to find out what people are saying about the Town and Village, to post breaking news, and discover local issues.

However, most survey respondents utilize **Facebook** over any other social media platform, and the development of concentric, strong Facebook pages for the Town and Village should be emphasized. Facebook can be used in very similar ways to Twitter and allows for longer postings and increased two-way communication between users. For all social media sites, interesting and relevant content, often accompanied by a picture is best for engaging followers. Posts with photos actually receive 50% more likes than posts without photos, which can help increase visibility and engagement on Facebook (Andrews, 2015). Short videos are also a good way to provide original and informative content on social media. Live Q&A sessions have also proven to be beneficial for municipalities to show interest in, and engage with their constituents (Andrews, 2015). Frequent posts, with consistent voice and hashtags should be implemented to increase the follower base on social media pages. The municipalities should look to popular pages related to the Town and Village for hashtags that will draw users to their pages. A search by the author found the "Lake Placid ADK," "IRONMAN Lake Placid," and "Lake Placid Olympic Sites" Facebook pages to have a strong presence and follower base beyond the local community and could be used to boost the official Town and Village pages to the broader community.

6.3   Email

While a small percentage of survey respondents use email as a source for information from the Town and Village, government marketing emails are the most successful in terms of open-rate, among 45 industries (MailChimp, 2020). Similar to website and social media, email design and content curation is crucial for improving engagement. Compared to other systems, email can feel outdated, but by employing a **modern interface** and **responsive design** can optimize the email experience. Below are three design and content elements that can be employed by the Town and Village in their email lists to improve email engagement.

A **single-column** layout is mobile-friendly and can scale up for users on every device. The **inverted pyramid formula** commonly used in news-writing, with the most important information at the top, followed by important details, and then general information can also work

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well for email newsletters, and drive the flow of the reader throughout the email. **Images and graphics** can also be used in emails to engage with readers and provide a continuity in branding used on the municipal website that is familiar for, and recognizable by users. Contrary to website design, **whitespace** is beneficial in emails, as users prefer simple layouts and only essential information and pictures in their inboxes (Berdine, 2019).

Additional best practices for municipal email lists include **using email to solicit feedback**, in the form of surveys and polls to gather direct citizen input. **Regular Newsletters** can be used to push out content that is also published on the municipal websites, summaries of public meetings, promote local events, and community guidelines. From the survey responses, the majority of residents are interested in hearing about council meetings, Town and Village events and projects, budgets, recreational events, municipal operations, code information, and law enforcement and judicial information, which could be well-suited to include in a regularly distributed email newsletter. **Mass Email Distribution** can be used to send out breaking and urgent news, such as unexpected road closures, or regular updates to projects. Survey respondents were equally interested in receiving more information about road construction, traffic pattern changes and updates, waste collection updates, snow removal and severe weather updates, and emergency alerts and notifications which would be well suited to be included in an as-needed mass email. Users should be able to easily opt-in to the types of email they wish to receive, ideally from aa page within the municipal website.

6.3.1   Mailers

As the largest amount of survey respondents receive information about the Town and Village from print media, the use of individual mailers should be considered to reach residents who do not have internet or email access. Similar to updates provided in a **regular email newsletter**, as described above in section 5.3, printed flyers can be included in municipal bills and mail sent to residents to disseminate information further. Following suit of the Town of Taber, Alberta, Canada (Brennan, 2017), a monthly newsletter is distributed monthly through the utility bills. Information provided in their mailer include meeting schedules, reminders, bill payment

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information, contact information for the Town, links to the municipal website and social media pages, as well as local events, tips, and community resources and activities.[2]

6.4   Virtual Public Meetings

Identified as an action item in the 2014 Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid Comprehensive Plan, the availability of virtual access to public meetings was also identified as a desire of survey respondents, and interviewed officials alike. Therefore, the author provides recommendations and a plan to implement video streaming of meetings, as well as considerations for meeting room design for improved IT capabilities below.

6.4.1   Live Streaming

There are three major considerations before setting up a live stream for a public council meeting. First, the municipality must consider how the stream will be captured: what types of cameras will be used, and where is the best position in the room to capture the meeting? Next, municipalities must consider on what sites the video will be posted. The most popular platforms are YouTube, and Facebook Live. Lastly, the video must be encoded in order to be viewed online. There are many websites and companies that provide live streaming services for governments. The City of Ithaca, New York, uses services provided by LEIGHTRONIX, INC., a company that specializes in video equipment design and manufacturing, including video solutions for live and video-on-demand streaming media for over 40 years (*LEIGHTRONIX, INC.*, 2020). The LEIGHTRONIX web streaming service, *VieBit*, provides a ready-made website, is compatible on both macOS and Windows computers, as well as iOS and Android mobile operating systems, and provides embedding options for videos to be played on external websites. A screenshot of the City of Ithaca VieBit Page is below (*figure 6-2*), and can be found at https://ithacany.viebit.com/?folder=ALL.

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[2] Past versions of the mailer can be found at https://www.taber.ca/discover-taber/cornhusk-chronicles.

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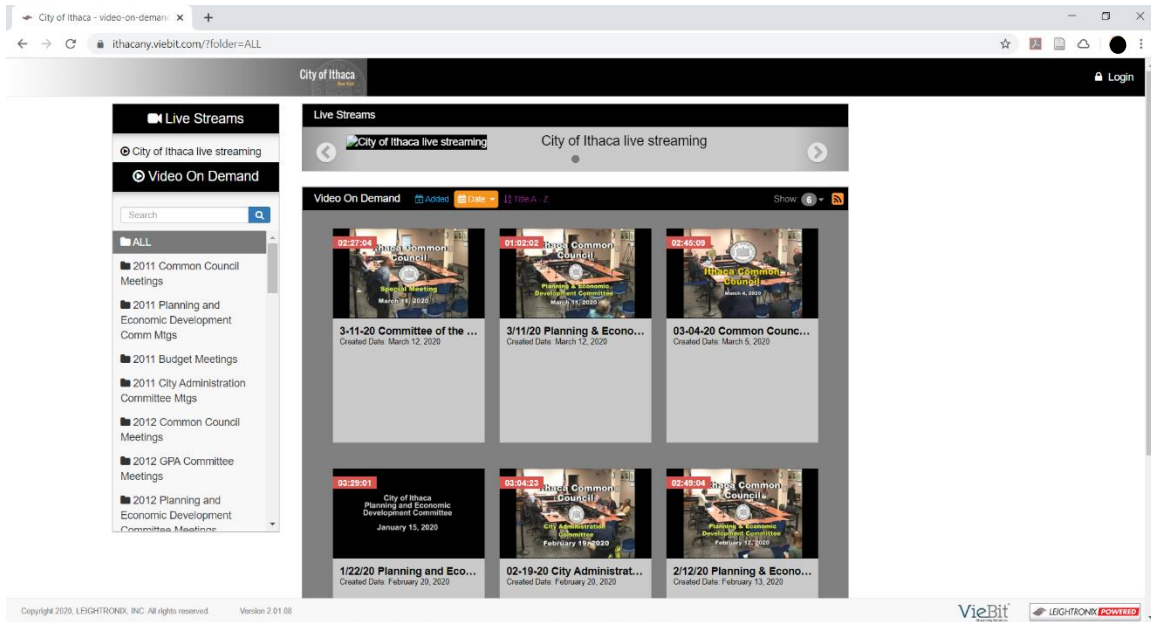kel222@cornell.edu
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Figure 6-2: The City of Ithaca VieBit webpage

6.5   Public Engagement

From the literature review, the author recognizes the importance of citizen engagement on municipal activities and operations. Survey respondents, and interviewed government officials alike responded positively to suggestions of new forms of public engagement, including an online feedback system, increased dialogue on social media, informal meetings with government officials, and dedicated development project meetings. The author provides recommendations based on the themes of informal communication, transparency, and citizen feedback below.

6.5.1   Informal Communication

Informal communication can help build trust in relationships, and the same can be said for a public official and constituent relationship. Modern communication technology and social media allows for government officials to be accessible as ever, and this channel opens up the possibility for increased two-way communications with public officials. An offline option could be realized through a "fireside chat" style conversation where residents come to town hall to speak directly with Town Superintendents and Village Mayors and voice their concerns, give ideas, and provide feedback directly to their elected officials. This face-to-face communication can increase trust in the government, as well as improved transparency and authenticity by public officials. As

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40% of survey respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that "the Town and Village Government welcomes citizen involvement and offers ways for residents to get involved," opening new opportunities for direct citizen involvement can drastically increase citizen engagement and overall community happiness and trust in the governments.

6.5.2   Transparency

Transparency is also a crucial element in the public engagement equation. The 2014 North Elba and Lake Placid Comprehensive Plan outlined an objective to "enhance transparency" through the operation of all Town and Village departments to optimize efficiency. The related implementation measures outlined in the 2014 plan include improved IT capabilities, and live streaming of public meetings (Lake Placid and North Elba Community Development Commission, 2014). As discovered in the literature review, transparency can take many forms when considering the flow of information from citizen-to-citizen, citizen-to-government, and government-to-citizen. Over 40% of survey respondents did not feel that the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid are dedicated to communicating openly and honestly with its citizens. Methods to ameliorate these negative feelings can take the form of ease of access to public information and records, in addition to open and streamed public meetings, dedicated open meetings to special development projects, government newsletters and updated websites, and surveys for citizens to provide feedback, as discussed in recommendations above.

6.5.3   Citizen Feedback

Collecting feedback from citizens is a key component of a participatory government and citizen engagement. As described in the literature review, simply gathering feedback from citizens is not engagement – there needs to be an active and intentional space for dialogue between citizens and the government. **Surveys and focus groups** can be used to gather preferences and opinions and start a dialogue of openness with citizens. Surveys can be successful in gathering information on budgeting priorities, support for particular programs or initiatives, and service evaluation (Svara & Denhardt, 2010). **Small group discussions** accompanied by informational sessions can allow for participants to become informed about the decisions being made, as well as providing opportunities to discuss possible solutions and outcomes with their peers. The small group setting makes the process more personal and citizens respond positively to genuine dialogue created in this type of setting. A small group discussion

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can be used for budgetary processes or program evaluations, especially if there are programs that may warrant negative opinions. **Open City Hall** is an initiative by the nonpartisan company Peak Democracy that helps governments create electronic forums for input for current issues and provides summaries of inputs to residents. This type of platform allows citizens a chance to explain their views in writing and fosters a different type of exchange than available at in-person meetings. **Social media** also creates many avenues for citizen engagement and should be used to its fullest by both the Town and Village to interact with citizens and visitors alike. Social media can help create "digital neighborhoods" that can promote a strong sense of community (Svara & Denhardt, 2010). Another form of citizen engagement can take the form of a **large-scale deliberative process.** This can be realized through the inclusion of residents in community planning and the resolution of particular issues, through the creation of a community vision or inclusion of citizens in the creation of future comprehensive plans.

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7.   Conclusion

In 2014, the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid, New York, came together to create a Comprehensive Plan for the future of the area. This plan detailed objectives rooted in government efficiency, transparency, as well as improved Information Technology (IT) capabilities. Over the years, these goals have shifted to include the need for a restructuring of the way the two municipalities communicate with their citizens. Through interviews conducted with public officials in both governments, and a survey of over 40 residents, the author has determined that there is a serious need for an improved, modern communication strategy and framework for the Town and Village. Consistency and user-focused elements must be leveraged to provide a modern website experience that is conductive to efficiency in government operations. Additionally, social media pages and email channels should be revamped to increase opportunities for citizen engagement and information sharing. As the resulting pandemic from the COVID-19 virus exemplifies the global need for online communications, North Elba and Lake Placid must also consider a transition to virtual meetings and improved online access to public information. Finally, in all aspects of communication and municipal decision-making, transparency and citizen engagement concerns must be answered to improve overall satisfaction of government service delivery.

8.   Appendices

Appendix A. Interview Questions

Interview Questions for Lake Placid and North Elba Government Stakeholders:

1. To begin to frame your responses for the following questions, start by describing what you consider to be successful communication? What is unsuccessful communication? What does successful communication from a governmental body look like?

2. What communication methods are essential to the function of your job?

3. What information/types of information are you currently communicating to the public? How are you disseminating this information? Is one method more effective than others?

4. What forms of communication with the public would make government operation easier? How can communication increase efficiency? What information needs to reach the public?

5. What would you like the public to do with this information? Should there be platforms/arenas for two-way communication with the government and the public? I.e. twitter feeds, comment boxes, etc.?

6. How do you envision the technological future of the area in relation to the government and its proceedings? What opportunities can IT Capability, live streaming, public access, presentation technology, etc. bring to Lake Placid and North Elba? Are there potential barriers to achieving this future?

7. What communication methods do you think are working well? What methods would you like to see to maximize communication? What can a new communication framework and structure bring to Lake Placid/North Elba?

8. What will be the biggest barrier to successful communication patterns, in your opinion?

9. Do you have any other suggestions or recommendations for improving communication for the residents of Lake Placid and North Elba?

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Appendix B. Survey Questions

Q1

The Lake Placid and North Elba Development Commission, in partnership with a Master of Public Administration student at the Cornell University Institute of Public Affairs are asking you to participate in a research study titled "Lake Placid and North Elba Government Communications." This study is being led by Katherine Long, Cornell University, Cornell Institute for Public Affairs. The Faculty Advisor for this study is Rebecca Morgenstern Brenner, Cornell University, Cornell Institute for Public Affairs.

What the study is about

The purpose of this research is to identify public perceptions surrounding government communications in Lake Placid and North Elba, New York. The opinions gathered in this survey will allow the Village of Lake Placid and Town of North Elba to better manage the way they inform, interact, and communicate with residents.

What we will ask you to do

We will ask you to spend a short amount of time answering the following questions. The questions will ask about general communication preferences and opinions, Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid social media and website use, and public meetings. We are looking for open, honest, and anonymous opinions and attitudes from the residents of the community. The survey should take no more than 25 minutes.

Risks and discomforts
We do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research.

Benefits
Information from this study may benefit residents of Lake Placid and North Elba now, or in the future, by relaying specific preferences and attitudes, in turn allowing for transparency and efficiency in communication styles and methods used by the government.

Compensation for participation
There will be no compensation for participation in the study.

Audio/Video Recording
No audio or video recording will be used during this study.

Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security
No identifying information will be collected from this survey. All identifiers will be removed from the data and the responses recorded separately. Only the research team will have access to data collected.

We anticipate that your participation in this survey presents no greater risk than everyday use of the Internet.
Please note that email communication is neither private nor secure. Though we are taking precautions to protect your privacy, you should be aware that information sent through e-mail could be read by a third party.

Sharing De-identified Data Collected in this Research
De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large to advance science and health. We will remove or code any personal information that could identify you before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify you from the information we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal data.

Future use of Identifiable Data Collected in this Research
Your information will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

Taking part is voluntary
Your participation in this study in voluntary, and you may refuse to participate before the study begins, discontinue participation at any time, or skip any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable, with no penalty.

Follow up studies
We may contact you again to request your participation in a follow up study. As always, your participation will be voluntary, and we will ask for your explicit consent to participate in any of the follow up studies.

If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is Katherine Long, a graduate student at Cornell University. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Katherine Long at kel222@cornell.edu. If you have any questions or

concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Participants at 607-255-5138 or access their website at http://www.irb.cornell.edu. You may also report your concerns or complaints anonymously through Ethicspoint online at www.hotline.cornell.edu or by calling toll free at 1-866-293-3077. Ethicspoint is an independent organization that serves as a liaison between the University and the person bringing the complaint so that anonymity can be ensured.

Q2 Statement of Consent

I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

○ I Consent (1)

○ I Do Not Consent (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Statement of Consent I have read the above information, and have received answers to any question... = I Do Not Consent

Page Break

Q3
The following questions will give you the opportunity to tell us more about your relationship with the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid.

Please answer truthfully and to the best of your ability.

Q4 Please select your age range:

○   18 and younger (1)

○   19 - 24 (2)

○   25 - 39 (3)

○   40 - 60 (4)

○   61 and older (5)

Q5 Do you live in the North Elba or Lake Placid Town/Village limits?

○   North Elba (1)

○   Lake Placid (2)

○   Other (please specify) (3) _____

Q6 Do you work in the North Elba or Lake Placid Town/Village limits?

○ North Elba (1)

○ Lake Placid (2)

○ Other (please specify) (3) _____

Q7 Do you own or operate a business in North Elba or Lake Placid?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q8 Please select your residency status in North Elba or Lake Placid:

○ Part-Time (0 – 11 months a year) (1)

○ Full-Time (12 months a year) (2)

○ Visitor (3)

○ Other (please specify) (4) _____

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Q9 In the last 12 months, have you or other members of your household done any of the following?

	Never (1)	Rarely (once every 2-3 months) (2)	Occasionally (once a month) (3)	Frequently (2-3 times a week) (4)	Very Frequently (daily) (5)
Visited Downtown Lake Placid (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Attended a Town or Village Event (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Visited a Town or Village Recreation Program (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Participated in a Town or Village Culture/Arts Program (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteered your time to an Organization or Activity in the Town or Village (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Attended a Public Meeting (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Attended a Town or Village Council Meeting (7)	○	○	○	○	○
Contacted the Town or Village Council (8)	○	○	○	○	○

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Q10 During the last 12 months, did you have any contact with a Town of North Elba or Village of Lake Placid Employee?

☐ Yes, by phone (1)

☐ Yes, by email (2)

☐ Yes, in-person (3)

☐ No (4)

☐ Can't recall (5)

Q11
The following questions will give you the opportunity to tell us more about your general experience with the communications of the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid.

Please answer truthfully and to the best of your ability.

Q12 Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: **Overall, I feel well-informed about the operations of the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid.**

○ Strongly Disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly Agree (5)

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Q13 Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: **The Town and Village Governments welcome citizen involvement and offer ways for residents to get involved.**

○ Strongly Disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q14 Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: **The Town and Village gather feedback from residents in new policies or projects.**

○ Strongly Disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly Agree (5)

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Q15 Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: **The Town and Village listen to its citizens.**

○ Strongly Disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly Agree (5)

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Q16 Which of the following sources do you use to receive your information about the Town of North Elba and the Village of Lake Placid:

☐ Town or Village Website (1)

☐ Town or Village Facebook Page (2)

☐ Town or Village Twitter Page (3)

☐ Lake Placid Insider (4)

☐ LakePlacid.com (5)

☐ ORDA.org (6)

☐ Local Print Media (newspaper, flyers, etc.) (7)

☐ Local Broadcast Media (TV, radio, etc.) (8)

☐ Email Notifications (9)

☐ Attending Council or Public Meetings (10)

☐ Town Staff (11)

☐ Word of Mouth (12)

☐ Other (please specify) (13) _____

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Q17 Please indicate how interested you are hearing more information about:

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	Very Uninterested (1)	Uninterested (2)	Neither Uninterested or Interested (3)	Interested (4)	Very Interested (5)
Council or Public Meetings (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Upcoming Town and Village Events (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Upcoming Town and Village Projects (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Town and Village Budgets (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Recreation Events and News (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Road Construction Updates and News (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Traffic Pattern Changes and Updates (7)	○	○	○	○	○
Waste Collection Updates and News (8)	○	○	○	○	○
Snow Removal Updates and News (9)	○	○	○	○	○
Severe Weather Updates and News (10)	○	○	○	○	○
Emergency Alerts and Notifications (11)	○	○	○	○	○
Employment Opportunities (12)	○	○	○	○	○
Government Affairs Affecting Town and Village Operations (13)	○	○	○	○	○

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By-Law and Code Information (14)	○	○	○	○	○
Law Enforcement (15)	○	○	○	○	○
Judiciary Information and the Courts (16)	○	○	○	○	○
Other (please specify) (17)	○	○	○	○	○

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Q18 In the future, if the Town and Village offered the following additional ways to engage and inform residents, how likely would you be to use each?

	Extremely unlikely (1)	Somewhat unlikely (2)	Neither likely nor unlikely (3)	Somewhat likely (4)	Extremely likely (5)
A way to provide online feedback on specific projects and initiatives (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Additional project information and dialogue on Social Media (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Meetings about Development Projects and Initatives (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Informal Meetings with Government Officials (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Virtual Town and Village Meetings (real-time online discussions) (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Live Streaming of Town and Village Meetings (video streaming) (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Text Message Notification Systems (7)	○	○	○	○	○
Mobile Application for the Town and Village (8)	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: General Communications

Start of Block: Town and Village Websites

Q19
The following questions will give you the opportunity to tell us more about your experience with the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid websites.

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Please answer truthfully and to the best of your ability.

Q20 Please select all the Town and Village Websites you have previously visited:

☐ Town of North Elba (northelba.org) (1)

☐ Village of Lake Placid (villageoflakeplacid.ny.gov) (2)

☐ Lake Placid and North Elba Development Commission (futurelakeplacid.com) (3)

☐ Other (please specify) (4) _____

Q21 How frequently do you access the Town of North Elba or the Village of Lake Placid websites?

○ Daily (1)

○ Several (4-6) times a week (2)

○ Once a month (3)

○ Once every 2-3 months (4)

○ Once every 4-6 months (5)

○ Never (6)

Q22 If you answered "never" to the above question, please tell us why:

_____
_____
_____

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_____
_____

Q23 Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: **I find the Town and Village Websites easy to use.**

○ Strongly Disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q24 Please finish the sentence: **I find the information on the Town and Village websites...**

○ Very Uninformative (1)

○ Uninformative (2)

○ Neither informative or uninformative / don't use (3)

○ Informative (4)

○ Very Informative (5)

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Q25 Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: **I can find what I'm looking for on the Town and Village websites.**

○ Strongly Disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly Agree (5)

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Q26 Please select all of the following that apply: **I mostly access the Town and Village websites to find information on...**

☐ Utilities (1)

☐ Garbage Collection (2)

☐ Taxes (3)

☐ Courts and Judicial Information (4)

☐ Police and Law Enforcement (5)

☐ Recreation Facilities and Hours (6)

☐ Recreation Schedules and Fees (7)

☐ Public Meeting Agendas and Minutes (8)

☐ Public Meeting Information and Schedules (9)

☐ By-Laws and Code Information (10)

☐ Development Permits and Applications (11)

☐ Town and Village News (12)

☐ Town and Village Initiatives (Upcoming Projects and Changes) (13)

☐ Career Opportunities (14)

☐ Other (please specify) (15) _____

Q27 Do you have any comments or recommendations for the Town and Village websites?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q28
The following questions will give you the opportunity to tell us more about your experience with the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid social media pages.

Please answer truthfully and to the best of your ability.

Q29 Which types of Social Media do you use?

☐ Facebook (1)

☐ Twitter (2)

☐ Instagram (3)

☐ YouTube (4)

☐ Pinterest (5)

☐ LinkedIn (6)

☐ Snap Chat (7)

☐ Other (8)

☐ I don't use social media (9)

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Q30 How frequently do you access the Town of North Elba or the Village of Lake Placid on any of our social media channels?

○ Daily (1)

○ Several (4-6) times a week (2)

○ Once a Month (3)

○ Once every 2-3 months (4)

○ Once every 4-6 months (5)

○ Never (6)

○ I don't use social media (7)

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Q31 Please indicate your agreement with the following statements regarding the Town of North Elba and the Village of Lake Placid Social Media pages as a whole:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
The Town and Village communicate effectively on social media (1)	○	○	○	○	○
The Town and Village are approachable on social media (2)	○	○	○	○	○
The Town and Village meet my expectations for social media use (3)	○	○	○	○	○
The Town and Village respond quickly to questions or concerns on social media (4)	○	○	○	○	○
The Town and Village answer my questions, concerns, or comments effectively (5)	○	○	○	○	○
The response to my comment or concern referred me to a proper resource for help (6)	○	○	○	○	○

Q32 If you Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed with any of the statement above, please tell us why

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

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Q33 Do you have any comments or recommendations regarding the Town and Village's use of social media?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q34
The following questions will give you the opportunity to tell us more about your experience with communications about public meetings in the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid.

Please answer truthfully and to the best of your ability.

Q35 Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: **I feel informed about the Town and Village Government's meetings.**

○ Strongly Disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

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Q36 Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: **I feel informed about the Town and Village Government's decisions.**

○ Strongly Disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

Q37 Please indicate the likelihood that you: **would watch a live video stream of a Town or Village Meeting?**

○ Very Unlikely (1)

○ Unlikely (2)

○ Neutral/No Opinion (3)

○ Likely (4)

○ Very Likely (5)

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Q38 Please indicate the likelihood that you: **would watch a video recording of a Town or Village Meeting made available after meetings have concluded?**

○ Very Unlikely (1)

○ Unlikely (2)

○ Neutral/No Opinion (3)

○ Likely (4)

○ Very Likely (5)

Q39
The following questions will give you the opportunity to tell us more about your experience with the overall communications of the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid.

Please answer truthfully and to the best of your ability.

Q40 Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: **The Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid are dedicated to communicating openly and honestly with its citizens.**

○ Strongly Disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

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Q41 Overall, how satisfied are you with the communications of The Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid?

○   Extremely Dissatisfied (1)

○   Dissatisfied (2)

○   Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)

○   Satisfied (4)

○   Extremely Satisfied (5)

Q42 Do you have any comments, feedback, or ideas regarding communications for the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid?

_____
_____
_____
_____

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