

Town launches text scheme

By Kate Brown Staff Writer kate@sonomawest.com | Posted: Wednesday, November 18, 2015 1:25 pm

Residents can now text Town

The Town of Windsor has expanded its customer service to a completely new platform by implementing a texting service for town residents.

Community members have been able to text and send photos to the Town's main phone number, 707-838-1000, to ask questions and voice concerns about non-urgent topics.

Frontier Texting provides the new service through a cloud-based application. The Town pays about \$125 monthly plus service fees to use the program.

"We are always looking for new ways to improve customer service at the Town and to connect with people in ways that are simple and seamless with their everyday lives," Town Manager Linda Kelly said. "I came across Frontier Texting's advertisement in the Alaska Airlines magazine I was reading during a flight to Portland for a city management conference, took a photo of the ad with my phone and upon returning to the office, asked my staff to research the service to see if we could utilize it with our phone system."

The Town's landline can now send and receive messages like a cell phone can and is monitored by the administrative assistant in the Town Manager's office, who reads the messages and directs citizens accordingly.

"Our texting service is monitored by a live person, whereas many texting services are automated and consist only of auto-responses," Kelly said, adding that Windsor is the first local municipality to utilize a texting service that directly connects to the office's main phone line as opposed to using a phone application-based program.

The Town has already received 29 text messages from 15 members of the community addressing subjects such as public commentary on Windsor's growth and the Lytton Rancheria Development, questions about town-sponsored workshops, facility and street maintenance requests, reports of building concerns and water leaks, weather, Club Blend inquiries and comments, trick or treating questions, utility bill inquiries, requests for graffiti removal and requests for local agency phone numbers.

Longtime Windsor resident Eddie Sandoval has used the service twice to contact a city about vandalism concerns near his home.



TWO WAY COMMUNICATION

Unlike other municipal texting schemes, Windsor's text service is monitored and responded to by Town staff, not an automated system.

“I live in front of a park and there’s been graffiti vandalism twice,” Sandoval said. “I saw they started their service, so I texted them, they replied and got the information over to the parks and recreation department and they took care of it right away.”

Sandoval explained that the first time he texted the Town was during its normal hours of operation, which are Monday through Thursday from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. He received an automatic response thanking him for contacting Town and then an immediate follow-up text directly from a city employee stating that his concern would be handled, which it was, on the same day.

The second time Sandoval sent a text was again about graffiti but sent over the weekend.

“I texted them on the weekend the second time and received an automatic reply that someone would get in contact with me on Monday, and someone did,” Sandoval said.

The Windsor resident said he was excited about the new service and the convenience it provides for citizens of the community.

“Everyone has their phones and can send a text right away,” Sandoval said. “Program (the Town) in your contacts. It’s kind of a security in a way because you know you can be anywhere, text them and someone is going to see it and reply back to you. I think it’s a great service.”

Kelly encourages the community to use the service for any non-emergency matters such as requesting dates and times for upcoming meetings and local events. However, Kelly urges against using the service for matters that can be resolved faster by calling.

“We also advise against sending confidential and inappropriate material,” Kelly said. “Furthermore, for all emergencies, callers should continue to use 911.”

The program is still in its beginning stages, but the Town is already looking towards using an auto-response feature triggered by texts that include keywords.

“For instance, if someone wanted to know Town Green concert information, they could text us a keyword such as “concert” and the auto-reply could be uploaded with basic concert information for an instantaneous response,” Kelly said. “Also, if there were a local disaster, the word ‘disaster’ might bring up a list of road closures and other pertinent information that could be updated as often as the Town chose.”

To learn more about the service, try it out and send the Town a text at 707-838-1000. Standard message and data fees apply.