

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN - MEDAL OF HONOR MUSEUM

Title: Town of Mount Pleasant Communications Plan, Medal of Honor Museum – 2018

Communicator: Office of the Mayor

Location: Mount Pleasant, SC

Program Background:

Plans to build the nation's only Medal of Honor Museum have been in the works for the past five years. Recently, fundraising for the project has stagnated and public support is wavering. In January 2018, the town's Planning Commission unanimously rejected the plans for the museum because of proposed building height; the plan for the building was 78 feet taller than the town's new building height limit (nearly double). The museum foundation also needs to raise over \$100 million and to date; the town does not know the museum's status of funds. On July 17, 2018, following public outcry and disapproval from the town, the foundation CEO assured town leadership, they were "scrapping the previous design for the museum and listening to what the community wants for the National Medal of Honor Museum." After being granted a 90 day extension to submit a new plan to the town, the foundation presented the town and community with a building plan that was exactly the same as the previous plan, but 20 feet shorter, still 50 feet above the existing height allowance. The town of Mount Pleasant is prepared to spend the funds to move roads and utilities to the museum site. The Medal of Honor Foundation is currently in contract default with the State of South Carolina for failure to provide an escrow on the building. The state of SC and town of Mount Pleasant are the Medal of Honor Museum's largest donors.

The primary limiting factors and influences to the communications plan are:

1. The Medal of Honor Foundation consists of no Medal of Honor recipients.
2. The Medal of Honor Foundation has mounted a PR offensive against the leadership of the Town of Mount Pleasant in order apply pressure to grant a waiver to approve the planned building. The campaign consists of encouraging supporters to write letters to the editor to the Post and Courier and paying for social media advertising with those letters to the editor, targeting residents of Mount Pleasant.
3. Lack of mainstream media interest seems to be an issue, with the expectation of the Charleston Post and Courier and the occasional Moultrie News article. The solicited letters to the editor are becoming more frequent. The limiting factor for media coverage is the complicated nature of the issue and extensive research needs to be done by the news media to stay on top of the overarching problems with the proposed building.
4. Media coverage thus far has been limited to height restrictions of building and is centered around, should it be built or should it not be built. The narrative should be focused on the numerous issues with the building, including finance and contract irregularities to paint a full picture.

5. Maj. General Livingston, a Mount Pleasant resident and the region's only Medal of Honor recipient supports the town of Mount Pleasant's stance.

6. The Post and Courier's stance on the Medal of Honor Museum is quite one-sided focusing on the town's "inability" to work with the MOH Foundation while ignoring the numerous financial and planning issues that plague the foundation.

Vision:

It is paramount for the town to protect its "brand" and image of the Mount Pleasant. The town must ensure the Medal of Honor Museum Foundation does not turn this situation into an "us vs. them" scenario, harming the town's public image. While the town is committed to having the museum, it must fit within the existing community.

Target Audience:

- a. Mount Pleasant residents
- b. Regional media and local media, primarily print outlets
- c. Potential town residents and visitors

Key Tactics in achieving the vision:

a. Begin a targeted public relations campaign aimed to communicate the town's key messages to the residents of Mount Pleasant.

b. Counter the Medal of Honor Museum Foundation's letter to the editor campaign by having Mount Pleasant elected officials and residents who support the town's position write competing letters to the editor. This tactic cause several counter effects. First, the Post and Courier will see fatigue in the amount of letters and stop running any of them. Second, it may cause the P&C to change their narrative. Lastly, it will help enforce the public's narrative.

The town needs two letters per week submitted to the Post and Courier in support of their position.

c. Make a concerted effort in all media interaction to highlight issues other than height and looks. The "ugly building" narrative could be considered petty if used too often.

d. Send out a news release and conduct a press availability at Patriot's Point with the SC Governor and Mount Pleasant Mayor about the future of the museum. Express excitement about having the museum as part of the community but highlight the many challenges the town faces and the lack of progress of the foundation. The news release headline should read, "Medal of Honor Museum's two largest donors meet at Patriot's Point."

e. The Mayor and Council members should be proactive in engaging the public (not arguing) on social media outlets. Take concerns directly to the people, thus controlling the narrative.

f. Continue to stress the money that Mount Pleasant has spent and will spend on the Museum through all available public outlets.

Communications Objectives:

- 1. Influence the opinion of residents of Mount Pleasant that the current plans for the Medal of Honor Museum do not fit with the existing landscape of the town.
- 2. Communicate the value of the Mount Pleasant's contributions to the massive undertaking.
- 3. Express the importance of getting the town "onboard" with the foundation's plans.

4. Utilize updated technology and the latest communication trends to connect town leadership's vision directly to the people, unfiltered.
5. Work around the Post and Courier as much as possible in order to avoid biased reporting.

Key Themes and Command Messages:

Theme #1: The town of Mount Pleasant absolutely wants the Medal of Honor Museum.

Message: The town of Mount Pleasant has remained committed to getting the museum built.

Message: Mount Pleasant, along with Patriots Point, are stewards of public property and money and have committed millions of dollars, granted every waiver requested and have participated in every public and private meetings requested.

Message: The Medal of Honor Museum must be feasible, fitting and sustainable.

Theme #2: The Medal of Honor Museum must be a good neighbor.

Message: Even with almost endless changes in leadership, staff and board resignations, Mount Pleasant has agreed to and already spent money on the process of moving the road and utilities to create the site on which the museum is envisioned.

Message: To date, town leadership has no idea how much money the Medal of Honor Museum Foundation has raised.

Message: The Medal of Honor Museum Foundation must meet all financial obligations agreed to in their original contract.

Message: The proposed building is unacceptable because it does not match the existing community and town regulations.

Message: Medal of Honor recipients are humble people doing extraordinary things to save others. This museum should represent that ethos by being simple, dignified and fit with the existing landscape.

Major Milestones:

1. Media event with the SC Governor
 - Teaming with the state helps change the "us vs. them" narrative.
 - a. Recommended location: Patriot's Point
 - b. Headline: "Medal of Honor Museum's two largest donors meet at Patriot's Point"
2. Patriot's Point August board meeting
 - The board meeting may help change the narrative based on their decision about issues pertaining to the museum.
 - a. More agencies talking with the same voice will help change the "us vs. them" narrative. It also helps downplay the foundation's PR narrative that they are pushing.
3. Two letters to the editor (Post and Courier) per week.
 - a. Continue this until the public narrative changes or the P&C stops running them.
 - b. Get town elected leaders onboard as well as private citizens who share the same viewpoints, is extremely important.