

TO: HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: CITY MANAGER

**DEPARTMENT: ADMINISTRATIVE
SERVICES**

DATE: May 18, 2009

CMR: 246:09

REPORT TYPE: Reports of Officials

**SUBJECT: Direction to Implement Recommendations of the Website Advisory
Committee**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the City's ongoing commitment to improve the City website, staff has enlisted a group of community volunteers to serve on the Website Advisory Committee with the goal of producing a set of recommendations to address concerns raised by citizens and enhance the overall website user-experience. The Website Advisory Committee, comprised of a select group of dedicated community volunteers, has met regularly during the past four months to develop a list of approximately 70 recommended items to improve the current City of Palo Alto website. The recommendations focus on creating a more user-friendly and interactive site that is compatible with rapidly changing technologies, such as Web 2.0 and mobile surfing. Some of the suggested fixes can be addressed in the short-term, while others are longer-term solutions and enhancements that require further analysis and additional resources to accomplish. The recommendations encompass (but are not limited to) adding valuable content that citizens frequently look for, as well as:

- providing information on schools, health organizations and facilities, and volunteer opportunities
- modifying the design to include greater background/text contrast and larger fonts to improve readability
- reorganizing information for better search-ability and easier access to content

Several members of the Committee have expressed a willingness to provide voluntary services to take immediate action on the recommended changes. Some efforts have already begun and changes have been implemented. For example, the City switched from WebTrends to the free Google Analytics tool for analysis of website metrics. This will save the City \$5,000 annually.

The collaboration between staff and the Website Advisory Committee has been an example of effective civic engagement.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Council direct staff to work with members of the Website Advisory Committee to implement the recommendations in bucket one and to develop a plan for addressing the recommendations listed in buckets two and three.

BACKGROUND

The City of Palo Alto launched its new website in 2007 with all new features, structure and design. Concerns were voiced by community members on the search capability and user-friendliness of the new site. As part of its ongoing effort to enhance the City of Palo Alto website and meet the Council's civic engagement priority, the City enlisted a Website Advisory Committee, comprised of community volunteers, to provide recommendations to the Council on how to improve the City website.

Since the October 29, 2009 initial meeting with potential committee members, the committee membership (see Attachment B) has been finalized and 20 hours of general meetings have been held since December. In addition to general committee meetings, subsets of the group have met to discuss and prepare recommendations within specific categories. These subcommittees are as follows:

- Design – The subcommittee reviewed the website from a graphic design and layout perspective.
- Content – The subcommittee reviewed the relevance and substance of information provided to users of the website.
- Information Architecture – The subcommittee evaluated the structure, organization and search functionality of the information on the server.
- Developer Coding & Technology – The subcommittee assessed the use of technology on the website.
- Marketing & Analytics – The subcommittee considered the website's user statistics and future roadmap.

The Committee has met with Civica, the web development contractor, to discuss the structure of the current website and to understand how the Committee's priorities and changes would need to be incorporated into a work plan.

The entire Committee also reviewed the beta version of the upcoming utility customer billing website which is part of the new utilities SAP system. Specific suggestions from the Committee, where possible, have been incorporated into the beta version that will be launched to the public in June.

DISCUSSION

The City of Palo Alto is committed to continuing improvements to its Internet presence as a vital source of information for those within the community, as well as the face of Palo Alto for everyone. The Website Advisory Committee has been meeting over the past four months both to evaluate the current City website and to evaluate potential solutions to user complaints and to envision ways to further enhance the capabilities of the website to meet the needs of the community.

The team has developed a set of recommended priorities. The recommendations have been prioritized into three “buckets” and a “parking lot”—user feedback as well as existing web traffic data has been taken into consideration in categorizing the recommendations.

The first bucket of recommendations contains high visibility, short-term items that can be addressed by staff, volunteers, or are within the scope of the current Civica contract (which does not require undergoing a new bidding process or contract revisions). These items add enhanced functionality to the website and improve the user experience. Staff expects to accomplish the recommendations in bucket one within three months with the assistance of members of the website committee. A condensed list of the bucket one recommendations is shown in the table below. The full list of recommendations and current status is provided in Attachment A.

Item Number	Area Addressed	Recommendation Description	Comments/Status
1	Release Roadmap	Need for a planning tool to map out phases for long-term web development	Initiated phase one with the website committee plan; future phases will be addressed in the IT Strategic Plan
2	Launch Plan	Need process for moving from development to production	Initiated an incremental process for revising the website; launch to be considered
3	Index/Site Map Pages	Information is too hard to find; need an enhanced index and site map	1) The committee will provide a site map design for 4-column layout; 2) automating the new site map may become a bucket 2 item, since Civica will need to be involved
4	Links Elevation	Elevate top viewed pages to home page especially those in "departments" and change to drop down menu on home page.	Will be addressed with additional input from the website committee
5	Search Box in Banner	Missing sophisticated search capability	Initiated. Search within search capability added; additional modifications will be discussed with the website committee.
6	Color and Contrast	Low color contrast between the text and the background makes it difficult to read	Final decision needed, but most likely the direction will be to have black text on a white background.
7	Font Size	Font size is too small	Final decision needed on specific font sizes, but the goal is to increase font sizes
8	e-Government tools (making payments online, filing police reports online, etc.)	Expand opportunities to create online access to services and facilitate transactions	Initiated. Utilities online bill pay added in May. Additional changes are needed to enhance the organization of online options on the page. The IT Strategic Plan will layout a plan for additional e-Government tools.
9	Education Information	Missing information on schools, university, other educational institutions	Initiated. Additional work w/Committee needed.
10	Health organizations and facilities information	Missing information on health organizations and facilities	Initiated. Additional work w/Committee needed

11	Volunteer Information	Potential opportunity to list ongoing volunteer opportunities in Palo Alto	Initiated. Additional work w/Committee needed
12	Contact List	Phone directory on homepage and contact us	Initiated. Phone directory link is on the home page and the link will be added to the contact us page
13	Council Page	Streamline access to bios with direct link from pictures	To be completed.

The second bucket of recommendations, while important, requires further analysis and discussion thereby necessitating more time to design and implement than the first group of priorities. These include non-governmental content (e.g., entertainment, business, K-12 activities, organizations); nomenclature of uploaded documents; further data clean-up and standardization; enhancing the use of user statistics; and improving layout and aesthetics.

The third bucket contains items that require more time or logically occur after other workflow items; these create additional functionality such as Web 2.0 capabilities and better site tracking. Some of these issues are tied to user feedback and data analysis, but are mentioned less frequently and have less impact than some of the other items in the first two groups. These items could incur further costs and resources.

The parking lot is a list of improvements that has less visible impact on the local community, but would be beneficial in cleaning up data, tracking more detailed usage patterns on the website, and reaching out to the extended web community.

Staff expects to return to the City Council in the fall or earlier with a timeline and plan for addressing items contained in bucket two and three as well as with an update on the implementation of bucket 1 recommendations.

RESOURCE IMPACT

Many of the recommendations for improving the website can be accomplished with current resources. These items are in bucket one. Other recommendations contained in buckets two and three may require funding commitments. As part of the Information Technology Strategic Plan, due in 2009-10, staff will identify needed funding for website improvements along with other City technology initiatives.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The recommendations included in this report will be incorporated into the upcoming information technology strategic plan that is planned to be presented to Council in 2009-10.


ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This is not considered a project under California Public Resources Code Section 21065 (California Environmental Quality Act).

PREPARED BY:

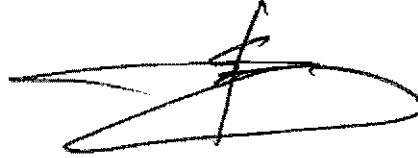


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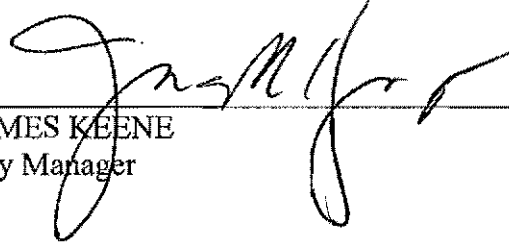
LILA YOUN
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DEPARTMENT HEAD:



LALO PEREZ
Director, Administrative Services

CITY MANAGER APPROVAL:



JAMES KEENE
City Manager

ATTACHMENT

Attachment A: Website Advisory Committee Recommendations, Full List
Attachment B: Website Advisory Committee Members

Attachment A
 Website Advisory Committee
 Full List of Recommendations

Bucket	Item Number	Area Addressed	Recommendation Description	Comments/Status	Sub-Committee
Bucket 1	1	Release Roadmap	Need for a planning tool to map out phases for long-term web development	Initiated phase one with the website committee plan; future phases will be addressed in the IT Strategic Plan	Marketing & Analytics
	2	Launch Plan	Need process for moving from development to production	Initiated an incremental process for revising the website; launch to be considered	Marketing & Analytics
	3	Index/Site Map Pages	Information is too hard to find; need an enhanced index and site map	1) The committee will provide a site map design for 4-column layout; 2) automating the new site map may become a bucket 2 item, since Civica will need to be involved	Design
	4	Links elevation	Elevate top viewed pages to home page especially those in "departments" and change to drop down menu on home page.	Will be addressed with additional input from the website committee	Marketing & Analytics
	5	Search Box In Banner	Missing sophisticated search capability	Initiated. Search within search capability added; additional modifications will be discussed with the website committee.	Design
	6	Color and Contrast	Low color contrast between the text and the background makes it difficult to read	Final decision needed, but most likely the direction will be to have black text on a white background.	Design
	7	Font Size	Font size is too small	Final decision needed on specific font sizes with the goal to increase font sizes overall.	Design
	8	e-Government tools (making payments online, filing police reports online, etc.)	Expand opportunities to create online access to services and facilitate transactions	Initiated. Utilities online bill pay added in May. Additional changes are needed to enhance the organization of online options on the page. The IT Strategic Plan will layout a plan for additional e-Government tools.	Developer Coding & Technology
	9	Education information	Missing information on schools, university, other educational institutions	Initiated. Additional work w/Committee needed.	Content
	10	Health organizations and facilities information	Missing information on health organizations and facilities	Initiated. Additional work w/Committee needed.	Content
	11	Volunteer Information	Potential opportunity to list ongoing volunteer opportunities in Palo Alto	Initiated. Additional work w/Committee needed	Content
	12	Contact List	Phone directory on homepage and contact us	Initiated. Phone directory link is on the home page and the link will be added to the contact us page	Full Committee
	13	Council Page	Streamline access to bios with direct link from pictures	Initiated. Phone directory link is on the home page and the link will be added to the contact us page	Content
	14	Information Order	Information should be presented logically dependent on its type	To be completed	Design
	15	Entertainment	Missing information on Restaurants, Theaters, events etc.	Need to be evaluated for policy considerations.	Content
	16	Visitors	Add link from visitors section to the new "Destination Palo Alto Visitor's Guide"	To be completed	Content

Attachment A
 Website Advisory Committee
 Full List of Recommendations

Bucket	Item Number	Area Addressed	Recommendation Description	Comments/Status	Sub-Committee
Bucket 2	17	PDF File Names	All PDF file names should use consistent format for naming (descriptive title plus date, etc.)	To be completed	Content
	18	Usable PDFs	Searchable, smaller, accessible PDFs	To be completed	Information Architecture
	19	Parks	Enhanced parks section – each park listed, specific services/amenities provided for each	To be initiated with coordinating department	Content
	20	Neighborhoods	Update Palo Alto neighborhoods – need page/section to highlight neighborhood programs and maps, and content should be enhanced.	To be evaluated	Content
	21	Cost/Benefit Metrics	Perform cost/benefit analysis of switch from WebTrends to Google Analytics	Completed. The City now runs Google Analytics.	Marketing & Analytics
	22	Emergency Preparedness	Enhance emergency preparedness section	To be completed	Content
	23	K-12 camp activities	Potential to list activities offered by Stanford, local schools and 3rd parties	To be evaluated	Content
	24	Business	Business in PA, click on available property, get brought to white page with white type on it (illegible), then must re-type same, information again on following website	Completed	Content
	25	Organization Chart	Add city org chart – hierarchical text with links to department website pages	To be completed	Content
	26	Trail Information	Enhance trail information with maps and pictures.	To be initiated with coordinating department	Content
	27	Search Box	Search box should be on every page of the site	Completed	Content
	28	Content Organization	Need to organize content by user needs rather than just city departmental organization	To be completed	Design
	29	Page Layout	Wasted and misused space on pages	To be completed	Design
	30	Primary Navigation	Potential to use navigation tabs or items with sticky drop down menus	To be completed	Design
	31	Visual Element in Banner	Need visual element representing the City of Palo Alto in banner	To be completed	Design
	32	Redo CPA in Banner	Wasted space by oversized "City of Palo Alto" name, and no branding logo	To be completed	Design
	33	Popular PDF Docs	Technical solution needed to identify which PDF documents are viewed/downloaded	To be evaluated with vendor	Marketing & Analytics
	34	Inside/Outside	Clearly identify internal and external IP addresses and develop monitoring system	Initiated	Marketing & Analytics
	35	Police Redundancy	Combine police home and police information pages	To be initiated with coordinating department	Marketing & Analytics
	36	What's Our Name	Consolidate 3 legacy home page URLs to show up as main homepage in Google Analytics	Completed	Marketing & Analytics
37	Cookies	Analysis of how cookies are used on the site and how Google Analytics identifies new and returning visitors.	To be completed	Marketing & Analytics	
38	High Interest Short Life	Design updateable area of home page for high interest documents such as courses which have short shelf life	Initiated	Marketing & Analytics	

Attachment A
Website Advisory Committee
Full List of Recommendations

Bucket	Item Number	Area Addressed	Recommendation Description	Comments/Status	Sub-Committee
Bucket 3	39	Live webcam feeds	Potential use of webcams to bring pertinent up-to-date visual information to citizens	Initiated by department. Creek cam and Fire Station 8 cam implemented. Need to evaluate additional use of webcams.	Developer Coding & Technology
	40	Virtual meaningful URLs	Allows useful bookmarks, and URLs for virtual dynamic web pages	Initiated	Information Architecture
	41	Public Works Projects	Add public works and utilities projects update page – some sort of alert program (or maintained webpage) to notify residents of street closures/detours due to construction projects	To be initiated with coordinating department	Content
	42	Metadata Content Standards	Metadata standards needed for project "Structured Metadata in Keywords field" above	Initiated	Content
	43	Search and Access	Encode existing website with metadata according to content standards. Support search and access of website content created since launch of new website	Initiated	Content
	44	Fix Download Filenames	Need for easily-identifiable filenames; Useful also for project "Virtual Meaningful URLs" above	Initiated	Content
	45	Minutes/Agendas	Minutes/agendas/reports links on City Council pages should link directly to Agendas page, not to interim "minutes/agendas/reports" page that doesn't include the actual documents	To be initiated with coordinating department	Content
	46	Employee Directory	Add employee directory – this used to be on the old PA website (indexed by last name and department)	To be evaluated	Content
	47	Creek Monitor	Add creek monitor archived data to the website	To be evaluated	Content
	48	Selectable Font Size	No easy way to change font size	To be completed	Design
	49	Explore use of Web 2.0 technologies	Lack of interactivity and modern technologies that epitomize Palo Alto	To be completed	Developer Coding & Technology
	50	Easy and quick page access	Every page should be accessed within 2 seconds	To be completed	Developer Coding & Technology
	51	User login	Potential for Web 2.0, personalized access with settings tailored to individualized interests	Initiated with recent launch of new utility customer account access and bill pay. Additional applications to be evaluated.	Developer Coding & Technology
	52	Structured Metadata in Keywords field	Improve Search by creating systematic structured metadata	Initiated	Information Architecture
	53	Search of structured metadata	Adopt lexicon support to translate external search terms to internal metadata encodings	Initiated	Information Architecture
54	Virtual dynamic web pages	Supports a web page listing all the reports and attachments for a meeting, or a web page listing all documents associated with a property address across all bodies, or all documents associated with a topic across all bodies. Allows easier repurposing of content for multiple uses	Initiated	Information Architecture	
55	Links removal	Remove rarely used links on landing pages	To be completed	Marketing & Analytics	

Attachment A
 Website Advisory Committee
 Full List of Recommendations

Bucket	Item Number	Area Addressed	Recommendation Description	Comments/Status	Sub-Committee
	56	Business Practices	Ensure that timely updating of most popular pages is standard operation procedure in those departments	To be completed	Marketing & Analytics
	57	Dashboard	Develop Dashboard [for website "health"] which is shared across all departments and Executive levels once/month	Initiated	Marketing & Analytics
	58	Metrics Decision Making	Metrics Based Design decision-making to be able to explain to stakeholders why/why not their page is not on landing page or persistent links	To be evaluated	Marketing & Analytics
	59	Google Search	Allow Internal Google search terms to be ported to Web Trends	Not applicable now that the City is no longer using Web Trends	Marketing & Analytics
	60	Searchable PDFs	Key historical PDFs made searchable	To be completed	
	61	Marketing Plan	Need Strategy and Tactics for increasing visibility and community/press acceptance	City coordination process discussion needed	Marketing & Analytics
	62	Revised Homepage	Revised homepage; (i.e. rotating pictures in banner, etc.)	To be completed with other homepage enhancements	Full Committee
Parking Lot	63	Important Police and safety news	Amber Alerts should be placed on the first page	Process established to allow for amber alerts on home page	Content
	64	Printable web pages	Make web pages formatted for easy printing.	To be completed	Developer Coding & Technology
	65	Breadcrumb trail	Add navigation trail/breadcrumb trail to header	To be evaluated with vendor	Content
	66	Data Clean Up	One Time Data Scrub to identify data anomalies, orphan pages, inconsistent nomenclature, technical issues, tagging issues, etc.	To be evaluated	Marketing & Analytics
	67	Council Member Voting Record	Provide table of motions and how each council member voted	Summary table to be evaluated. Voting results exist in minutes.	Content
	68	Navigation consistency and ease	Inconsistencies in font, justification (alignment); highlight active menu item; remove "previous page"; make menu/submenu fixed place (freeze pane) as user scrolls down	To be evaluated with other navigation recommendations.	Marketing & Analytics
	69	Famous Palo Altans	Potential to list famous Palo Altans from Palo Alto or currently residing in Palo Alto	To be evaluated	Content

Attachment B

WEBSITE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Community Volunteers:

Philippe Alexis, Mark Eden, Sheri Furman, Carol Gilbert, Bob Harrington, Lori Heyman, Arthur Keller, Gary Lindgren, Sean Momeny, John Raftrey, Joe Villareal, Dave Voelker

Council Liaison:

Sid Espinosa, Council Member (former Council Liaison: Pat Burt, Council Member)

Staff:

James Keene, City Manager; Lalo Perez, Director of Administrative Services; David Ramberg, Assistant Director of Administrative Services; Glenn Loo, Chief Information Officer; Chris Carvalho, Sr. Technologist; Kelly Morariu, Interim Deputy Manager; Linda Clerkson, Public Communications Manager; Julia Pollard, Administrative Assistant; Lila Youn, Management Fellow