TO: **HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL**

FROM: **CITY MANAGER**   **DEPARTMENT:**   **ADMINISTRATIVE**
                                                                                    SERVICES

DATE: **OCTOBER 1, 2007**   **CMR: 371:07**

SUBJECT: **UPDATE ON CITY WEBSITE REDESIGN PROJECT**

This is an informational report and no Council action is required.

BACKGROUND

Over the past decade, the City of Palo Alto website had essentially retained much of its original design and function. As the content grew to over 10,000 pages (including PDFs) with over 120 staff members providing content, it became more difficult for users to navigate the site and for City staff to maintain it. The site had become cumbersome, the search function ineffective, the look outdated, and navigation style variable. After more than a decade with limited functionality and many support challenges, a request for proposal process was conducted in late 2005. Staff selected Civica for its Content Management System (CMS) and Creativewerks for its graphic design capability to work on the redesign of both the City's public internet website and intranet internal website. The City launched the new public website in August 2007.

DISCUSSION

Public launch of the new design for the City's website was expected to generate a great deal of attention, and it has. Because the design is bold and unique, a text-only version was developed and a reverse-color print version made available prior to go-live. Staff anticipated, especially with such a major change in site design and functionality, that additional work would be required after "going-live." For example, staff expected to further refine search results through keywords and content placement as visitors began to actually search for information. This technique is working well and helping to enhance search speed and number of results found.

There are two main themes arising from the feedback received thus far: design and search.

Design
An important aspect of website design is to have high contrast between background and text color for best legibility. The dark gray background with white text was chosen for its contrast. For users with more traditional tastes, a text version of the site with white background and black

text (provided as a link on the upper right hand corner of the screen) is available. In addition, to ensure ease of printing, an automatic reversal of color occurs so that pages are not printed with the gray background (requiring large amounts of toner for printing).

Font size variation is used to emphasize important information while also allowing more content to be visible in the web viewing area. The previous website had a similar distribution of normal and small text sizes (all left navigational and other items were small sized text). Staff recognizes that some font sizes, particularly the contact information on departmental pages, are smaller and difficult to read. Staff will continue to review font size issues to determine an appropriate course of action.

Photography used on the website rollout was initially chosen for its high color and strong imagery. Over time, staff intends to replace many of the existing stock images with photos of Palo Alto. Staff is currently seeking high quality photos from departments that highlight many of the great attractions and services the City offers.

Search
Search results continue to improve. Currently, searches are reviewed daily to ensure relevant information is properly keyworded. This effort allows for all respective information to list as a top search result. As of September 14, 2007, the top 10 search words/phrases are as follows (listed highest to lowest):

1. library
2. rinconada pool
3. golf
4. shuttle
5. municipal code
6. enjoy!
7. employment
8. animal services
9. mitchell park
10. recycling

Ongoing Enhancements
Since the launch of the City web site redesign last month, staff has concentrated on refining search capability, adding new content, posting news releases and uploading reports for upcoming meetings. The site continues to take on new shape as new information is posted, special events are highlighted in the calendar section, and photos highlighting Palo Alto's attractions are added to the web site. Staff continues to work on transferring older content pertaining to Council, Boards, and Commissions from prior years. All content from 2007 is currently available on the site.

Knowing search engines such as Yahoo!, Google, and Alta Vista generally take several weeks to begin returning correct search results (re-index), staff has taken steps to redirect some of the top search engine results to relevant pages on the new City website.

Approximately 80% of the City's website visitors use Internet Explorer and the site is currently viewable via the following browsers: Internet Explorer (IE) 6, Internet Explorer 7, Firefox, and Safari. However, some online forms do not display properly with browsers other than IE and this issue is currently being addressed. Staff is making modifications to the many forms available on the website and this continues to be the highest priority.

In the coming months, staff will continue to work with the new site, enhance on-line forms, refine search capability, review on-going testing, train key department representatives and add new content.

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