



STAFF REPORT

June 14, 2023

File Number 0600-10; A-3462

SUBJECT

CITY WEBSITE CONSOLIDATION, UPGRADE, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROJECT UPDATE AND APPROVAL

DEPARTMENT

Communications

RECOMMENDATION

Request that the City Council adopt Resolution No. 2023-71 authorizing the Mayor to execute a Master Services Agreement with CivicPlus for implementation and hosting of the City's new website. The five-year contract total is \$232,706.23.

Staff Recommendation: Approval (Communications: Joanna Axelrod, Deputy City Manager / Director of Communications and Community Services)

Presenter: Teresa Collins, Deputy Director of Communications

FISCAL ANALYSIS

The total five-year investment for the design, hosting, training, consulting, testing, maintenance, and redesign at year four of the new website is \$232,706.23. The majority of this project is funded through American Rescue Plan Act monies and will have no General Fund impact until year 5 at which time the cost will be \$7,956.26. Beyond that, annual hosting services costs will be included as part of the Communications General Fund operating budget.

BACKGROUND

The City of Escondido's website is the primary digital platform used to engage with the public and to share information regarding City operations, initiatives, and services. The current website's Content Management System (CMS) is used by all City departments to create, share, and publish information, including public noticing of federal and state-mandated information. All content is updated and managed by the respective City departments with general oversight and support from the Communications department. The current CMS is an internally hosted, open-source solution deployed in 2010. In early 2018 with direction from the City's leadership, City staff updated the look and structure of the website



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with a facelift and reorganization of the home page, which is the current status of www.escondido.org. Shortly after the updates to the main website, City staff updated the look and organization of the Police, Fire, and Recreation websites to fall in line with the look of the City's main site. The Escondido Public Library's website underwent an update when it launched its new logo and branding in 2019.

While the City's current website software has served the community for many years, City Leadership tasked Information Systems and Communications staff to research and recommend a new website and resident engagement platform that improves the visitor experience by making information easier to find while promoting civic engagement.

A CityWide project team was assembled with representation from Information Systems, Communications, Finance, Library, Police, Fire, Economic Development, Development Services, and Community Services. The team sought a qualified vendor with local government website design and consultation experience that could provide software, website and intranet design, content management services, hosting services and would lead and facilitate the consolidation and conversion of the City's current websites. To accomplish this, the project team identified the key outcomes for a successful vendor partnership - improved public experience and an easy-to-navigate CMS system for internal staff to update web content. The project team began meeting in October 2022 and broke this project out into three phases:

- Phase 1 – Research and vendor selection
 - Develop and publish an RFP for a government-focused web consultant or firm, select the best proposal, and engage services.
 - Completed in March 2023
- Phase 2 – Implementation
 - Follow the lead of the consultant/vendor to implement new website software and hosting services.
 - Current phase in progress
- Phase 3- Testing
 - Will be led by the consultant/vendor and address additional needs, including engagement, migration/re-entry of the website content, and cutover to the new website.
 - Final phase of the project

The project team also identified the following key benefits of investing in a new website, community engagement, and outreach platform, including:

- Increased transparency by ease of use
 - An easy-to-navigate website helps build trust in the information the City shares.
- More opportunities to interact online
 - More City services like special event permits, surveys, and easy-to-find processes provide the community an easier avenue to communicate with City staff and leadership.
- Information accessibility for all



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- Prominent embedded translation capabilities and a fully ADA-compliant website ensures equity of information for those who access information via assistance devices or those who are not native English speakers.
- Leading with current best practices
 - By partnering with a leader in the government website space, we can be assured that the City's website consultation services will be on-trend and forward-thinking.
- Vendor partnership
 - Ongoing work with the vendor via a dedicated customer success manager ensures the City's web platform will stay optimized and up-to-date.

In December 2022, staff issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit competitive bids to identify a vendor for the website update project. The proposal required respondents to be able to provide a robust offering of technical and communications-focused functionalities. Some of the highlights include:

- The City's new website will be easy to navigate, user-centered, and accessible to all individuals served by the City of Escondido.
- The public will be able to engage with the City, submit requests, and initiate processes.
- The City's new website will incorporate a "mobile first" design to provide accessibility for all device users.
- In addition to upgrading the City's main website, the following websites will be consolidated into the City's main site: Police, Fire, Recreation, and Library. The employee intranet will also be updated.

Eight proposals were received. In January 2023, each proposal was carefully reviewed and rated by the evaluation team, which was comprised of staff members from multiple City departments. Supplemental questions were sent to the top candidates after initial ratings, and demonstrations were conducted with the top four vendors in February 2023. Finalist interviews were then conducted with the top two candidates. While all four finalists met all the criteria and needs of the project, CivicPlus was selected by staff for its product features, including communications tools and user accounts, consultation services for design, and its deep experience working with municipal clients. CivicPlus also had a competitive project cost. Staff recommends that the City enter into an agreement with CivicPlus, a platform that features a flexible, user-friendly civic engagement platform.

Per the Scope of Work, CivicPlus will deliver a new website that is user-centric (fully ADA-compliant), mobile-focused first, easy for the public to use, promotes transparency and accountability, search friendly for users without knowledge of local government structure, includes analytics, simple and intuitive content editing tools, and straightforward methods to keep all site content up-to-date. The analytics or metrics of the site will include data on user behavior, devices, and experiences that will allow staff to make improvements in content and navigation. Highlights of the Scope of Work include:



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- CivicEngage
 - CivicEngage is custom-built to provide the tools needed to engage citizens, provide up-to-date, easily accessible information, and foster a more involved community.
- Hosting & Security
 - Extensive industry-leading processes and procedures for protecting and hosting our website.
- ArchiveSocial
 - Connects directly to the City's social networks to capture and preserve all the content the City posts and engages with, in context and in near-real-time.
- Merger Management
 - The City will be paired with a Customer Success Manager from CivicPlus, that will help City staff navigate the merger in an efficient and successful manner.
- CivicPlus Chatbot
 - This advanced technology combines the power of site search and artificial intelligence (AI), to deliver exceptional customer experiences to people using the City's website.
- Content Development
 - A CivicPlus web content specialist will guide City staff in content development, ensuring the application of industry best practices for usability and accessibility.
- System Training (virtual and on-site)
 - A CivicPlus trainer will deliver virtual and on-site training sessions for City staff administrators and users.
- On-site User Testing
 - User testing will verify that the website is easy to navigate and provides residents with the information they need before launch. After launch, user testing can be leveraged as a tool for continuous improvement and to guide decisions for website maintenance.
- Year 4 redesign
 - The contract includes a redesign of the website in year four.

The City's new website and engagement platform will provide a space to improve communication and engagement with residents. Features such as online forums, feedback forms, and newsletters will be integrated to facilitate two-way communication, enabling residents to voice concerns, provide feedback, and participate in community discussions. Residents will be able to opt-in for information they select, and the City will be able to maintain interested party lists for future communications. In addition, a strong new website will support opportunities to amplify the work the City is doing around Economic Development. The website will create a space to strengthen the ties to the City's identity while providing information for future development. While the City uses various portals, the goal is for the visitor to be able to attain all necessary information and interactions securely utilizing technology-based solutions. Social media integration will also help promote City events, initiatives, and news, reaching a wider audience and fostering civic participation. With built-in analytics, staff will leverage data to gather insights on user behavior, popular services, and areas of improvement. These analytics can inform data-driven decision-



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making, allowing the City to more effectively allocate resources, optimize service delivery, and better tailor content to meet the needs of the community.

RESOLUTIONS

- a. Resolution No. 2023-71
- b. Exhibit A – Resolution No. 2023-71