

City of Greater Sudbury Website Revitalization Project

Background:

As part of the *Greater Together 2015-218 Corporate Strategic Plan*, the revitalization of the municipal website was identified as an action by Council under the priority of *Responsible, Fiscally Prudent Open Governance; Focus on openness, transparency and accountability in everything we do*.

A citizen-focused website is also essential in building understanding between citizens and their municipal government, as outlined in the *Connecting You, Connecting Us: City of Greater Sudbury Communications Strategic Plan*.

The City of Greater Sudbury website is the No. 1 tool for engaging with residents of our community. In a recent web survey, 44 per cent of residents stated that they prefer to interact with the City online. In 2017, the City of Greater Sudbury website received more than 1.6 million sessions, and almost 4 million pageviews. In addition, since the last website redesign, website traffic demographics have significantly changed with 58% of all users to the City's website using mobile technology. This, combined with the results of a comprehensive third party audit of the website, determined the requirement for a complete redesign, restructure and rewrite of the municipal site.

After two years, and contributions from more than 110 staff across the organization, this significant overhaul has resulted in an award-winning municipal website that meets the information and customer service needs of residents with clear, consistent, easy to find and easy to understand information.

Goals of the Website Revitalization Project

In May 2016, staff began the two-year website revitalization project. Based on the recommendations of an extensive third-party web audit, a web survey, and focus groups with residents and staff, a detailed project plan was developed with specific goals and actions to address identified needs and priorities.

To achieve the overarching goals of the plan, the project was broken down into two phases.

- Phase One: May 2016 to May 2017: Restructuring of content into a new resident-focused layout, a fresh new design, mobile optimization, and re-written content in the six top-visited areas of the website: Jobs, Transit, Tenders and Purchasing, Garbage and Recycling, Arenas, and Leisure.
- Phase Two: June 2017 to June 2018: Re-writing, condensing and restructuring of the remaining areas of the website.

The goals of the website project, as well as key action taken to achieve them are outlined below:

Goal: The municipal website meets the information and customer service needs of residents.

- The number of web pages was reduced by almost 74%, making it significantly easier for residents to find the information they are looking for. For example, areas where residents had to click through many pages of information was reorganized using tabs and accordions.
- Information was re-organized in a way that makes sense to residents. For example, the website is no longer organized by City department, but rather, by service and/or theme.

- The search functionality has been significantly improved. For example, the web search provider was changed and key words and search engine optimization tactics were implemented to improve search functionalities.

Goal: Content is easy to understand.

- Content was re-written to reflect best practice for web writing. This includes shortening paragraphs, using headings to make content easier to skim, and using bulleted lists for easy reading.
- Content was re-written to make it more accessible to all audiences. This includes using plain language and avoiding technical jargon to make information about municipal services easy to understand.

Goal: Content is relevant, timely, and accurate.

- Unnecessary and outdated content was removed and replaced with new, up-to-date, accurate content.

Goal: The website is easy to manage for staff.

- A web governance framework is in development to allow for clear work processes and outline roles and responsibilities for maintaining web content.
- Web content management training manuals are in development to assist staff across the organization responsible for updating website content.

Goal: The website is compliant with accessibility legislation.

- The new website design and rewritten web content according meets web content accessibility guidelines (WCAG 2.0 Level AA).

Goal: The website is optimized for mobile devices.

- The new, responsive web design functions on all devices, including tablets and mobile phones.

Costs of the Website Revitalization Project

The financial resources required to complete the website revitalization project were as follows:

	Description	Phase 1	Phase 2
Project Expense	Public website survey	\$4,579.21	
	Online advertising for public website survey	\$1,669.86	
	Third-party Web Audit, plus expenses	\$34,748.62	
	Web design	\$15,729.60	
	Translation	\$10,200.00	\$19,800.00
	Web Content Editor	\$29,576.00	\$29,576.00
Contingency			
Total per phase		\$96,503.29	\$49,376.00
Total website revitalization project cost			\$145,879.29

There is no revenue associated with the website revitalization project.

The approved web editor FTE, which came into effect on June 1, 2018, increases the FTE staff complement by one, and represents a change to the base operating budget of \$24,732 on an ongoing basis, beginning in 2019. Based on the needs of the section, \$34,626 from other line accounts in the Communications and Community Engagement Division were reallocated to allow for this full-time resource with minimal impact on the base operating budget. The salary and benefits total for this position is \$59,358.

Communications

Promotion of the website as an information source for residents is done daily through regular public communications. The majority of public communications from the City includes a link to the information on the municipal website. As a result, the website is key to all communications activities undertaken by the City.

In an effort to continue to make the website the main, trusted source of information for residents, the City has partnered with Cambrian College through their Cambrian Innovates Voucher for E-Business (VEB) Program.

Established in 2009, Cambrian Innovates is Cambrian College's research development arm. Cambrian Innovates brings together industry, funding partners and Cambrian faculty and students to provide market solutions for current business challenges. The students receive paid working experience to put on their resumes. Faculty keeps their industry-specific skills and knowledge current. Industry connects with bright upcoming workers and solves problems with fewer wasted resources. (Cambrian Innovates. (October, 2015). About Cambrian Innovates [Brochure]. Sudbury, ON.)

The Voucher for E-Business (VEB) Program connects eligible industry partners with the expertise and resources available at Ontario colleges to help their business scale up the development, adoption and implementation of online tools to drive innovation. Through the VEB program, student teams guided by college faculty engage directly with industry partners and act as consultants to industry to identify and solve their online business innovation challenges. (Voucher for E-Business, VEB. [Accessed June 21, 2018])

The City has been working with the Cambrian Innovates VEB program to produce a short promotional video about the City website, highlighting helpful online information and tools, such as the Transit Trip Planner.

Next Steps

During the 2017 budget, City Council approved a permanent full-time web editor to provide ongoing support to the website. As a result of this resource, a process of continuous improvement for the website has been adopted:

- Continuous work on content to ensure it remains simple, accurate, relevant, and easy to find and understand.
- Continuous engagement with residents through the *Over to You* portal for feedback on changes and identification of opportunities for further improvement.
- Finalization and implementation of a web governance framework and associated website policies and protocols to assist staff in maintaining website content.
- Monitoring and identification of new opportunities for online services, in line with the City Information and Technology Strategic Plan.
- Development of additional training, tools and resources for staff.
- Implementation of benchmarks to evaluate and monitor progress improvements.

Conclusion

Since the launch of the revitalized website, improvements have provided clear benefits to residents and stakeholders.

For example, enhancements to online accessibility were well-received by the Accessibility Advisory Panel, and work on the website was chosen as an example of positive online accessibility for a project by a student in Mohawk College's Accessible Media Production program.

Since the launch of the first phase of the project in May 2017, the City has received two awards from the Association of Marketing and Communication Professionals: a Gold-Level AVA Digital Award in the category of Web-Based Production/ Website/ Government, and a Gold-Level Hermes Creative Award in the Government: Website Overall category.

The website revitalization project has enabled the City to improve the connection that residents have with their municipality by providing them with information that is easy to find and easy to understand. As the primary source of information for residents, and with technological change continuing to drive digital communication, the City website will require ongoing maintenance and continuous improvement to meet the quickly evolving needs of residents.

The website revitalization project has provided a solid foundation for the City to continue to strengthen its digital communications and provide quality online service to residents.

Resources Cited

2015-2018 Corporate Strategic Plan: <https://www.greatersudbury.ca/inside-city-hall/open-government/strategic-plans1/>

City of Greater Sudbury *Connecting You, Connecting Us*. Communications Strategic Plan: <https://www.greatersudbury.ca/city-hall/pdfs/communications-strategic-plan/>

Voucher for E-Business, VEB: <http://www.oce-ontario.org/programs/industry-academic-collaboration/collaboration-voucher-program/VEB>