

Community and Economic Development Committee Report - November 04, 2021

Members present: Michael Talbott (chair), Sharon Davis (vice chair), Mike Doenges. Bill Gillam, Devon Neary (on phone)

Others present: Matt Whitcomb, Paul Clifford, Matt Bloomer, Andrew Strniste, Brennan Duffy, Mary Markowski, Nathaniel Gibson (Collaboration 133)

The committee met in the conference room of the Rutland Regional Planning Commission in order to utilize their video conferencing system. The meeting was called to order at 5:32pm.

The purpose of the meeting was to learn about the work completed up to this point on a new city website. Matt Bloomer began by outlining the history of this project, which began when he was recruited by the former mayor to help create a scope of work for a new website. An RFP was issued, and Collaboration 133 was one of the respondents, but the project stalled. Around 2016, the BOA's Marketing Committee revisited the RFP responses and Collaboration 133 was hired to create a new city website. Since that time, roughly 80% or more of the work has been completed, but the project has been in a holding pattern for the last two years. Bloomer recommended taking the necessary steps to launch the site in its current form, and then address desired changes to the new site.

Nathaniel Gibson of Collaboration 133 gave a rundown of the project budget, including remaining un-invoiced amounts, and all deliverables that have been added to the project scope per request. Gibson suggested that a moratorium be placed on updates to the current city website during the content migration process. He estimates about 4-6 weeks are needed to execute the remaining updates necessary to launch the site, and he is available to move forward with this final phase in early 2022.

Andrew Strniste shared a comprehensive overview of updates made to the existing city website since the draft new website was put together in 2019. These updates would need to be made to the new city website, and Bloomer suggested that each department head review this list to determine that all critical items are on the new site before launch. Strniste also suggested having a tab that has all boards, committees, and commissions in one place, with the minutes under the tab for each body.

Alderwoman Davis asked if we track which areas of the current site are visited most often. Gibson explained that the URLs for the currently city website pages do not make it easy to track usage.

Alderman Talbott asked who will maintain the new website, and how much flexibility the city will have to maintain the website in-house. Bloomer explained that the plan is to have a handful of city employees trained by Collaboration 133. He also suggested that style standards be

established to maintain consistency across the site. Mary Markowski suggested that each department have one person who is able to make updates to that department's pages.

Brennan Duffy gave a brief history of the development of the Rutland Municipal Business Portal, which is still live but largely unused. He asked if there is interest in reimplementing the portal as part of this process.

Davis asked if it is cost-prohibitive to have someone external maintain the new city website. Bloomer explained the new site will be relatively easy for city employees to update after minimal training. Backend maintenance would be built into an ongoing maintenance contract, including hosting fees and domain name registration, with Collaboration 133 or another vendor. Gibson said he maintains several municipal websites around Vermont and that the maintenance costs are usually around \$1000/year. He explained that the challenging aspect of maintaining the business portal involved complicated payment integration work. The informational pieces of the business portal could be rolled into the new city website at a relatively low cost.

Talbott advocated for retaining the work that has gone into the business portal by migrating the content into the new city website. Gibson estimated that the cost to migrate the informational content only would be between \$700-\$1000.

Mary Markowski stated that the the Treasurer's Office still uses the Rooms, Meals, and Entertainment Tax Return portion of the business portal and would like to retain that functionality. Gibson explained that there would be higher maintenance fees involved in maintaining this functionality as issues around payment security can be more complicated. Alderman Doenges suggested that separating payment forms from the new city website would keep security maintenance costs much lower.

Talbott indicated he would coordinate with Gibson and the department heads present to determine a budget for completing the new website.

A motion was made to refer the new city website to the Finance Committee with a dollar amount to be determined. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 6:41pm.