

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY, FLORIDA

MEMORANDUM

TO: Jason E. Brown, County Administrator

FROM: Dan Russell, Information Technology Director

SUBJECT: County Websites, Domains, and Internet-Based Services.

DATE: April 12, 2021

DEPARTMENTAL

BACKGROUND:

County staff is seeking a board discussion and direction regarding County websites, domains, and internet-based services.

ANALYSIS

County staff periodically reviews and updates the numerous websites and domains maintained for the County and various departments within the organization. In discussions with County staff, Commissioner Earman has expressed an interest in upgrading the County website(s). As part of this preliminary discussion, the Commissioner provided a list of other Florida County websites that might serve as a model for the features and aesthetic look-and-feel he desired to see in a new website for Indian River County. The Martin County website, martin.fl.us, was the Commissioner's top choice of those websites on the list. In an effort to harmonize the next website update with the Commission's expectations, staff is seeking further direction from the Board on the website development process going forward.

Information Technology staff has reviewed a preliminary list of requirements and features desired, should the Board of County Commissioners vote to proceed with a project to upgrade the County website. It is anticipated that staff would present further detailed specifications for the Board's consideration as part of this process.

1. The website should establish an identity for Indian River County and openly promote our best attributes.
2. Each page should have a clear intention for the user while establishing a focal point where the most important information can be easily found.
3. Each page should consider the most common way visitors scan a website: starting from the top and left of the site. Subsequently, website features should be aligned on a grid layout with columns and sections that line-up, feel balanced and orderly, and overall result in an aesthetically-pleasing appearance. Information should be clean, simple, and non-confusing.
4. The IRC website should use a standardized color palette (five or fewer total colors) and a limited number of fonts (three or fewer).
5. Website imagery must be high-quality and professional in appearance. Overall tone of the imagery should match the standardized color palette.
6. Users must be able to intuitively navigate the website, and navigation techniques should be consistent between pages.
7. All Departments should have access to and control over the content they present to the user. The website should be easily accessible for editing so the Departments can keep their information current.
8. The website should load quickly (within 2-3 seconds) based on the performance capabilities of

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the IRC server system, given that a user has “average” bandwidth at home and a mid-grade PC.

9. The website must be mobile-friendly.
10. Contact info for specific County employees and functions must be readily-accessible and include phone, email, and social media. There should be an easy-to-use contact form, a staff directory (“telephone book”), and a map function, and these should be present on every page.
11. The website should have a prominent, graphical calendar function displaying the current month and highlighting key meetings and happenings.
12. The home page will have an “I want to...” feature that logically and quickly takes the user to a page that satisfies the intent of her/his visit. Reporting an issue must be particularly simple and straightforward.
13. The home page should offer residents an easy tool for identifying their County Commissioner.
14. External agencies should be linked, especially the other IRC constitutional offices and State of Florida agencies/departments.
15. County employees should be easily able to track which webpage features/information items are gaining the most public interest at any time. The most popular search results should be directly linked on the home page.
16. The County website should be prominent on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other popular social media sites.

Content Management System (CMS)

Item 7 in the list above sets a requirement that all departments should have access to and control over the content they present to the user and the website should be easily accessible for editing so the Departments can keep their information current. In order to accomplish that requirement, the County website would have to be moved from static HTML pages, currently updated and managed by IT staff, to a database-driven Content Management System (CMS) to allow for department staff to make changes and updates to website content within each department (Content changes would be held for moderation and approved by IT staff to ensure ADA accessibility standards are applied.) A CMS system shares a group of template pages across the entire site, allow for uniformity of design elements, and the ability to make design changes across the entire site by changing the design style of the template pages. The actual content resides in a single database and is inserted into template pages.

Single County Website

Moving the County websites to a Content Management System (CMS) would require a single website domain name (a single website) to function as a CMS is intended. The County currently has 14 websites with different domain names spread across multiple departments. (See Attachment 1 – County Websites)

New Domain Name

If a consolidation to a single website and domain name was to occur due to a shift to CMS, it would be an opportune time to consider moving to a single domain designated for government-use-only (.gov) and to brand Indian River County in a way previously not achieved with the abbreviated domain ircgov.com. (See Attachment 2 – New County Domain)

Web Services

The County utilizes a number of 3rd party vendors and public web-facing products to conduct business with the public and internal staff. Most of these products would not change with an upgraded County website (See Attachment 3 – Web Services). However, a project to upgrade the County website could include new integrated online services such as a “report a pothole” feature or similar.

FUNDING

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According to Martin County staff, their 2014 web project initial investment was \$250K, with ~\$150K in annual maintenance (over five years, Martin County has spent close to \$1M on the website). Our costs will likely differ, however, this information provides a general indication of potential costs.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Board of County Commissioners discuss the Indian River County websites, domains, and internet-based services to determine board interest in (a.) an upgraded website project, (b.) consolidating websites and allowing for departmental staff updates of web content through a Content Management System (CMS), (c.) a new County domain name, and (d.) any new web services not currently being offered. Based upon Board direction, staff would present a set of specifications and requirements for Board consideration at a later date.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – County Websites
Attachment 2 – New County Domain
Attachment 3 – Web Services

DISTRIBUTION