



Date: October 24, 2003

TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation
FROM: Finance Committee - Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: WEB SITE REDESIGN

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board receive this report for information.

BACKGROUND

The Park Board web site - www.parks.vancouver.bc.ca - is one of the key tools we use to communicate with residents, stakeholders and business partners, visitors and the media. The web site provides a wealth of information on topics such as board meetings, news releases, recreation opportunities, parks, construction projects, bench donations, and dog off-leash areas. It contains over 2,000 pages of information, and receives between 700 and 1,000 visits per day. The current style and organization of the Park Board web site was created in 1997.

DISCUSSION

The Need for Change

The public increasingly expects to find comprehensive, accurate information on an organization's web site. They expect to find the information quickly and easily. As the Park Board site has grown, the current design makes it increasingly difficult for staff to meet these expectations. Some of the problems that needed to be addressed include

- dated layout, artwork and photos
- awkward navigation, dependent on multi layers of information
- difficulty in making changes, updating and editing
- inconsistent look and style in presentation of information
- some out of date content

Goals

Early in 2003, staff embarked on a project to redesign the web site. The project was based on these goals:

- Improve the overall functionality and visual presentation of the website
- Facilitate effective communications and feedback with all audiences
- Encourage brand awareness and support
- Reflect the personality of the organization
- Reach existing customers, make new friends, encourage return visits
- Be user-friendly; find popular information in one click - reduce 'hunting'
- Update to a clean, contemporary, professional style
- Streamline maintenance to ensure information is timely, accurate and consistent
- Make content more relevant, current and interesting

The resulting design was also based on an information gathering phase which included:

- Analyzing statistics on the most popular pages on the existing site
- Interviewing front-line staff at various service areas to determine the information that the public was requesting most frequently
- Researching designs of other web sites - City of Vancouver, other parks and recreation organizations, municipalities, private organizations - to get effective design and content ideas
- Meetings with staff and information owners from across the organization to get their ideas and feedback

Scope and Size

The project has been a major undertaking. After creating the new page styles, the existing information had to be re-organized for more efficient access, and then the 2,000 pages had to be converted to the new style. City IT staff were seconded to assist with this conversion. A decision had to be made on every page as to whether it was still relevant, or needed to be updated, or in some cases deleted. Every page, including approximately 1,000 Board Reports, was assigned an information owner, given a new underlying location and links reviewed and changed if required. Key words were developed and added to every page to assist in searches. New tools are being implemented to enable staff to more easily manage the timely updating of the site.

Key Improvements

One of the key improvements of the redesign is the new home page which includes the use of four “feature boxes”. These feature boxes (one large and three smaller) will include high impact photos, change often and allow us to focus attention on timely news, events, and projects as well as other less timely but still interesting stories of our business. They will enable us to inform, educate, involve and surprise visitors and encourage return visits. In addition, the new home page will include direct “one-click” links to our most popular information.

The inner pages of the new web site will have an updated, clean, consistent look, including green and black header bars, left side navigation menus, standard footers which contain contact and copyright information, and an icon to generate a well-formatted printable page. The technical foundation of these inner pages will enable staff to easily make global changes to any of these elements. These pages are also consistent with the City of Vancouver web site, but with our own distinct colors and graphics. This will make the layout immediately familiar to users of the City's site, and will enable us to take advantage of new web site technology that the City may adopt in the future.

Searching for information will be easier than ever before. A new A - Z search menu will allow easy access to all content. A new data base of parks and facilities will allow visitors to cross reference and search information, grouped by neighborhood, facility or a combination. The data base extends across the site for all related inquiries. For example, the public could search for all grass hockey and lacrosse locations across the city, or in a specific neighbourhood, or in multiple neighbourhoods.

Community Centre pages will be cleaner, with more comprehensive and consistent content. New information will include an descriptive overview and key contacts.

The Golf pages have been updated significantly with new text, new photos and better organization.

News releases will now be archived back to 2002 for ready reference by staff and media.

While a number of new photos, graphics and narrative descriptions will be in place for the launch of the new site, the post-launch phase of the project will see additional pages and sections enhanced.

New Services Online

As we develop more and more of our services online, such as the recreation program registration and golf tee time reservation system, the newly designed site will better accommodate the changes and attract an increasing number of visits.

Launch

The redesign and conversion of existing pages is nearly complete. Key stakeholders will be notified of the changes and improvements, and advised of any technical updates they may need to make to their sites or links. Staff have requested to speak at an upcoming Community Association presidents meeting to give an update and demo. The new site is targeted to go live in early December 2003, and will include a feature box for feedback. After analyzing and incorporating feedback as appropriate, and after further improvements to the site, a formal publicized launch of the site will take place in early 2004.

SUMMARY

A successful web site is one that supplies our customers with program and service information that is both current and comprehensive and meets their changing needs and interests. The new Park Board site will provide our public with easier access to the organization. It will present an updated, clean, professional image, and enable feedback. Over time, it will increase traffic and help build awareness, support and participation. The Finance Committee at its meeting of October 24, 2003 has reviewed the website development plan and demonstration and endorse this new initiative to the Board.

Prepared by:

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