Jan 2, 2021

Mayor Pauline Rochefort
Councillor Terry Kelly
Councillor Steven Trahan
Councillor Erika Lougheed

The Strategic Planning process undertaken by this council produced an ambitious set of action items that are important to the residents of the community. One of those action items was to improve the Municipal website

Re-skin **website**, review content and look at increasing access to information, ensure compliance with accessibility legislation, and upgrade for mobile use.	CAO and Manager of Planning & Economic Development	2019	$8,000

Originally targeted for completion in 2019, in Sept of that year the following item in the minutes for the Sept 16th meeting Communication Committee stated the following

Correspondence and Information:
- Web site update: CAO presented the document received from VSGroup. It was determined that it was more than a re-skinning of the website. Cost was quoted at $11,000 plus taxes. Resolution will be prepared for Council approval at the Council meeting of September 24th, 2019. Committee reviewed the new website design from the Municipality of Callander and the East Ferris Website will be similar

Which resulted in the following resolution passed at the Sept 24th, 2019 Council meeting

2. Resolution approving Municipal Website Re-skinning
2019-260
Moved by Deputy Mayor Voyer
Seconded by Councillor Kelly
WHEREAS in 2018 a $5,000 budget for municipal website enhancements went unspent and was transferred to reserves for future website upgrades;
AND WHEREAS an additional $7,500 was budgeted in 2019 for website enhancements;
AND WHEREAS VS Group currently manages and hosts the municipal website and has met with staff to discuss enhancements to our website including functionality, access to content, and design;
BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that Council approves the quote received from VS Group in the amount of $11,215.00 plus taxes for the redesign and development of the municipal website.
Carried Mayor Rochefort

The new website went live in mid Sept 2020 and although it is a graphical improvement, the content has been reduced and the search capability is non-existent. I reported the problem via the Service Request button on Nov 8th and promptly received a response from Kim Rose

advising that the search function would take some time to work properly since it was powered by Google.

I confess I am not an expert in website search engines, nor Google indexing algorithms, but it seems to me that VS Group, after receiving some $11K should be able to advise our Municipality on how content can be added to the website and how a search function can produce useful results.

I understand that in a small municipality the work to put information online in a format that can be easily accessed is a big project but the goal of increasing access to information will never be achieved if there is not a workplan in place to put that information on the website.

Aside from managing current notices and events, I see little progress in adding content such as active bylaws or studies that have been done but not yet fully implemented. It is recognized that website improvements cannot be done overnight, but it would help to post a timeline of what is expected to be posted and by what time, in addition to a fully functioning website search engine.

There is a social media policy, but no social media strategy that could describe how information is to be posted about the various committees and boards of the Municipality that are working to achieve the goals of the Strategic Plan.

The latest report on the progress of the Strategic Plan implementation is now buried in the News and Notices, which would not be a problem for those who are aware it exists, provided the search function worked. It would be better posted in the same location as the Strategic Plan itself for those who are not aware of its existence though.

It is somewhat ironic that the Accountability and Transparency Policy, although outdated, is not posted on the website.

I would think, at a minimum, the minutes of meetings from all committees should be posted in an organized chronological order on the website, not buried in council meeting minutes.

You may wish to consider posting a summary of concerns received and actions taken to show how input from the community is valued and productive.

It is worth noting that none of the links in the Community Profile are working now, newly updated this past summer but not co-ordinated with the new website.

I assume VS Group was given instructions to make the website compliant with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, now that the requirement to meet WCAG 2.0 Level AA is in force. An online accessibility review indicates there are areas that are not compliant, but a full review by a competent professional would be a good idea, in my opinion.

The Township of Perth South has been used as a comparator for East Ferris in the past and a review of their website indicates comparing their website to that of East Ferris would be valuable in providing direction to the aforementioned proposed workplan.

I think the escribe software utilized by East Ferris is superior to that used by Perth South…although one thing I can suggest is that East Ferris should include sections for all committees and boards, not just the Committee of Adjustment and the Planning Committee. The Economic Development, Parks & Rec, and Communication committee could use their own section, as could the Police and Public Library Boards.

The website is a cornerstone to achieving transparency and accountability and requires ongoing effort to maximize its potential. The Strategic Plan Progress report showed the action item as complete, but in reality the website will never be complete. There should be a posted plan to at least make it current though.

Philip Koning
Corbeil, ON