



TOWN OF PORTSMOUTH  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

2200 EAST MAIN RD • PORTSMOUTH, RHODE ISLAND 02871

August 31, 2010

From: Portsmouth Economic Development Committee

To: Portsmouth Town Council

Subject: Portsmouth Town Website Survey

1. Background.

To provide the Town a measure of the effectiveness of the Town web site, the Economic Development Committee member Doug Smith created and posted on the internet a public survey of the Portsmouth Town Website in late February, 2010. The survey was developed by PEDC to solicit citizen input regarding the current Town Website, with a view towards redesigning the website and making it more user-friendly. During the 4 months the survey was active, 158 responses were registered. This memo summarizes the results of that survey and provides recommendations to the Town Council.

2. Survey Results. The detailed responses and comments are included in enclosures to this memo. Quantitative responses to key questions (numbers rounded) are summarized below:

- **Website Use:** 40% use the website more than once a month, 50% less than that.
- **Website utility:** 75% indicated that the information they were looking for was either very difficult to find or not found at all.
- **Access from Mobile devices:** 59% indicated that they would probably not use a mobile device to access the site.
- **Importance of website to the Town:** 84% indicated that a modern, easy to use website was important for the Town.
- **Meeting the needs of citizens:** 70% rated the website 5 or less on a scale of 10 in meeting their needs.
- **Desired Website information:**
  - Future meeting information (62%)
  - Contact information for Town officials (56%)
  - Ability to contact Town officials from the website (53%)
  - Breaking news and information (45%)
  - Meeting minutes (42%)
  - Official documents (41%)
  - Online payments of taxes and fees (39%)
- **Need for visits to Town Hall:** 60% indicated that a full-featured website would reduce their need to visit the Town Hall.

- **Improving the Website.** In addition to these survey questions, respondents were asked for their comments on improving the website. These comments support an attractive, professionally managed and full-functioned website. The general theme of many comments was the desire and need to allow more public access and participation in Town government through an upgraded Town website. Features that are considered to be key to an effective town site are:
  - **Video Streaming.** Streaming and on-demand videos of Town Council, School Board and other important public meetings
  - **Emergency Data.** Up to date emergency and important information that can be posted as well as “pushed” to Town citizens via a blog, Facebook or Twitter feeds.
  - **User Friendly Searches.** Clear and user-friendly website search ability with links to other important external sites (State, other communities, school department, etc.)
  - **Online payments.** (For taxes and other Town fees)
  - **On-line renewals** (e.g., Town and Transfer Station sticker renewal)
  - **Local Links.** Links to local news, Committee meetings, sports schedules, etc.
  - **Online access to Records.** (e.g., Birth, death certificates, etc.)
  - **Backup reference Information.** Posted backup reference material provided to Town officials for all public meetings
  - **Posted public documents.** (Both final and in draft form while being updated)
  - **Position statements.** (e.g. by Town leaders and candidates for office on controversial or upcoming issues such as budget, policies or initiatives)
  - **Comments and Suggestions.** Ability for citizens to send comments and suggestions to Town officials from the website

3. Conclusions.

Based on the survey results, the EDC concludes that the Town website is in need of major work to be even minimally effective. Many of the features mentioned above are needed to increase its effectiveness. An attractive, full-featured and more user-friendly Town website will benefit all Portsmouth residents by allowing direct access to Town documents, ordinances, meetings agenda and minutes, and Town officials. An updated website will also facilitate the payment of fees and taxes and provide a much needed vehicle for rapidly communicating important information to the public during emergencies. These changes will also enhance Portsmouth’s ability to attract new businesses and residents, since the first impression potential visitors will have of Portsmouth is likely to be from our website.

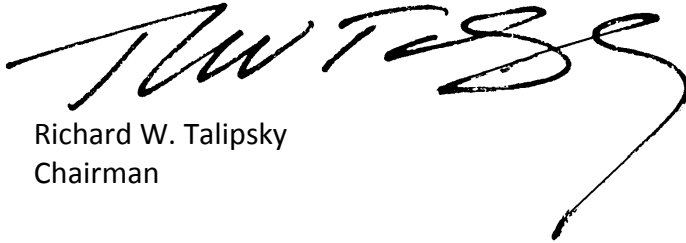
4. Recommendations.

- a. The Town Council resolve’s that the town administrator assign priority effort and necessary resources needed for a complete upgrade of the Portsmouth Town website. The PEDC understands that the Town Administrator is working a website

improvement initiative. He should be given the support and resources to do an effective job.

- b. The Town council resolve's that a plan should be put in place to phase the migration of individual Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to a single town ISP, as current ISP contracts expire, to save money. The PEDC understands that a number of individual town-related web sites (Police Department, Fire Department, etc.) have been established due to the lack of effectiveness of the current town site.
- c. That high priority must be given to migrating current data, keeping data current and providing priority attention to emergency and high priority information that citizens need. Including as many of the key features as possible (provided in paragraph 2 above) will greatly improve the effectiveness of the site.

For the Committee,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. W. Talipsky', with a long, sweeping flourish extending downwards and to the right.

Richard W. Talipsky  
Chairman

Copy to: Town Administrator, Town Councilors

Enclosures:

- 1. Graphic survey results
- 2. Survey Comments