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TIME CRITICAL AGENDA MATERIAL

October 31, 2022

Recommendations for Bright Streets Initiative

Though access for the general public on new items and ongoing matters has been improved, the new website's utility as a resource and archive for specialized or in-depth records and materials, has been severely hobbled. Staff has reported that over 15,000 pages were consolidated into 500, in an attempt to focus the website on a particular and important user experience. Unfortunately, other functionalities were severely reduced and users who have long relied on the website to access a broad range of important materials have limited opportunities to search for and find responsive documents.

Another consequence of removing the City's "old" website is that all links in plans such as the Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Vision Zero Plans, Area Plans, the SOSIP Plan, the Climate Action Plan, Electric Mobility Plan - and all other Plans generated prior to launch of the new website - are broken. Links in every item, memorandum, study, regulation, footnote, press release, health order, or other document or statement generated by the City prior to launch of the new website are also dead.

The changes recommended in this referral are necessary to restore the functionality of the website for the ongoing legislative process, transparency of our local government, and efficiency of staff and the public. These changes will impact all future committee and council meetings, and cannot wait until a future meeting date to be addressed.

Time Critical Items. *A Time Critical item is defined as a matter that is considered urgent by the sponsor and that has a deadline for action that is prior to the next meeting of the Council and for which a report prepared by the City Manager, Auditor, Mayor or Council Member is received by the City Clerk after established deadlines and is not included on the Agenda Committee's published agenda.*

*The author of the report shall bring any reports submitted as Time Critical to the meeting of the Agenda Committee. **Per BMC 2.06.060 (D), Time Critical items must be accompanied by complete reports and statements of financial implications.***



Sophie Hahn
Councilmember
District 5

CONSENT CALENDAR
May 31, 2022

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Sophie Hahn (Author), Councilmembers Terry Taplin, Ben Bartlett and Kate Harrison (Co-Sponsors)

Subject: Restoring and Improving Access to City of Berkeley Website and Archival Materials

RECOMMENDATION

Direct the City Manager to:

1. Restore at previous URLs all PDF documents previously hosted on the City of Berkeley website.
2. Create a publicly accessible archival copy of the City's previous website, CityofBerkeley.info, that can be accessed without logins and via internet search engines. Include a prominent disclaimer noting the date the website, page, or document was archived, with links redirecting to the active website or other responsive resource.
3. On the new website, update Commission pages to include a minimum of 2 years of historic agendas and other materials and update City Council and Council Committee pages to include at least 3 years of complete materials.
4. By July 15, 2022 develop and make available to all City staff and to the public training at beginner to expert levels on use of the City's Records Online search function and create more extensive and less technical self-help resources covering basic and expert use.
5. In recognition of increased public traffic, update the Records Online homepage to explain how the portal works and link to more robust self-help resources and alternative search functions.
6. Coordinate with agency staff to include all relevant records (agendas, minutes, etc.) from Rent Board and Housing Authority in Records Online Portal.
7. Update any remaining 404 pages to explain that the City's website has been moved/updated, and provide links to helpful pages, search functions and/or pathways to access responsive materials. As quickly as possible, consider

implementing redirects with wildcards to direct as many old links to relevant new website pages in lieu of the standard 404 page. E.g. cityofberkeley.info/planning* to the Planning Department site map/homepage, or Department Specific 404 page explaining new navigation.

Refer to the City Manager the following additional improvements to Records Online:

1. Within Records Online, provide unique archival/search categories for each City Commission, Board, Committee and Rent Board, and consider other useful categories, to assist users in narrowing results and identifying responsive materials.
2. Allow Records Online search *results* to be sorted by date and by other searchable factors. Consider means to integrate records online into default site search bar.
3. Explore and report back to Council options for improving the scope of Records Online, improving search options and sorting, and making all materials – or materials from January 1, 2000 (or an earlier recommended date) forward, searchable using internet search engines.

BACKGROUND

The recently launched new City Website has brought many important improvements, in particular with respect to customer/resident services. It's much easier for users to find help with important functions such as requesting a service, reporting a pothole, or paying a bill, and to learn about public-facing services and facilities. It also includes well-organized foundational information about City departments and special projects. All of this represents a huge improvement for these users and uses.

The new website's utility as a resource and archive for specialized or in-depth records and materials, however, has been severely hobbled. Staff has reported that over 15,000 pages were consolidated into 500, in an attempt to focus the website on a particular and important user experience. Unfortunately, other functionalities were severely reduced and users who have long relied on the website to access a broad range of important materials have limited opportunities to search for and find responsive documents.

Another consequence of removing the City's "old" website is that all links in plans such as the Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Vision Zero Plans, Area Plans, the SOSIP Plan, the Climate Action Plan, Electric Mobility Plan - and all other Plans generated prior to launch of the new website - are broken. Links in every item, memorandum, study, regulation, footnote, press release, health order, or other document or statement generated by the City prior to launch of the new website are also dead.

Materials previously accessible via simple search engine queries are no longer accessible, except via an “old school” portal that requires time and expertise to navigate. Unlike 21st Century search engines, Records Online works best when a user knows exactly what they are looking for, including the title and date a document or topic was generated, severely limiting its utility. Broader searches generate voluminous results that cannot be easily browsed, adding significant time to locate materials that previously could be identified instantaneously. For members of the public curious about a City topic or policy, and in particular for staff and Council Members involved in research or writing memos, policies, programs, plans, and other in depth items, the extra time involved searching for responsive documents can add up to hours, and important documents are likely to be missed.

Compounding this problem, website pages that previously linked to years’ worth of archived documents, press releases, memos, regulations, plans and similar materials either no longer exist, or contain only shallow archives. As a result, a veritable trove of documents and reports important to understanding the history and current status of the City and its programs and policies, while technically still available via expert use of Records Online, are functionally beyond reach.

Addressing the loss of critical transparency and functionality with closure of the City’s previous website requires urgent action. This item requires both interim and long term solutions to be implemented on an expedited basis.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Significant reduction in staff time across the organization chasing broken links and searching for materials in Records Online. Staff time to implement requested changes and research additional solutions.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The updated website presents significant challenges for important users and uses. Members of the public, staff, and elected officials are no longer able to reliably locate or navigate current and historic materials. Critical transparency is vastly decreased, and user time across the City and among members of the public is increased, rendering both work and public participation more difficult and time consuming.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

N/A

CONTACT PERSON

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