



Municipal Website Development

Everything you need to know when considering a Website for your municipality.

*Photos by Soar Over It, a division of Shumaker Technology Group.
Litchfield (top, left), St. Ignace (center), Oxford Parks & Recreation (bottom)*

STG Municipal Website Development

The many ways that Websites benefit municipalities.

AN UP-TO-DATE AND USER FRIENDLY WEBSITE is a tool that benefits not just residents, but also the hard working government officials that keep municipalities running. Studies have shown that about 84% of Americans use the internet daily, so it is crucial to make sure your residents have the ability to reach out and see what is happening in their community in an easy and efficient way. A well-equipped Website promotes and informs your community and is available to serve residents 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Why Websites Matter

Websites are a great way to promote all of the amenities of your city, township, or village. Your Website reflects your community, and it is important to have your site represent your home in a positive light. A Website may also be required by or help to meet the requirements of various laws including the Open Meetings Act, PA 660, and the Americans With Disabilities Act.

Informing Residents

Having a user-friendly site is very important in connecting with residents and keeping them informed of current events happening in your community. If your Website has an outdated or confusing navigation menu, or parts of your Website are broken, many residents will give up looking for information online. An ineffective Website isn't much better than no Website at all.

Keeping your Website current is also crucial. Having an up-to-date calendar and other information available on your Website keeps residents involved within the community and brings people together to make your community even stronger. Events like board meetings, trash or recycling collection dates, fundraisers, and other activities that are hosted in your community are important bits of information that everyone should have access to. A Website is a fast and simple way to share this information.

Documents & Forms

One of the biggest complaints we hear from municipal officials is about the overwhelming number of calls they get per week from residents looking for a particular form or permit. These are most commonly burn permits, building and zoning permits, and tax forms. You can easily cut down the number of calls you receive to your office by making these forms available on your Website. That way, not only will residents be able to obtain any and all government documents they need whenever they need them, but it will also reduce the amount of time your staff spends sending documents. To take it a step further, you can make any document into a fillable form, allowing residents to fill out the information online and send it right back to you digitally.



Burn Permits

In rural areas one of the most important permits that residents use are burn permits. The problems with burn permits are frequently the same thing we see with other forms and permits: residents constantly calling in or asking for them. In order to optimize this process we took it a step even further than just an online form and created an online burn permit activation system. Through this simple process, residents can login and activate their burn permit without having to call or come

into the office. The police and fire department are then informed automatically about the activated burn permit, making the whole process easier for both municipal offices and residents.



Mobile-Friendly

Over the past few years, the number of people accessing the internet from their mobile phone or tablet has grown significantly. In fact, more than half of all search traffic now comes from mobile devices, and major search engines are penalizing the ranking of sites that aren't mobile-friendly. This means that a Website that isn't mobile-friendly will appear further down the list of search results, even when the viewer is using a desktop computer. Unfortunately, not all municipal Websites have kept up with the times, and many are still not mobile-friendly. This can be very frustrating for residents or guests who try to visit your site from a mobile device and have to constantly zoom in and out to be able to read your content. These users will have trouble navigating your site because the links are too small to click on, and many will simply give up on using your Website and have to resort to calling the municipal office to get the information they were searching for, thereby taking up more of your valuable time.

Design and Setup

When it comes to the design and content that will be displayed on your site, it is important to take some time and think about what you want your Website to do for you and your community. A great starting point is to look at the Websites of a few similar municipalities in order to get a feel for what you like and don't like about their Websites.

A board meeting or separate committee meeting is a great place to seek advice from board members as well as residents about what they would like to see on your Website. Getting input from residents is very important because the site should be just as good a tool for them to use as it is for you and your team.

Some of the most common categories on most municipal Websites include:

	Officials <i>Mayor, Supervisor, Clerk, Treasurer, Police Chief, Fire Chief..</i>
	Departments <i>Assessing, Building, Cemeteries, Elections, Zoning, Public Safety..</i>
	Permits & Forms <i>Business License Application, Rezoning Applications, Burn Permits, Hall Rental...</i>
	Meeting Minutes and Agendas
	News, Announcements, and Public Notices
	Calendar of Events

Page Planner

STG has created a useful "Page Planner" tool available at shumakergroup.com/page_planner that lets you not only see the common pages and page hierarchy of a municipal Website, but also lets you see various common layouts for each type of page.

Deliverables

If STG is lucky enough to gain you as a new municipal Website client, we will immediately get to work on building your perfect Website. STG's graphic design team will provide design mockups based on any design input received from you as well as our own recommendations. Based on

your feedback, we will provide additional design revisions to ensure that you are perfectly happy with your new Website. Once the design has been approved, STG will begin programming the Website and migrating/adding content to it. We will also take any relevant information from your old Website, if you have one, and transfer the information to your new site. When a municipal client efficiently provides necessary information and approvals to STG, we can typically build the Website from start to finish in four to twelve weeks depending on the size of the site.

Costs

Initial Setup Costs

One of the first costs you will experience while setting up or redesigning a Website is the initial setup cost. This cost is to design the site, populate the site with content or transfer content from your old site, and launch the new Website.



Hosting Costs

Websites need to live on a server that is constantly powered on and connected to the internet. Unless you are fortunate enough to have a dedicated IT staff, it will likely make sense to lease server space in a data center. Doing so usually means that the data center staff are responsible for making sure that the server is on and your Website is accessible at all times, excepting infrequent scheduled server maintenance or emergency downtime.

When it comes to web hosting, quality is often more important than price. In this day and age, people expect that your Website is “up” when they try to go to it and will become instantly frustrated if it isn’t. Many low cost hosting providers skimp

on important things like redundant power/ internet connectivity for their servers, quality backup software, and quality security software.

Ongoing Website Maintenance

A good Website is never “done” since it is important to keep both the information on the site as well as the platform on which the site was built up-to-date. Some municipalities will choose to update and maintain the site themselves through a content management system (CMS). A CMS is a software application or set of related programs that is used to create and manage digital content such as a Website. We can also work in a variety of other popular content management systems such as WordPress, Joomla, Drupal, etc. It is generally wise to be skeptical of web firms that either won’t let you have access to edit your own site, or can only work within a single CMS framework, especially if that framework is proprietary, as you could completely lose access to your data if the firm goes out of business or you decide to move to a new provider.

Other municipalities will contract with an outside provider, usually the designer of the site, to maintain it for them for a fee. For budgeting reasons, it is generally helpful to both the company and the municipality to establish a set monthly fee that includes most to all maintenance that will be necessary on the site as well as an hourly rate for any work which may be requested outside of the scope of the maintenance agreement.

.gov Domain Names

The Cyber Security and Infrastructure Security Agency recommends local government Websites use the .gov domain name. While domain names (a Website’s URL, such as stgmunicipal.com in our case) have historically been another cost, the .gov option is now free. STG can help walk you through the application process.

What To Look For In A Website Firm

Relevant References

Relevant references are one of the biggest things to look for when choosing a web design firm. It is important to check out other Websites that the firm has built and, if possible, talk to some of

these clients about their experience working with the firm.

Longevity

In general, a Website should last anywhere from 3-5 years before you'll want to consider a major redesign or overhaul. Therefore, it is important to make sure that the firm that designs your Website will be around and willing to help you out (at a reasonable price) if you should encounter any issues with the site. This is especially important to keep in mind if you are considering a brand new company or single person instead of an established firm. While going with a less established firm may save you a little money upfront, it could end up costing you big time in the long run. Over the years we've helped several clients who have been abandoned by their previous firm or developer. It's also important to pick a firm that will continue to be available to assist the township even if you leave office.

Price

It can be very difficult to evaluate web design firms based strictly on price. It can be very easy for a one man shop with no overhead to come in at the lowest price, but they likely have the highest risk of not being around to support you in the long run. In one municipal RFP, quotes came in ranging from \$2,389 to \$44,000 to redesign and modernize the same Website.

Talent

Believe it or not, there are absolutely no required licenses or certifications necessary to market oneself as a web developer. Literally any high school student with a laptop and a chair can present themselves as such. And, while it's certainly possible that they'll do a great job, a spectacular Website is the combination of many different specialties that a single person is unlikely to possess all of. At a minimum, a well rounded web design team should consist of a:

- Graphic Designer to make sure that your Website looks great
- Back-End Programmer/Database Designer to make sure that your Website is well coded

- Front-End Developer to make sure that your site has a great user interface and is compatible with all major desktop and mobile browsers
- Server/Security Expert to make sure that your server and Website are properly secured
- Project Manager to manage this team and ensure everyone's expertise comes together to produce a Website you can be proud of.

ADA & Website Accessibility

While the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) doesn't specifically reference Website accessibility, numerous recent court cases overwhelmingly suggest that Website accessibility is required under the law. By designing your Website to be accessible to people with disabilities (including but not limited to visual, hearing, or fine motor impairment) you are not only helping protect your municipality from liability, but are also making critical information easier to access for those with and without disabilities. At Shumaker Group, we strive to abide by these guidelines without sacrificing Website quality.

About The Shumaker Technology Group

In 2001, when Kyle Shumaker was still in high school, he built his first client Website. From there, while receiving a degree in Computer Science from Michigan State University, he continued to take on more projects, and the projects continued to grow. The Shumaker Technology Group was officially founded in 2007 and has grown to house a whole team of programmers, designers, and marketers. Today, we serve over 200 municipal clients in the State of Michigan.

We'd Love To Meet You

At Shumaker Group, we love to meet with clients and potential clients. Whether it's making a presentation to your board, helping you brainstorm ideas for your first Website, or suggesting ways in which your current Website could be improved, we'd love the opportunity to come out and meet with you. Please don't hesitate to invite us out to learn more about your municipality.

Municipal Website Portfolio

A selection of our municipal Website development work.



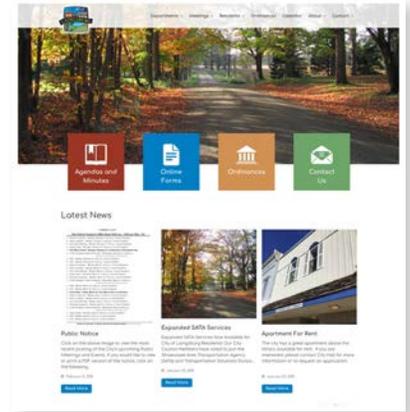
Morton Township
Mecosta County, MI

www.mortontownship.org



City of Litchfield
Hillsdale County, MI

www.cityoflitchfield.org



City of Laingsburg
Shiawassee County, MI

www.laingsburg.us

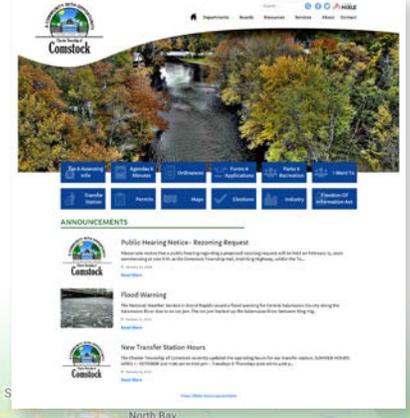


Brandon Township
Oakland County, MI

www.brandontownship.us

View our full website development portfolio at stgmunicipal.com

STG proudly serves over 200 Michigan municipalities. Thank you to our municipal clients!



Comstock Charter Township
Kalamazoo County, MI

www.comstockmi.gov



Why does your municipality need a Website?

Comply with laws such as the Open Meetings Act, Public Act 660, and Americans With Disabilities Act.

Reduce calls to the office by having information online.

Keep residents informed of current events.

Save time by having forms available online.

Be accessible anywhere and anytime with a mobile-friendly site.

Give guests a great first impression of your municipality.

And much much more! Find out inside.



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