

**TO:** Andrew P. Powers, City Manager

**FROM:** Alexandra South, Director of Strategic Communications and Public Affairs

**DATE:** February 28, 2023

**SUBJECT:** City Website Redesign, Intranet, and Content Management System

**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Award professional services agreement to JesseJames Creative, New York, NY, for the City Website Redesign, Library Website Redesign and Content Management System (CMS), and cloud-based hosting project for an amount not-to-exceed \$220,000.
2. Authorize expenditure of available funds in the total amount of \$220,000 from A/C # 001-0830-646.56-99.
3. Find that this action is not a project as defined under the California Environmental Quality Act.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

**No Additional Funding Requested.** \$220,000 is included in the Adopted FY 2022-23 General Fund Budget.

**BACKGROUND:**

In June 2015, the City entered into an agreement with Vision Internet Providers to design the City's internet website. Vision Internet Providers has served as the City's website provider for nearly eight years and has provided several content management upgrades and minor structure updates. The website is integral to the City's overall communications strategy.

The current website has served its purpose since 2015 as a way to provide information on City programs and services. However, its functions and features are limited and are not up to date with current website trends. For example, the

City website is not fully functional on a mobile device or tablet, which is a significant portion of the website traffic.

There is a growing challenge facing cities across the nation in how they can effectively communicate with residents because the public has an expectation for the rapid dissemination of information. Community Attitude Survey data from 2020 revealed useful insights into the City website's role in communicating with residents. The website was not identified in the top 5 resources of information for residents. This is indicative of a website that has outlived its useful age. While 50 percent of respondents reported having visited the City website for information within a year of the survey, its rating for being a source of information has fallen significantly as competing sources of information, that are easier to use, have expanded such as Twitter and other social media channels. Based on Google web analytics, during FY 2021-22, the website's homepage averaged over 7,000 visits per month and the entire website averaged more than 97,000 unique site visits per month.

### **DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:**

In an effort to make the City's website more innovative, transparent, responsive, and mobile-friendly, the City issued a formal Request for Proposals/Qualifications (RFP/Q) for Professional Services for City Website and Library Website Redesign, and Content Management System (CMS) on September 30, 2022. Twenty-six proposals were received. A committee comprised of staff from the City Manager's Office, Information Technology, and Library, reviewed all proposals and rated each proposer based on their qualifications, background, and proposal quality.

The committee selected the top five proposals and the following four vendors participated in oral interviews:

1. Civic Plus, Manhattan, KS
2. Interpersonal Frequency, Mclean, VA
3. JesseJames Creative, New York, NY
4. Planeteria, Santa Rosa, CA

The fifth vendor selected to interview was not able to find a suitable time in the designated interview timeframe. Each vendor shared their approach and plan to address some of the current website's biggest challenges, as well as each of their unique solutions to scaling and keeping the new site highly functional. Selection criteria were based on ease of use, features, functions, and mobile capabilities. After following up on the interviews with an additional list of questions and concerns, the committee unanimously selected JesseJames Creative.

JesseJames Creative currently provides over 400 government websites. Their design offered the most informative and attractive public websites as well as the most intuitive content management system. The cost of the system is \$165,250 with an estimated annual hosting fee of \$9,000 with a guaranteed 99.98% uptime. The remaining funds will be utilized for photography, additional design features, illustration, and additional work needed as the project progresses.

The City is committed to leveraging technology to better engage the community. By partnering with JesseJames Creative, innovation, functionality, productivity, and performance will enhance the City's current outdated website.

Elements such as a unique look and feel, custom form builder, upgraded eCommerce capability, a robust search feature, responsive design, and strong focus on digital marketing and amplifying information will provide the public quick access to information on City programs and services.

A critical aspect of building a new website is to ensure Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance in the City's digital spaces. Ensuring accessible content to all users is a top priority and maintaining the content can be challenging. The CMS that JesseJames Creative brings complies through required alternative text on images, accessible design elements for limited/low vision users, and document uploads that allow the document to be read by most screen reading programs. In addition, a more intuitively integrated language translation option will help increase the reach of the City's website to users of any language. A redevelopment of the information architecture will make the new site easier to navigate, search, and prioritize the most critical pieces of information for the public.

As the City seeks to recruit and retain top talent, the website is often the first touchpoint for a candidate seeking a career. By offering an attractive, easy-to-use, forward-thinking digital first impression, the City's recruitment efforts are strengthened in a competitive market. Job seekers are more likely to find careers and City information that can have an impact on their decision to apply for an open position.

The City is constantly striving to improve communications both internally and externally. Community Attitude Surveys revealed that residents feel the City can do a better job engaging them and receiving feedback. The investment in a new website is an example of how the City is responding. The City has put a strong emphasis on civic engagement and a new and improved public website that offers interactive, accessible, and innovative tools to engage and communicate effectively. Through the implementation of a new website, the City gains state-of-the-art features with a responsive design, engaging content loaded based on analytics and demand, an open data catalog, and dynamic content that are easily accessible and will further enhance these communication goals.

**COUNCIL GOAL COMPLIANCE:**

Meets the following City Council goals:

A. Create a more equitable, accessible, safe, welcoming, and inclusive government and community regardless of race, color, ethnicity, religion, sex, physical or mental ability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, age, language, education, and/or socio-economic status.

B. Provide municipal government leadership which is open and responsive to residents, and is characterized by ethical behavior, stability, promoting public trust, transparency, confidence in the future, and cooperative interaction among civic leaders, residents, business representatives, and staff, while recognizing and respecting legitimate differences of opinion on critical issues facing the City.

C. Operate City government in a fiscally and managerially responsible and prudent manner to ensure that the City of Thousand Oaks remains one of California's most desirable places to live, work, visit, recreate, and raise a family.

K. Prepare for transition of City workforce by ensuring that sufficient succession planning takes place to develop an employment base which is reflective of the community's demographics.

Attachments:

Attachment #1 – JesseJames Creative Professional Services Agreement