



October 16, 2018

To: Jeannine Robbins, Strategic & Legislative Affairs Administrator  
Winsome Jacobs, Information Technology Director

From: Alice Garner, Internal City Auditor *Alice Garner*

Re: City of Ocala Website Content - Project No. 2018-10

We have conducted an audit of the City of Ocala website content, as scheduled per the FY 2018 Internal Audit Plan. The objectives of the audit were to determine whether website content is accurate and current, and the approval process for website content is adequate. The audit was conducted by Phillip Vincent.

To accomplish these objectives, we inquired with City staff, reviewed webpages for typographic and grammatical errors, tested webpage links for functionality, assessed the appropriateness of user access, ensured that all City departments were represented on the website, and compared a list of services offered to those accessible on the website.

Our audit included such tests of records and other auditing procedures, as we considered necessary in the circumstances. Although there are several websites associated with the City of Ocala, our audit work was focused on its primary website, [www.ocalafl.org](http://www.ocalafl.org). Our audit period was June 1, 2018 through July 31, 2018. However, transactions, processes, and situations reviewed were not limited by the audit period.

During the course of our audit, we noted several aspects of the operations that were working effectively:

- All City departments are represented on the website.
- The layout of the website allows for easy access to online services.
- Web representatives are the subject matter experts in their departments.
- Web representatives have been adequately trained on Vision software.
- Super User account access to Vision software is properly restricted.

Based on our work performed, we conclude that website content is accurate and current. However, we also conclude that the approval process for website content is not adequate. Some opportunities for improvement are noted.

We appreciate the cooperation and assistance provided by the Office of Strategic Engagement, the Information Technology department, and also other entities contacted during the course of our audit.

Cc: Ocala City Council Members  
John Zobler, City Manager  
Bill Kauffman, Assistant City Manager  
Ken Whitehead, Assistant City Manager  
Sandra Wilson, Deputy City Manager

## **BACKGROUND:**

The address of the City's website is [www.ocalafl.org](http://www.ocalafl.org). It is the official website for the City of Ocala and is the primary "face" of the City to the public. On the website, users can find information from each of the City's different departments, pay their electric bill, see the calendar of events, read press releases, and much more. The navigation bar at the top of the home page includes: Services, Living, Visitors, Businesses, Government, and a search feature. The navigation bar at the bottom of the home page includes: Licensing and Permits, Employment, Recreation and Parks, Utility Services, Transportation, and City Maps. The home page also contains a slider panel with several beautiful pictures, as well as highlighted calendar events and news articles. The website consists of about 680 pages.

In October 2016, the website was redesigned by Vision Internet Providers; existing content was also migrated. One of the many reasons for the new website was to become compliant with the American with Disabilities Act. The new website also provided for a more user-friendly look, with a selection of webpage templates, and features such as the Vision Content Management System (VCMS). The purpose was to decentralize the maintenance of the website from the Information Technology department to web representatives in various departments so that content could be updated on a more frequent basis by the actual subject matter experts. There are currently 42 active web representatives responsible for the City's main website. The web representatives initiate edits to their webpages in VCMS, and the request is routed to the Marketing and Communication Manager for approval. The Marketing and Communication Manager makes any necessary changes before posting the content to the website.

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT:**

Our audit disclosed certain policies, procedures, and practices that could be improved. Our audit was neither designed, nor intended, to be a detailed study of every relevant system, procedure, or transaction. Accordingly, the Opportunities for Improvement presented in this report may not be all-inclusive of areas where improvement may be needed.

1. **The website contains numerous broken links.** We tested the links included on 611 webpages of the City's website and found that 84 of the links returned an error message. We also discovered that another 82 links were not working as intended; for example, clicking on the link does nothing or takes the person to the wrong information. According to staff, a process is not in place to ensure that the links are operating as intended. Trying to access information that is actually a broken link will likely cause an inconvenience to the website user because the information is unavailable. The user will then have to call, or visit the City in-person, to obtain the needed information.



**We recommend** management instruct the departments to periodically ensure that the webpage links are working as intended.

**Management's Response:** We concur. IT staff has corrected the majority of broken links. Links that were content specific, or required input from specific departments, were sent to that department's web representative for correction. To address this issue moving forward, IT has created a website policy that requires web representatives to review their content on a regular basis. The website policies and procedures were implemented as of 9/19/2018.

2. **The website contains errors, as well as instances of what may be offensive language.** We noted 95 out of 658, or 14%, of the webpages tested contain typographic, grammatical, or formatting errors. Two webpages contain several instances of language that may be considered offensive or politically incorrect. According to City staff, webpages are reviewed for these types of errors and content prior to publishing the webpage for the public to view. However, this single review process was ineffective at preventing the mistakes. In order to maintain a user-friendly and professional appearance, the City's website should be free of errors and offensive language. The effect that this could have on the City would be damage to its reputation, caused by users doubting the professionalism of employees.

**We recommend** management implement a review process for website content at the department level. The reviewer should be different from the person posting the content.

**Management's Response:** We concur. To address this issue moving forward, IT has created a website policy that requires web representatives to have an internal staff member review their content prior to it being submitted to the website's official approval process. The Office of Strategic Engagement will also continue to work diligently to ensure that all webpages are free of errors and potentially offensive or politically incorrect information. We are confident that the new multi-step review process within each department prior to uploading the content into Vision Internet will be beneficial in this effort. The website policies and procedures were implemented as of 9/19/2018.

3. **Policy for website content and review does not exist.** During our audit work, we surveyed 37 web representatives responsible for updating website content. As a result, we noted that none of them were aware of any written policies and procedures nor did any web representative have an informal policy within their own department. According to the Office of Strategic Engagement, a written policy doesn't exist because updating the website is an implied responsibility of the web representatives. However, as previously noted, we found numerous errors and broken links throughout the website. Without a written policy, the content of the webpages is subject to each web representative and could produce a website

that is not uniform in appearance or updated on a consistent basis. A written policy could have prevented the Opportunities for Improvement, numbers 1 and 2, above.

**We recommend** that management establish a written policy for website content. The policy should include standards for consistency in writing formats, including items such as dates, time, numbers, and abbreviations, as well as any requirements for ensuring that website content is current and operating as intended.

**Management's Response:** We do not concur. Both parties agree it would be extremely difficult to enforce a policy on writing standards. There are 50+ website representatives, all possessing different writing styles. For the majority of the City's web representatives, website content management isn't their primary job function, nor are they properly trained in writing styles. However, while we do not feel that we can enforce writing styles, we can continue to convey the importance of posting accurate, timely and grammatically correct information to the City's website.

4. **Website users are not warned when they click on a link that causes them to leave the City's website.** During our testing, we found 121 webpages with external links that did not notify the user that they would be redirected to another website. According to Information Technology department staff, the Vision Internet software has a feature, that when activated, would display a warning message, enabling the user an opportunity to first consider whether the other website is trusted before continuing. Without this feature activated, users may be redirected to an external site which may be inconvenient, contain inappropriate material, or be harmful if it contains computer viruses.

**We recommend** management activate the software feature that would warn users when clicking on a link that redirects them to an external site.

**Management's Response:** We concur. Information Technology contacted the software vendor, VisionInternet, and had them enable external link redirection. Implemented as of 7/20/18.