



Wisconsin Elections Commission

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DATE: For the December 1, 2021 Commission Meeting

TO: Members, Wisconsin Elections Commission

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Administrator

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SUBJECT: WEC Website Redesign Project Update

1. Introduction

WEC staff presented a proposal to redesign WEC's elections.wi.gov website at the September 9, 2021 commission meeting where commission members expressed support for the project. Since that time, WEC staff have completed an initial update of the website's Drupal content management platform and contracted with Northern Commerce, Inc. for their professional support in designing a content and information architecture strategy. Additionally, staff have contracted with Acquia, Inc. to provide hosting, maintenance, and support of the WEC website long-term. The migration to the Acquia platform is underway.

2. Phase Updates

Discovery

On October 29, WEC staff kicked off the discovery phase of the WEC website redesign project with Northern. WEC staff are working with a team from Northern who specialize in designing content management website's using Drupal. Internal discovery processes over the summer already identified major priorities of improving the site's search function and making the site more usable for its key users including clerks, election inspectors, candidates, voters, and the media. Northern began facilitating focus group user sessions with WEC staff the week of November 8 to learn more about existing protocols for posting and approving site content, the background architecture of the site, and how staff manage irrelevant content. An additional session that week covered goals for the new website, desired tone, and key workflows or information types that different users seek out on the WEC website. Discovery continued the week of November 15 where clerks, election inspectors, and voters were the subject of the focus groups. During this same time, Northern has completed a content audit of the site which includes site inventory, an analysis of the content sitemap, and current usage of existing pages. WEC staff have also evaluated options for maintaining older iterations of the site and associated content like guidance, communications, and other documents deemed to be no longer

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Administrator
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relevant due to legislative changes, etc. with the Wisconsin Historical Society so that this information is accessible as needed through the WI Electronic Records Portal, but not confused with current information.

Content Strategy and Information Architecture

Using the information gathered at focus group sessions, in December 2021 Northern will present a plan to restructure the site's home page, menus, search tool and page layouts to make information easier to find, and to better guide users to complete key tasks. WEC staff advised the tone of the website should be formal, use simple language, and be accessible to all audiences. Additionally, Northern will provide recommendations on how to create structured content so that information is presented appropriately in search results. They will also provide a strategy to allow for archiving information that is no longer current, which will allow WEC's website to remain relevant as statutes, policies, and guidance changes over time. WEC staff expect to approve the website content strategy and site architecture plan by the end of December 2021.

The next phase of the project is to involve graphic design specialists and developers to design and create the look and feel of the site and its workflows. This phase integrates the strategy established in phase 1 with a complementary visual design and then brings that design to life in a polished website. This process may only begin once the commission has approved the purchase for the rebuild phase of the project. The motion listed in this memo is to approve the costs associated with the next phase of the project. With commission approval, staff and Northern will kick-off the next phase of the project in January 2022.

Development

On November 11, 2021, WEC staff completed an update of WEC's website from Drupal 8 to Drupal version 9. Drupal has discontinued support of Drupal 8 as of November 2. Drupal 9 is the most current version and required by Acquia. On November 15, WEC staff met with Acquia to begin the migration of the WEC website onto their platform. Using Acquia will mean that the State of Wisconsin will no longer host the WEC website and Acquia will be responsible for maintaining up to date security patches, software versions, and responding to critical incidents.

The actual building out of the new WEC website on Acquia's platform will be performed by Northern professional services. Development is anticipated to start in January 2022. The costs of designing and developing the new site to be ready and tested by June 2022 is anticipated not to exceed \$190,000. As indicated at our last commission meeting, WEC staff and contractors do not possess the level of technical expertise in Drupal required to build the new site. WEC staff recommend approving the design and development costs associated to the WEC website to remain on track with delivering the new site between the Spring and Fall elections of 2022.

3. Conclusion and Suggested Motion

WEC staff will continue to work with our Northern and Acquia counterparts to deliver the new and improved WEC website by June 2022. At this time, WEC staff have one recommended motion for the consideration of the Commission.

Suggested Motion: The Wisconsin Elections Commission approves the purchase of design and development services for WEC's elections.wi.gov website at a total cost not to exceed \$190,000.