CITY OF WATERLOO
WATERLOO, IOWA
50702

Date: May 7, 2021
To: City of Waterloo
From: Adesso, Bautista, Ikanovic, Shumaker, and Villarrea
Cc: Iowa School of Planning and Public Affairs
Re: Communications

INTRODUCTION
The current Waterloo city website does not have easily accessible housing information.

SUMMARY
When cities have easily accessible information on their website, it allows citizens to find exactly what they are looking for in a matter of minutes. This reduces the number of calls to the city center and keeps information transparent. By implementing the simple changes explained below, call traffic and housing confusion will decrease greatly.

BACKGROUND
The Waterloo city website holds all information related to housing. The website is organized by city department, but there are multiple departments where an individual could find information about housing. The departments where housing information is available include:
1. Housing Authority
2. Neighborhood Services
3. Buildings and Inspections

Under Housing Authority, there is information on different housing programs, housing quality, and myths and facts about housing. The Neighborhood Services page contains information on some more housing programs, homelessness, and code enforcement. The Building and Inspections page has information on building codes and inspection guidelines. It is not clear how the information has been organized and why certain information is under different departments. The lack of clarity and organization lead to issues for constituents finding the housing information they need.

STAKEHOLDERS
Residents of Waterloo
This website will provide information that is not only useful for citizens looking into the housing market of Waterloo, but for its residents altogether. Information about city codes, bill payment portals and general information about the housing market will create a place where residents can have access to all the information that they need.
Landlords in Waterloo
Our website will provide landlords with the resources that they need to keep up to date with housing regulations, inspection standards and city codes. Landlords will be a key stakeholder so they can keep their properties up to standard, as well as be aware of when a tenant needs to be reminded of important information. Landlords will also be able to utilize the website to direct tenants to easy billing options as to not miss any payments.

<u>Tenants in Waterloo</u>
The tenants of Waterloo will benefit greatly from the creation of a housing focused website. Tenants will have access to a "one stop shop," payment page, housing information and city codes, as well as information regarding on the responsibilities that fall on tenants. This website will help prevent confusion regarding housing regulations and options, as well as help the landlord- tenant relationship as both parties will have more information at their disposal.

BEST PRACTICES
- **<u>Operation Threshold</u>**
  - The homepage of this website has three distinct sections that provide important information. The FAQ section is a quick and easier way for people to look for and find answers to questions they might have had regarding housing. The quick links section was found in relatively the same on every single page which makes navigation dependable and easy.
- **<u>City of Des Moines</u>**
  - The City of Des Moines website had a very easygoing self-explanatory lay out. The "I want to find" tab made it easy to search for whatever it is that the person is looking for without the hassle of going through page after page of information. The "How do I find" tab also comes with action items marked as apply, contact, and pay, register, and request. These action items take you to the page that you are looking for making it easy to apply or pay a bill.
- **<u>Habit For Humanity</u>**
  - The Habit for Humanity website has a lot of aspects that make the website accessible. Their bold and contrasting headings as well as eye catching graphics makes it easy to look at. The informative subheadings did exactly that, inform, making it easy to find information.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
Below is a concise list of recommendations for changes to the current city website[1].
- **<u>People and Action Based Headings</u>**
  - By changing the top heading of the website to "people-based," it allows visitors of the site to easily relate to one of the options. Since this is the first text frame visitors see, it decreases the amount of time spent searching for information. Underneath the "people-based" text is "action-based" text. All relevant material related to the "person" will be consolidated underneath. This can include forms, deadlines, and city codes.
- **<u>Include a "Turn In" Tab</u>**
  - This section is a button that visitors can click, bringing them to a submitting section. Here, visitors can submit complaints, lease agreements, payments, and other online forms necessary for housing. Including a "turn in" tab reduces the amount of foot traffic in the office and saves time from the city side and the client side.

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[1] The recommendations for the city website may be different then recommendations for the Housing Website. The Housing Website is part of our project and has its own list of recommendations in creating an entirely new website solely dedicated to housing.

- **<u>Add a F.A.Q. Section</u>**
  - Many questions are simple and can be answered quickly, however with an unorganized website, it is more likely that visitors will take time to call or write an email to the city. With a simple frequently asked questions section, visitors to the website will be able to find their question and answer it themselves.

NEXT STEPS
- **<u>Purchasing Website Domain</u>**
  - For any protected website to exists on the world wide web and be accessible to the public a domain must be obtained. There are free ways to obtain a website domain, however, to maintain a secure domain that cannot be duplicated purchasing one is required. There are countless places to purchase a domain from GoDaddy to square space, many of these sites also double as website design sites to both purchase the domain and design the website. This will be paid for by tax raises, or through a preset budget from the local government. The person or people to purchase this domain can be from the workforce that will be created to maintain the website.
- **<u>Supply workforce to update, maintain, and protect the website.</u>**
  - Websites are not self-sustaining and because of that some sort of position or team must be created to maintain, update, and protect the website. A force with the combined efforts of both the IT, communications, and housing department can do this easily as the workforce required to keep the website fully operational is not large. This can ensure that the website stays up to date on the housing information, can promote community housing events, and stay secure from any malpractice that could be brought upon it.

Resources Report

Click here to visit the mock "Waterloo Housing" website. This website indicates an entire list of our policy recommendations for a new website dedicated to housing specifically which can be found below:

New Housing Website Recommendations
- Change heading to "people based" followed by "action based" words
  - Landlords, Tenants, Homeowners (along with Programs, Payments, and Policy Codes)
  - This will make it easier for users to think "This is who I am, and this is what I need to do/want to read more about"
- Landlord
  - How to become one
  - Deadline information
  - Inspection information
  - Landlord rights
  - Links on how to ensure a safe home for your tenants
- Tenants
  - Tenant rights
  - Deadline information
  - Inspection information
- Homeowners
  - How to become one
  - Finding the right home for you
  - Who to contact based on:
         -Income
  - Geography
- Programs
  - Black Hawk County payment programs
  - Section 8
  - Look on website and copy/paste the programs they have
- Include Payment options
  - Make paying for anything super easy along with contacting by having the same consistent button on each page
- F.A.Q
  - Include this on the home page
- Include a "turn in" section
  - You can turn in complaints, lease agreements, and anything else right on the website along with being able to download or print documents
- Who's Who
  - Put a name to a face – this could allow for people to me more friendly with one another and get work done quicker