



## The Tangled Web

Oh, What a Mangled Web We Weave...

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### Summary

The public relies on current, accurate information to conduct its business with government agencies and offices. As we the Grand Jury have accessed county and city websites to gather data and contact government officials, we find that website information is sometimes inaccurate and out-of-date. In fulfilling our charter as an advocate for the public to improve government operations, we will point out where these errors exist and direct those responsible to provide a reliable information platform to the public.

## **Background**

From the Institute for Local Government, June 2012:<sup>[1]</sup>

*A local government agency's website is "home base" for how it organizes the way it wants to involve residents in local decision-making. How transparent and accessible is information about public meetings? Can community members easily find the issues they care about and sign up for updates?*

### ***County, City, and Local Agency Websites: Where the Public Goes for Information***

Thinking about what might usefully go on the agency's site is a timely question. For example, a Pew Research Center study<sup>[2]</sup> found that 61 percent of Americans either looked for information or completed a transaction on a public agency website in the 12 months before the study.

Specific website activities mentioned in that study with the highest concentration of interest included the following:

- Agency Information – 48 percent of users looked for information about the agency or issues within the jurisdiction and powers of the agency;
- Agency Services – 46 percent used the internet to determine what services were offered by the agency; and
- Agency Records – 41 percent downloaded forms while 35 percent researched official documents and/or agency statistics.

Additionally, about one-third of the studied users access alternate online communication platforms such as blogs, social networking sites, email, online video and text messaging. A quarter of these users want to actively participate and share their ideas and views on policies, procedures or issues.

Effective websites, according to the research by Dalhousie University,<sup>[3]</sup> apply these 6 criteria for good content:

1. **AUTHORITY** Authority reveals that the person, institution or agency responsible for a site has the qualifications and knowledge to do so. ...
2. **PURPOSE** The purpose of the information presented in the site should be clear. Some sites are meant to inform, persuade, state an opinion, entertain, or parody something or someone. ...
3. **COVERAGE** It is difficult to assess the extent of coverage since depth in a site, through the use of links, can be infinite. One author may claim comprehensive coverage of a topic while another may cover just one aspect of a topic. ...
4. **CURRENCY** Currency of the site refers to: 1) how current the information presented is, and 2) how often the site is updated or maintained. It is important to know when a site was created, when it was last updated, and if all of the links are current. ...

5. **OBJECTIVITY** *Objectivity of the site should be clear. Beware of sites that contain bias or do not admit its bias freely. Objective sites present information with a minimum of bias. ...*
6. **ACCURACY** *There are few standards to verify the accuracy of information on the web. It is the responsibility of the reader to assess the information presented. ...*

It is advised to: include the ownership of the content, state the purpose and scope of the information, assure that the information is current and when and how often it is maintained, and that the content be factual, objective, and accurate.

## **Scope and Methodology**

Grand Jury members look for contact information, budget data, policies and procedures, etc. in order to conduct their investigations. The Grand Jury therefore typifies the experiences of the public to access information and execute transactions.

The necessary information on county and city websites at times is more than 12 months old; annual reports are not current, members of organizations and committees have moved on and rosters have not been updated; in addition, organization charts are inconsistent and do not contain contact information. This hampers the user's ability to make progress, and reflects on the potential struggles the public can have to access government services.

We reviewed the policy of the county as documented on its web page.<sup>[4]</sup> We were unable to obtain similar policies for the cities. We also made note of the strategic plans, which document enhancements and improvements that will be analyzed and implemented over time. To understand the respective responsibilities for information system platform and content management, we interviewed responsible individuals. To test the trouble reporting capability on county websites we also entered trouble reports where this was possible.

From the Dalhousie model cited above, we concentrated on the attributes of **Currency** and **Accuracy**. Note that compliance with codes governing reporting or disclosure obligations was not assessed. We were not seeking to verify content in any and all web pages accessed, nor every commission or special district website. We make no claim of being exhaustive in our research. Our discoveries were limited to instances where, in the course of research or investigation, we found a deficiency in the information or operation of a website. We cite examples in this report for demonstration.

In addition, when asked, Information Technology officials cited information security as their number one concern. And rightly so. Their vigilance in monitoring and managing attacks, spyware, malware and ransomware is essential and appreciated—this, however, was not included in the scope or intent of this report.

## Investigation

There may be reasonable explanations for why errors and omissions exist in website information, but those explanations are not presented on the website, nor are estimates for when the website will be corrected. Without an understanding of why information is missing, users may continue to spend time searching for information that does not exist, whose unavailability is known to administrators, but not to users. For example, in the city of Santa Cruz [SIRE](#) agenda system, minutes from the Equal Employment Opportunity Committee (EEOC) meetings and the records of several meetings were missing with no explanation, although the reasons for omissions were known to staff.<sup>[5]</sup>

There are mechanisms for reporting errors in websites (like ‘contact webmaster’ links). Emails from users are typically acknowledged, but there is no follow-up when problems are resolved or remediated.

The cities of Santa Cruz, Watsonville, Scotts Valley, and Capitola all provide mechanisms for users to be notified via email when website content has changed. (See [Appendix A](#)) The county does not provide this capability on its website. Although social media presence can partially supplant the need for these notifications, it does not allow for users to be selectively notified based on specific areas of interest.

We discovered that the County website includes a **Contact Webmaster** button at the bottom of each page to report any user issues:



Figure 1.

While the Contact Webmaster webpage<sup>[6]</sup> reached from that button allows for reporting these issues, and receipt acknowledgement is timely, the resulting forwarding to the department owning the content has no closed loop. It is not verified for completion and the user reporting the problem is not informed as to disposition.

In [Appendix B](#) we provide a sample of deficiencies in websites: broken links, outdated information. In [Appendix C](#) we show the examples of county and city goal-setting for Information Technology improvement. These documented goals are directionally sound but lack specificity, quantified objectives, and delivery time goals.

## **Findings**

- F1.** County and City website information is sometimes missing, out-of-date, and inaccurate; links may be broken. Thus, many city and county departments aren't updating their websites often enough to keep citizens informed.
- F2.** County and City administrations lack a process to review content accuracy and currency and thereby assure timely correction and revision of content.
- F3.** County and City goals for website redesign or quality improvement are not sufficiently "SMART": Specific + Measurable + Attainable + Relevant + Time-Bound.
- F4.** The County does not have a notification system by which users can be alerted to updated web content. The County's website would be enhanced by the addition of a site-wide notification system.
- F5.** County and City website content providers do not provide an explanation in content for incorrect or out-of-date information, even though they appear to know the reasons.

## **Recommendations**

- R1.** The County Administrative Officer and the City Managers should establish a formal process by December 31, 2020 for their departments to validate and verify the accuracy and currency of website information. (F1, F2, F5)
- R2.** The County Administrative Officer and the City Managers should establish a protocol to be exercised quarterly, beginning January 2021, which requires department heads to confirm via documentation (initial a spreadsheet, for example) that they have verified the accuracy of their department's web information (F1, F2, F3)
- R3.** The County Administrative Officer and the City Managers should establish 'SMART' goals for website quality assurance and manage these goals beginning in 2021. (F3, F4, F5)
- R4.** County ISD should provide a notification system similar to the city of Santa Cruz by June 2021 whereby users receive email or text messages when updated web information is available. (F4)

## Required Responses

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Respond Within/ Respond By</b>
Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors	F1–F5	R1–R4	90 Days September 14, 2020
Capitola City Council	F1–F3, F5	R1–R3	90 Days September 14, 2020
Santa Cruz City Council	F1–F3, F5	R1–R3	90 Days September 14, 2020
Scotts Valley City Council	F1–F3, F5	R1–R3	90 Days September 14, 2020
Watsonville City Council	F1–F3, F5	R1–R3	90 Days September 14, 2020

## Requested Responses

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Respond Within/ Respond By</b>
Santa Cruz County Administrative Officer	F1–F5	R1–R4	90 Days September 14, 2020
City Manager of Capitola	F1–F3, F5	R1–R3	90 Days September 14, 2020
City Manager of Santa Cruz	F1–F3, F5	R1–R3	90 Days September 14, 2020
City Manager of Scotts Valley	F1–F3, F5	R1–R3	90 Days September 14, 2020
City Manager of Watsonville	F1–F3, F5	R1–R3	90 Days September 14, 2020

## Definitions

- **SIRE:** Store Index Retrieve Exchange, a [software product](#) of Hyland Software, Inc.

## Sources

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<http://www.cityofsantacruz.com/how-do-i/register-or-sign-up-for/news-and-notifications>
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<http://www.santacruzcountyyfire.com/>
9. Santa Cruz City Equal Employment Opportunity Committee Member Roster and Contact Information webpage. Accessed May 28, 2020.  
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12. Loma Prieta Volunteer Fire and Rescue Incident Statistics webpage. Accessed May 28, 2020.  
<http://www.lomaprietafire.org/home/incident-statistics>
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<http://www.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/Departments/CountyAdministrativeOffice.aspx>
14. Scotts Valley Agenda Center webpage. Accessed May 28, 2020.  
<https://www.scottsville.org/AgendaCenter>
15. City of Watsonville. "Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report." Accessed May 28, 2020.  
<https://www.cityofwatsonville.org/Archive.aspx?AMID=36>
16. City of Watsonville Board of Library Trustees webpage. Accessed May 28, 2020.  
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17. County of Santa Cruz Operations Plan FY 2019-20 and 2020-21, page 119. Accessed May 28, 2020.  
[https://sccounty01.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/Operational\\_Plan\\_2019-21/Operational\\_Plan\\_2019-21\\_complete.pdf#page=125](https://sccounty01.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/Operational_Plan_2019-21/Operational_Plan_2019-21_complete.pdf#page=125)
18. City of Santa Cruz Information Technology FY 2020 Goals, "Engaged & Informed Community," page 8. Accessed May 28, 2020.  
<http://www.cityofsantacruz.com/home/showdocument?id=77136>

## **Websites**

SIRE <https://www.hyland.com/en/government/sire>

# Appendix A

## City of Santa Cruz Notifications<sup>[7]</sup>

### News and Notifications

If you want to be notified of events, meetings and employment opportunities (see the list below), you can sign up on this page and you will receive email notifications of the items you select. If you later wish to change your selections, revisit this page and make your changes by selecting "Change E-Notifier Preferences" (below).

eNotification Signup | [Change eNotification Preferences](#)

**Email Address \***

**Retype Email Address \***

**First Name \***

**Last Name \***

**Calendar**

<input type="checkbox"/> Arts Commission	<input type="checkbox"/> Civic Auditorium	<input type="checkbox"/> Clean River, Beaches and Ocean Fund Citizen Oversight Committee
<input type="checkbox"/> Climate Action	<input type="checkbox"/> Commission for the Prevention of Violence Against Women	<input type="checkbox"/> Community Advisory Committee on Homelessness (CACH)
<input type="checkbox"/> Community Meeting - Water	<input type="checkbox"/> Community Programs Committee	<input type="checkbox"/> Council Meetings
<input type="checkbox"/> Downtown Commission	<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Programs	<input type="checkbox"/> Equal Employment Opportunity Committee
<input type="checkbox"/> Kaiser Permanente Arena	<input type="checkbox"/> Louden Nelson Center	<input type="checkbox"/> Measure K Oversight Committee
<input type="checkbox"/> Parks & Recreation Events	<input type="checkbox"/> Parks & Recreation Commission	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Safety Committee
<input type="checkbox"/> San Lorenzo River Committee	<input type="checkbox"/> Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf	<input type="checkbox"/> scwd2 Desal Task Force
<input type="checkbox"/> Sister Cities Committee	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Events	<input type="checkbox"/> Sports & Athletics
<input type="checkbox"/> Successor Agency (Redevelopment)	<input type="checkbox"/> Teen Center	<input type="checkbox"/> Training Calendar Category
<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation and Public Works Commission	<input type="checkbox"/> Water Commission	<input type="checkbox"/> Water Conservation Master Plan

**Job Posts**

<input type="checkbox"/> Temporary/On Call
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**News**

<input type="checkbox"/> 101 Felix Street - Significant Project	<input type="checkbox"/> 111 Errett Circle -Significant Project	<input type="checkbox"/> 119 Coral Street - Significant Project
<input type="checkbox"/> 126 Eucalyptus Ave - Significant Project	<input type="checkbox"/> 190 West Cliff - Significant Project	<input type="checkbox"/> 1930 Ocean Street Extension - Significant Project
<input type="checkbox"/> 2035 N Pacific Ave	<input type="checkbox"/> 530 Front Street - Significant Project	<input type="checkbox"/> 908 Ocean Street - Significant Project
<input type="checkbox"/> Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)	<input type="checkbox"/> Board of Building and Fire Appeals	<input type="checkbox"/> Cannabis
<input type="checkbox"/> City Surplus to Sell	<input type="checkbox"/> City Weekly Reports	<input type="checkbox"/> Climate Action
<input type="checkbox"/> Community Meetings - Planning	<input type="checkbox"/> COVID-19	<input type="checkbox"/> Crime Stats
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Programs	<input type="checkbox"/> Front St/Riverfront - Significant Project	<input type="checkbox"/> Green Building
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic Preservation Commission	<input type="checkbox"/> Homelessness	<input type="checkbox"/> Housing
<input type="checkbox"/> Major Road Projects	<input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Front Mixed-Use Development - Significant Project	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning Commission
<input type="checkbox"/> Police Media Releases	<input type="checkbox"/> Press Releases	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Works Project Updates
<input type="checkbox"/> Railtrail, Phase II - Significant Project	<input type="checkbox"/> Short-Term Rentals	<input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Engineering Projects
<input type="checkbox"/> Zoning Administrator		

**RFP Posts**

<input type="checkbox"/> Bid Notices
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## Appendix B Website Errata Examples

### Santa Cruz County Fire Department

**This www.fire.ca.gov page can't be found**

No webpage was found for the web address: <https://www.fire.ca.gov/communications/socialmedia.php>

HTTP ERROR 404

**QUICK LINKS**

[CAL FIRE INCIDENT INFO](#)

Figure B.1 The Santa Cruz County Fire Department's webpage<sup>[8]</sup> has many such outdated links in its 'QUICK LINKS' list, including the Amber Alert link.

### Santa Cruz City Equal Employment Opportunity Committee

<b>EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMITTEE</b> Member Roster & Contact Information		
October 3, 2018		
Amy Chirman *	831-427-7706 x7752	<a href="mailto:chirmana@santacruzpl.org">chirmana@santacruzpl.org</a>
Katherine Donovan	831-420-5134	<a href="mailto:kdonovan@cityofsantacruz.com">kdonovan@cityofsantacruz.com</a>
Jim Frawley	831-420-5283	<a href="mailto:jfrawley@cityofsantacruz.com">jfrawley@cityofsantacruz.com</a>
Tremain Hedden-Jones	831-420-5275	<a href="mailto:tjones@cityofsantacruz.com">tjones@cityofsantacruz.com</a>
Dara Herrick	831-420-5280	<a href="mailto:dherrick@cityofsantacruz.com">dherrick@cityofsantacruz.com</a>
Dorah Shuey	831-427-7706 x7734	<a href="mailto:shueyd@santacruzpl.org">shueyd@santacruzpl.org</a>
Valerie M. Simmons	831-600-7177	<a href="mailto:vsimmons@harbornet.com">vsimmons@harbornet.com</a>
Adam Spickler	831-588-0692	<a href="mailto:Eocomm1@cityofsantacruz.com">Eocomm1@cityofsantacruz.com</a>
Beth Tobe**	831-420-5154	<a href="mailto:btobey@cityofsantacruz.com">btobey@cityofsantacruz.com</a>

\*Chair  
\*\* Vice Chair

Figure B.2 Their member roster<sup>[9]</sup> is 18 months old; the chair and co-chair are no longer on the committee.

Meetings & Agendas			
	2020	2019	2018
<b>2019</b>			
Meeting	Date	Documents	
Equal Employment Opportunity Committee	10/3/2019	<a href="#">Agenda</a>   <a href="#">Minutes</a>	
Equal Employment Opportunity Committee	9/12/2019	<a href="#">Agenda</a>	
Equal Employment Opportunity Committee	5/9/2019	<a href="#">Agenda</a>	
<i>Results: Table for 2019</i>			
Showing 1 - 3 of 4 result(s)			
EVENT	DATE/TIME	AGENDA	MINUTES
<a href="#">RESCHEDULED - Equal Employment Opportunity Committee Meeting</a>	09/12/2019	Not Included	Not Included
<a href="#">RESCHEDULED - Equal Employment Opportunity Committee Meeting</a>	05/09/2019	Not Included	Not Included
<a href="#">Equal Employment Opportunity Committee Meeting</a>	12/13/2018 1:30 PM - 3:30 PM	<a href="#">EEO Agenda_2018-12-13_FINAL_agenda packet</a>	Not Included
<a href="#">RESCHEDULED - Equal Employment Opportunity Committee Meeting</a>	11/08/2018 1:30 PM - 3:30 PM	Not Included	Not Included
<a href="#">Equal Employment Opportunity Committee Meeting</a>	09/20/2018 1:30 PM - 3:30 PM	<a href="#">EEO Agenda_2018-09-20_FINAL</a>	Not Included
<a href="#">RESCHEDULED: Equal Employment Opportunity Committee Meeting</a>	09/13/2018 1:30 PM - 3:30 PM	Not Included	Not Included
<a href="#">Equal Employment Opportunity Committee Meeting</a>	05/10/2018 1:30 PM - 3:30 PM	<a href="#">EEO Agenda_2018-05-10_FINAL</a>	<a href="#">EEO Minutes_2018-05-10_FINAL DRAFT</a>
<a href="#">CANCELED - Equal Employment Opportunity Committee Meeting</a>	03/08/2018 1:30 PM - 3:30 PM	Not Included	Not Included
<a href="#">CANCELED - Equal Employment Opportunity Committee meeting</a>	02/08/2018 1:30 PM - 3:30 PM	Not Included	Not Included

Figure B.3 There are agendas and minutes missing without explanation. [\[10\]](#) [\[11\]](#)

## **Loma Prieta Fire District**

Annual Detail Charts		
2017	<i>coming Feb 2017</i>	<i>coming Feb 2017</i>
2016	<a href="#"><u>Incident Response Overview</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Monthly Response Charts</u></a>
2015	<a href="#"><u>Incident Response Overview</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Monthly Response Charts</u></a>
2014	<a href="#"><u>Incident Response Overview</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Monthly Response Charts</u></a>
2013	<a href="#"><u>Incident Response Overview</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Monthly Response Charts</u></a>
2012	<a href="#"><u>Incident Response Overview</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Monthly Response Charts</u></a>
2011	<a href="#"><u>Incident Response Overview</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Monthly Response Charts</u></a>
2010	<a href="#"><u>Incident Response Overview</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Monthly Response Charts</u></a>

**Figure B.4 There has been no update to Loma Prieta Fire incident statistics since 2016.** [\[12\]](#)

## **Santa Cruz County Administrative Office**

**Carlos' Corner – Newsletters from the CAO**

- [February 6, 2018](#)
- [June 14, 2018](#)
- [February 13, 2018](#)

**CAO's Newsletter - February 6, 2019**

**Figure B.5 There has been no posting after February 2019.** [\[13\]](#)

Note: the February 6, 2018 link actually opens the February 6, 2019 newsletter.

## Scotts Valley Agenda Center

▼ City Council Public Hearing Notices		2019
Agenda	Minutes	Download
Jun 19, 2019 — Posted Jun 14, 2019 5:01 PM Public Hearing Notice: Public Financing Authority Bonds		Download ▾

  

▼ Economic Development Committee		2017
Agenda	Minutes	Download
May 22, 2017 Economic Development Committee Meeting Agenda (PDF)		Download ▾

  

▼ Planning Commission Public Hearing Notices		2018
Agenda	Minutes	Download
Dec 13, 2018 — Posted Nov 8, 2018 4:19 PM 22 Blake Lane - Notice of Intent and Planning Commission Public Hearing Notice		Download ▾

Figure B.6 Scotts Valley City Council, Committee, and Commission agendas and minutes are 9-36 months old without explanation.<sup>[14]</sup>

## City of Watsonville

Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report	
	<a href="#">Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report 2011 - 2012 (PDF)</a>
	<a href="#">Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report 2010 (PDF)</a>
	<a href="#">Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report 2009 (PDF)</a>
	<a href="#">Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report 2008 (PDF)</a>

Figure B.7 Their annual reports stop in 2012.<sup>[15]</sup>

## ***City of Watsonville Board of Library Trustees***

### **Members**

- Blanca Baltazar-Sabbah, District 1  
Term expires: November 2020
- Diane Muñoz, District 2  
Term expires: November 2020
- Anthony Bernard Tapiz Jr., District 3  
Term expires: November 2018
- Providence Medrano Martinez, District 4  
Term expires: November 2018
- Victoria M. Bañales, District 5  
Term expires: November 2018
- Barbara Corrigan, District 6  
Term expires: November 2020
- Rhea DeHart, District 7  
Term expires: December 2022

**Figure B.8 Some of their members' terms have expired without explanation or replacement.** [\[16\]](#)

## Appendix C

### Goal/Objective Setting Examples

#### **Santa Cruz County**

<b>COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OBJECTIVES &amp; KEY STEPS</b>			
#23	<b>Website Redesign</b>		
By December 2020, the County Administrative Office will convene a multi-departmental committee to study a website redesign with consistent branding and design standards.			
Key Steps			
Outreach to County departments and form committee with timeline.	Review current departmental practices in managing websites.	Review website design and management practices in other jurisdictions.	Determine cost and feasibility of website redesign.
<b>Plan Reference:</b> 6.A.i	<b>Collaborating Depts:</b> ALL	<b>Target:</b> Website Design Standards	<b>Est. Completion Date:</b> December 2020

Figure C.1 The County of Santa Cruz Operations Plan for FY 2019-20 and 2020-21 has no targeted result and has no objective to improve accuracy or currency.[\[17\]](#)

#### **City of Santa Cruz**

<b>Engaged &amp; Informed Community</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Begin migration of agenda and document management to vendor's replacement products.</li><li>• Refresh design of Human Resources web pages and expand content.</li><li>• Re-look at internet standards and site organization based upon compiling newer usage analytics since redesign has been live for over a year.</li></ul>

Figure C.2 The City of Santa Cruz FY2020 Information Technology Goals to update their webpages do not include keeping them accurate and current.[\[18\]](#)