



# AGENDA REPORT

**TO:** Edward D. Reiskin  
City Administrator

**FROM:** Karen Boyd  
Citywide Communications  
Director

**SUBJECT:** Website Design And Development  
Services Contract Extension

**DATE:** October 27, 2021

City Administrator Approval 

Date: Nov 4, 2021

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**Staff Recommends That The City Council Adopt A Resolution Waiving The Competitive Multiple-Step Solicitation Process Required For The Acquisition Of Information Technology Systems, And Authorizing The City Administrator To Amend The Professional Services Agreement With Exygy, Inc For Website Design And Development Services For The City's Website To Extend The Term By An Additional Two Years And Increase The Compensation By An Amount Not To Exceed \$498,000.00 For A Total Contract Amount Of \$747,000.**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Adoption of the proposed resolution waives the competitive multiple-step solicitation process required for the acquisition of computerized or information technology systems, and authorizes the City Administrator to execute an amendment to the existing Professional Services Agreement (Agreement) with Exygy, Inc, which has been providing critically needed services to support the City's Oaklandca.gov website since February 2021.

The initial scope of work will be completed by November 16, 2021. The proposed resolution will extend the Agreement's term through this two-year budget cycle, until June 30, 2023, at two-hundred and forty-nine thousand dollars (\$249,000.00) per fiscal year, for a total contract increase of four-hundred and ninety-eight thousand dollars (\$498,000). The existing Agreement is in the amount of two-hundred and forty-nine thousand dollars (\$249,000), and with this increase, the grand total contract amount will be seven-hundred and forty-seven thousand dollars (\$747,000) for the Project.

The initial contract was competitively bid and awarded through a formal Request For Proposal (RFP) process. Staff have been very satisfied with the quality of services delivered to date. Exygy, Inc has completed the initial scope of work, which has included: conducting robust internal and external stakeholder research, employing data analytics to guide decision-making, creating a shared vision and roadmap of development priorities, and making substantive foundational improvements to the design and structure of the website. This effort has resulted in improved search and navigation, and prioritized redesigns of key elements of the City of

Oakland's website, including service pages and public meetings. In addition, the team has supported the City of Oakland with ongoing website maintenance and improvements.

Under the extended Agreement, the City Administrator's Office will continue to receive website design and development services that improve delivery of digital services on the City's website (oaklandca.gov), enhance the availability of services and information online, ensure searchability and accessibility of content, and support the ongoing development of a modern, accessible, user-centric, and mobile-responsive website that can be easily updated with content in multiple languages.

## **BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY**

The City of Oakland has been engaged in a multi-year process to redesign and re-architect the City's website and our approach to digital service delivery. The global COVID-19 pandemic that resulted in the closure of many public facilities over the past 18+ months required the City to shift to more online service delivery, which has made this work even more critical.

Three key principles guide our work to improving the City's digital service delivery:

- **Equity:** Remove systemic barriers to accessing City Government
- **Simplicity:** Make information easy to find and understand
- **Trust:** Become a trusted source of information by providing accurate, timely, consistent, and reliable information

The approach is to:

- Retool our service processes to make them simpler and easier to access.
- Design interfaces for real-world users—both staff and residents—and test those designs to be sure they work.
- Use data and analytics to define high-demand needs and prioritize those services as we build the site.
- Inspire City staff to try new approaches and foster new relationships with the community based on trust and mutually beneficial outcomes.

Most importantly, this process is iterative and ongoing. The City website will never be "done," only continually improved based on user needs and measured outcomes.

### ***Digital Front Door Project***

On May 20, 2014, City Council passed Resolution 84998 C.M.S. authorizing a professional services agreement with Code for America to develop a "digital front door." Staff worked with Code for America for about 15 months to produce a set of standards to modernize our online service delivery and communications.

## **Phase 1**

Phase 1 of the Digital Front Door project focused on research, creation of an analytics dashboard, and development of a prototype of the new website. The project started with users first. Over the course of three months, the team interviewed, gathered data, and analyzed feedback from City staff and community members. Research included in-depth interviews with groups of users and individuals, and surveys received from City staffers and Oaklanders alike.

## **Phase 2**

Phase 2 focused on building a sustainable foundation and constructing a new beta website. The goal was to develop a more user-centered, data-driven, and iterative approach to digital service delivery and involve a cross-departmental team in the process. The City/Code for America team took inspiration from many places, drawing heavily from the work of GOV.UK and also cities like Philadelphia, San Diego, Long Beach, New York City, and Grand Rapids, and even the federal government, all of which were similarly exploring new approaches to delivering digital services. The team learned from their experiences and shared our own.

A significant focus during Phase 2 was to build a solid foundation for the website, specifically good governance, standards, practices, and tools to ensure ongoing sustainability of the work.

The outcome of Phase 2 of the City's engagement with Code for America was the creation and launch of a new website (<https://www.oaklandca.gov>) with a more government-appropriate, credible, and user-friendly "dot gov" URL.

## **Current Status**

Since launching the new oaklandca.gov website in 2018, the team has been iterating and improving on page design functionality, and supporting department staff on updating their content across the website. Staff have rolled out new features including online chat and forms, redesigned and expanded certain elements of the site, and refined our style guide.

Staff in the City Administrator's office have worked to keep the website up and make ongoing improvements but haven't had the internal resources and capacity to iterate quickly enough to meet the evolving needs of City staff and the community. In 2020, Staff conducted an analysis of internal staffing that would be necessary to manage the website in house. The analysis determined that for a website of the complexity and size of Oaklandca.gov, the City would need a minimum team of five employees with a range of skill sets including user research, user experience design, information architecture, accessible website development and deployment, data and analytics, and content strategy. While an internal team remains the ultimate goal, without a budget to hire a team with the qualifications to perform all these roles, the option providing the most stability was to find a qualified firm that could bring in the right support as needed.

## **ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES**

Through a formal RFP process, Exygy, Inc. was selected to be this partner. Exygy is a full stack digital agency with over a decade of experience and expertise in everything from engineering and design to product and content strategy. Their team has a wealth of experience building inclusive, highly functional websites for government agencies, including the Metropolitan

Transportation Commission, San Francisco Unified School District, BART, the Judicial Council of California, the City and County of San Francisco, and Alameda County. The majority of Exygy's projects involve partnering with a mix of community members, local stakeholders, community-based organizations, and government teams to lead successful projects that ensure lasting value to the communities they serve.

Criteria used to select the firm included the team's experience in working with local government partners, the professional background and qualification of the team members, the capacity of the organization to take on a project of this size, as well as the understanding of the nature and extent of the services required.

Since embarking on this partnership in February 2021, Exygy, in partnership with City staff, ran a thorough discovery process to identify the top priorities, defined a product roadmap, and began work to improve the online service experience and help people find information. Staff from across the City of Oakland, as well as service providers and community members, have helped define the priorities.

Key priorities identified include:

## **1. Information Architecture (IA) & Navigation**

### **a. Improved Search**

Search is the primary form of navigation for users, however search components and landing pages are visually flat and inconsistent. Search terms bring up old and outdated content.

### **b. Welcoming and Easy-to-Use Navigation**

Less than 10% of our website visitors enter the website through the homepage, and more than 80% of visitors are "new users." A welcoming and easy-to-use global navigation is critical to orient people to the information and services they are looking for.

### **c. Improved in-page navigation**

Improving in-page navigation with wayfinding components. There is a lot of interrelated content that is difficult to navigate to between pages.

### **d. Surface key content**

People use service providers (311, Library, Mayor's Office Front Desk, Finance chat widget) to help locate City services on the website, creating an extra burden on City staff to find the right resource quickly. If we make the website easier for staff to use, in turn it will be easier for our users to use.

## **2. User Experience Design**

### **a. Consistency Across Site**

There is a lack of consistency across oaklandca.gov, including voice & tone, visual interface, and content.

### **b. Unified Content Strategy**

There is an overwhelming amount of old or archived content on the website (sometimes for compliance reasons). Lack of a unified content strategy, poor management of content, and inconsistent resources across teams lead to eccentricity in voice and tone, or misinformation.

### **c. Improvements to the Visual Design**

The current visual design lacks imagery and iconography to authentically capture the spirit and diversity of the Oakland community. Aside from the "tree" there is little to no cohesive visual branding.

## 2. Accessibility

### a. Accessibility Tools and Training for Staff

Staff have limited access to accessibility tools and training, meaning they are not always centering the needs of people with disabilities or language barriers.

### b. Multilingual Content Strategy

Multilingual content is often kept in images or PDFs that are not easily accessible. Because there is not an easy way to post manual translations, many people put translated materials in PDFs which aren't accessible via search.

### c. Improved Readability

Many of the top most-visited pages are not easily readable. Content for many services and process pages is complex and verbose, written at advanced reading levels (our target reading level is 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade).

### d. Improved Style Guide

Multiple contrasting styles for section headers, links, and other components may contribute to making pages harder to read and understand.

## 3. Expanding Online Services

### a. Redesigned Service Landing Pages

Service pages are inconsistent, with quality and quantity of content varying greatly. There's an opportunity to improve readability and wayfinding to help visitors find services more easily.

### b. Online Service Delivery

Many services still involve downloading PDF forms that are returned to the City. There is an opportunity to digitize services and improve back-end workflows.

### c. Technology Governance for 3rd Party Platforms

Many departments rely on outside websites for transactions, making for an inconsistent user experience. There's a need to determine process and governance for 3rd-party integrations for the website.

## 4. Staff Training & Support

### a. Enhanced Staff Training

There is a capacity challenge with ongoing website support and training. With over 300+ website contributors across the site, people are constantly needing to be trained and retrained.

### b. Content Templates

Departments are grateful for a templated, prescribed approach, though it can have limitations, especially when there is no staff capacity to evolve templates to meet changing needs.

### c. Improved Authoring Experience

The authoring experience in Craft CMS is challenging. There are inconsistent training experiences, and inconsistencies in fields, entry types, and naming conventions further this challenge. Support is needed to create a standard structure, organization, and tagging for content.

The extension of this contract will allow staff to work with Exygy to build on the momentum generated so far and continue making progress towards achieving these priorities.

Oakland Municipal Code (OMC) Section 2.04.042.A requires that the City Administrator conduct a competitive multiple-step solicitation process for the acquisition of any computerized or information technology systems. OMC Section 2.04.042.D provides that the City Council may waive the competitive process upon a recommendation of the City Administrator and finding and determination by the City Council that it is in the best interests of the City to waive the solicitation processes. Staff recommends that it is in the best interest of the City to waive the

RFP/Q process in order to build on the work done to date and ensure ongoing improvements and sustainability of the City's website.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

The proposed contract amendment will not exceed \$498,000 for fiscal years 2021-23. This funding was appropriated by the City Council in the FY 2021-23 Adopted Budget (Resolution No. 88717). Funds are available in the Information Technology Fund (4600), Communications & Media Org (02112), Contract Services Account (54930), DP020 Administrative Project (1000002) to be transferred to a new project (TBD), Administration Program (IP03).

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST**

Oakland's website ([oaklandca.gov](http://oaklandca.gov)) receives about 2.5 million unique visitors per year who are looking to access City services or information online. For many of those visitors, the website is their first and perhaps their only impression of the City of Oakland. If they are not successful in finding the service or information they need quickly, their frustration can lead them to believe that their City government does not value or prioritize customer service, which can further erode public trust in government.

The City website has become the "digital front door" through which our constituents are accessing City services. Driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced much of our business online, as well as years of rapidly changing technology, the public's expectations of our City website have grown exponentially. People expect the government to meet them where they are, and deliver easy-to-use online services 24 hours a day, seven days a week using mobile-friendly technology.

Three key principles guide the City's work to improving the City's digital service delivery: equity, simplicity and trust:

- **Equity:** By harnessing technology, the City can serve people where they are: on mobile devices using simpler, human-centered interfaces that are accessible at all times of the day. Fair, inclusive and equitable access to services must be factored into the design of digital services. This goal is achieved through ongoing user research and testing with our community members who the City has traditionally failed to reach: people who speak limited English and residents who have limited literacy or disabilities, or poor access to advanced technologies such as the latest smartphone or fastest wifi connection. When City services are more accessible for people who have faced the biggest barriers to accessing government services, they in turn become more accessible for everyone.
- **Simplicity:** Simple designs that are easy to use will make interactions between City staff and the public more friendly and engaging, and improve the quality of our relationship with the public. With more than 125 languages spoken in Oakland public schools, conveying information about City services, policies, and procedures must be straightforward and easy for the community to understand. Content should be written at the eighth-grade reading level. Content written in plain English is faster and less expensive to translate into other languages. Simple interfaces convey that we respect

people's time, which is key to building trust.

- **Trust:** The City has a tendency to focus more on top-down processes—which appear to the public to be more in service of the bureaucracy than in service to the community. Interfaces are cluttered, complex, wonky, dense, and confusing, and information is organized from the perspective of the bureaucracy. The public's frustration with this approach leads to low public trust of government. Instead, the City's messaging and the organization of information should convey a sense of credibility as a trusted source of information for the Oakland community. Information should be simple to navigate, intuitive, in plain language (English or other languages), and centered on services. This goal is achieved by ensuring our information is accurate, consistent, and reliable.

At each stage of this project, Exygy, in partnership with City Staff, are analyzing user analytics, and conducting user testing to ensure that the updates that we make serve the needs of our community and align with the principles of digital service delivery.

## **COORDINATION**

During the competitive bid process, the core team who helped develop the RFP goals and evaluate the responding firms consisted of representatives from the City Administrator's Office, the Communications Office, ADA Programs, Information Technology, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Public Works, the Department of Race & Equity, the Planning and Building Department, and the Mayor's Office.

The website roadmap was developed in coordination with representatives from every City department. City staff generated over 680 ideas on how to improve the website. Exygy has conducted one-on-one interviews with over 50 staff members and hosted workshops that have engaged many more.

## **PAST PERFORMANCE, EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP**

Staff have been very satisfied with the services delivered to date. The extension of this contract will allow staff to work with Exygy, Inc. to build on the momentum generated so far and continue making progress towards achieving City priorities.

## **SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES**

**Economic:** By digitizing processes and making the necessary organizational changes, the City of Oakland can improve the delivery of services, make our processes more efficient, and result in cost savings and increased revenue.

**Environmental:** As additional City processes are automated and digitized, fewer paper forms will be used, thereby reducing the consumption of paper and minimizing the use of electronic printers and ink. Also, the City's collective carbon footprint may be reduced as more users are able to access services through the City's website instead of City Hall.

**Race & Equity:** By harnessing technology, the City can serve people where they are: on mobile devices using simpler, human-centered interfaces that are accessible at all times of the day. Fair, inclusive and equitable access to services must be factored into the design of digital services. This goal is achieved through ongoing user research and testing with our community members who the City has traditionally failed to reach: people who speak limited English and residents who have limited literacy or disabilities, or poor access to advanced technologies such as the latest smartphone or fastest wifi connection. When City services are more accessible for people who have faced the biggest barriers to accessing government services, they in turn become more accessible for everyone.

### **ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

Staff Recommends That The City Council Adopt A Resolution Waiving The Competitive Multiple-Step Solicitation Process Required For The Acquisition Of Information Technology Systems, And Authorizing The City Administrator To Amend The Professional Services Agreement With Exygy, Inc For Website Design And Development Services For The City's Website To Extend The Term By An Additional Two Years And Increase The Compensation By An Amount Not To Exceed \$498,000.00 For A Total Contract Amount Of \$747,000.

For questions regarding this report, please contact Nicole Neditch, Assistant to the City Administrator, at [nneditch@oaklandca.gov](mailto:nneditch@oaklandca.gov).

Respectfully submitted,

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