South Lake Tahoe launches user-friendly website

By Kathryn Reed

Information about South Lake Tahoe is finally easily accessible.

The city replaced its outdated website this month with one that can actually be navigated without needing a doctorate in information technology. Visually, it's also inviting.

It has all the info readers will want, but it is presented in a format with the user in mind instead of the government employee.

South Lake Tahoe's website has been overhauled.

Instead of listing departments — which might not be intuitive to most people — a tab called "City Services" has the general categories people would seek. Most people with a planning question would not instinctively know this falls under the Development Services Department. That is why "Planning, Land Use & Zoning" is a category under "City Services".

One of the constant complaints the city receives through

surveys and other means is people don't know what is going on. Calendars on the website are aimed at making that issue go away.

While the website is still a work in progress, that is actually a good thing, according to city officials. A goal of the city's is to be more responsive to citizens — residents and tourists. This includes having a website that provides people with what they want. So, if something is missing, it can be added.

The last website was difficult for staff to update because of the old-style platform and technology that were used. (The old site was up for at least a decade without any real upgrades.)

Twenty-two employees are trained to work on the website, with two being the gatekeepers to what sees the light of day. That number is likely to change as time goes by. The reviewers are checking to make sure the message and format is consistent, and to weed out duplicate information.

Another issue this site is addressing is better communication with the public.

"It is easy to track our responsiveness," city spokeswoman Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

This is because the feature "Let's Talk" that is accessed via the home page allows people to ask specific questions. It goes to the appropriate person, and usually to multiple people. The person asking the question can then track the response. The exchange, while visible on the city's website to the person posing the question, is not sitting there for the whole world to see.

Until this week people wanting to ask the fire department a question had to do so in writing and deliver it to the station. Not so with the online questionnaire.

One thing still being worked out is if police reports will one day be available by asking for it through the city's website.

A category not often found on government websites is the "Communication Center" — another tool to interact with people. People can be sent emails about a slew of things by going under "City News," then to the right is a button saying "Notify Me". Social media is another venue to stay in touch with the city.

"We want two-way communication," Kerry said.

Updates on city projects are also provided.

For people who want to read the content in another language, every page allows the words to be translated.

The website cost $36,000 to build — which according to Kerry — is cheap for a government site, and one that functions like the city's does. It has 300 pages, with more that can be added as needed.