City of Everett, MA

Website Accessibility & Usability Synopsis of Issues

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Introduction

The Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD) conducted a review of the City of Everett Massachusetts' website, www.cityofeverett.com. This review consisted of an internal assessment by deep content experts which focused on applicable portions of the World Wide Web/Web Accessibility Initiative (W3C-WAI) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0) and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act along with research involving diverse users with pertinent lived experiences with disabilities.

The generated catalog highlights important issues for not only accessibility compliance, but also usability and inclusive design. Each issue serves as an example that should be remedied in all occurrences. The report includes a screenshot, issue details, and issue tags. Issue details provide background information on the applicable accessibility guidelines or inclusive design principle and how it affects diverse users, a description of the current issue found on www.cityofeverett.com, and a proposed solution including engineering or design notes such as code snippets and sketches. Issue tags signify the primary groups of users affected by each issue and cite applicable sections of WCAG 2.0.

Overview

The City's website www.cityofeverett.com is built on the CivicPlus CMS using jQuery, ASP.NET and Ajax. Overall the CivicPlus framework typically adheres to good use of web accessibility best practices out of the box. However, the Everett template reveals many accessibility barriers due to components that fail to meet the WCAG 2.0 AA standards and inclusive design best practices.

One key barrier is the navigational components. On the main navigation, only the high-level five menu items are accessible to users who use various assistive technologies. This component contains improper use of HTML and ARIA attributes that give limited context to screen reader and keyboard-dependent users. In addition, sub-menu items are not appropriately placed in the accessibility tree. Navigation is also obstructed for assistive technology users due to poor or sometimes completely absent heading hierarchy and often link text and ARIA-labels that give inadequate context to the functionality.

The City's website www.cityofeverett.com provides important information and actions steps though downloadable PDFs and other file formats. Many of these documents and forms are inaccessible to blind or low vision users and those with brain-based disabilities. These inaccessible documents are often the only method offered to submit forms. www.cityofeverett.com also relies on third party widgets, integrations, and portals. Much of this software contains major accessibility barriers and fails to comply with WCAG 2.0 AA. For example, the Municipal ePayment System uses very poor color contrast, has missing form labels, no headers, and no alt-text.

To address these issues, the CSS and JavaScript theming should be redesigned to remedy all occurrences of web accessibility barriers and detrimental usability. In addition, web authoring staff should undergo training covering best practices for posting web content and creating accessible documents. For creating accessible PDFs please review Adobe's Accessibility Training. All third-party software should be properly vetted for compliance with WCAG 2.0 AA and section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. When contracting with vendors developing websites and other software, the city of Everett's RFPs and contracts should ensure the finished product is compliant by specifying appropriate accessibility guidelines in calls for proposals, contracts and by conducting web accessibility reviews.