



Town of West Tisbury

Citizen Engagement Best Practice

Prepared By: The Office of Municipal & School Technology

EOTSS | Executive Office of Technology Services & Security



Image: West Tisbury Town Hall¹

Introduction

Incorporated on April 28, 1892, the Town of West Tisbury is located on the Island of Martha's Vineyard, off the coast of Massachusetts. The Town covers 34 square miles and has a year-round population of 3,151². Town officials value the neighborly sense of community that has developed over the years and seeks to preserve and improve communication with citizens. In alignment with this goal, West Tisbury signed a Community Compact agreement on July 25, 2017 and pledged to implement citizen engagement best practices using technology. The Town received state grant funding to complete their initiative. They utilized the funding to upgrade and redesign their municipal website to make it more user-friendly and easier to navigate.

¹ John Phelan. "Town Hall, West Tisbury MA." *Wikimedia Commons*. Accessed on October 30, 2018. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Town_Hall,_West_Tisbury_MA.jpg

² Taken from West Tisbury's Official Website.

Website Redesign

The process started with a competitive bid for the redesign of the website. The Town received five responses from qualified vendors (Virtual Town & Schools, CivicPlus, CivicLive, SeamlessGov, and Revize) with varied proposals around cost, design, migration and training. They found the proposal from Virtual Town & Schools (VTS) to be the best value and allowed the Town to pursue a financial transparency tool to bolster their public engagement efforts.

West Tisbury entered into a contract with VTS in February 2018 for design, migration and training to be completed by July 2018. In addition to the design and implementation costs supported by the Community Compact program, website hosting and support costs were funded through the Town's operating budget. The project was successfully completed as planned, on schedule.

The redesigned website significantly improved appearance, content, and navigation features, including:

- Homepage "Action Center" for quick, one-step navigation to most important public desired features, including:
 - Signup for emergency notification text alerts
 - Signup for e-mail notifications from selected Town Committees and Departments
 - Access to Agendas and Minutes of Town Committee meetings
 - On-line bill payment for Property and Excise Taxes, Dog Licenses and Beach Passes
 - The Town's GIS Assessor Maps
 - Employment and Committee openings
 - Available Request for Proposals and Bid opportunity for town services and projects
 - Answers to Frequently Asked Questions and general town contact information

- Homepage Calendar of upcoming Town and Regional Meetings with links to Agendas
- Homepage posting of News and Announcements
- Ability to post emergency and public safety banner alerts to Homepage
- Separate Webpage for each Town Committee, Board and Department containing or linking to:
 - Committee/Board/Department members, staff and contact information
 - Committee/Board/Department specific Forms and Documents
 - Committee/Board/Department News and Announcements
 - Committee/Board/Department Meeting Agendas and Minutes
- Other webpages included for Town By-laws and Community news and facts

Recognizing that a website is only as good as its content and relevancy, the site is designed to have town staff maintain and upload content. Several key staff members have been trained to do so and are available to other Committees and Departments.



Screenshot: <https://www.westtisbury-ma.gov/>

Financial Transparency

Following their website redesign, West Tisbury also entered into an agreement with ClearGov to add a financial transparency component to their website. Their “ClearGov Insights: Civic Edition” module is a service that will make current and historical town financial information available to the public and providing transparency to residents and allowing for comparison with similar communities. In addition to the benefits of providing transparency, it will also improve the ability of the Town to present proposed financial and budgetary information to the public in advance of Town Meeting. The module is expected to be accessible through the Town’s website in November 2018.

Conclusion

In pursuing this IT initiative, the Town of West Tisbury has seen a dramatic improvement in their ability to communicate and provide services to the public. These improvements would not have been possible with their previous technology assets. Today, the Town’s Community Compact initiative is complete and they are better equipped to continue implementing citizen engagement best practices going forward.