

# Request for Proposal

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission / Website Redesign



<b>Issue Date</b>	December 20, 2019
<b>Responses Due</b>	January 24, 2020
<b>Contact</b>	egelhaafj@swmpc.org
<b>Project Budget</b>	\$15,000 - \$18,000
<b>Goal for Launch</b>	June 1, 2020

# Introduction / Summary

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission will rebuild its website in 2020 and would like to solicit your expertise. We are a partner to many special interest groups, state agencies/departments, and local units of government. It is common for us, in conjunction with web designers, to assist them in the process of building their websites. Now that it is our turn we understand the process pretty well. We know that the act of redesigning a site seems like a relatively simple design exercise when, in fact, it can expose all sorts of gaps that may have been ignored for too long. As a result, we have prepared by engaging in an organization-wide exercise in rebooting our mission, vision, and organization's value statements. Our staff has been solicited to provide examples of websites that they appreciate from a basic design and navigational perspective.

The SWMPC has been maintaining its own website since its latest design was completed back in 2008. We are committed to continuing our relationship with the Land Information Access Association (LIAA) who owns the content management system (Community Center) that our site is built on. LIAA works in a similar way with state agencies, local governments, and non-profits throughout Michigan. We would like to work with a third-party web designer to customize our design approach, then implement the design approach through LIAA and the Community Center platform.

## Context

The SWMPC is a non-profit regional planning organization that serves southwest Michigan. We were created by the three counties (Berrien, Cass, Van Buren) in the southwest corner of the state. We are one among a network of fourteen regional planning organizations across Michigan. Each is unique and serves the particular needs of their region. Our staff is comprised of professional land use and human networks and systems planning and digital mapping expertise. We help communities express their collective vision for themselves and work them through the development of a roadmap to achieve it. Naturally, it is much more complicated than that. Sometimes our work focuses on a specific need like transportation, environmental issues, or

economic development, shared by multiple communities within our region. Our purpose is to assemble the best research, apply it within a thoughtful methodology that involves experts, local voices, and leaders to craft durable solutions that can be supported by the communities involved.

# Prioritized Goals

As it ages, the existing SWMPC website has grown to look excessively busy and full of too much choice. The following are items that constitute objectives for the new site that we have identified:

- A priority source for public education.
- Project page for individuals engaged in one of our planning processes.
- Active projects easily reachable.
- Calendar of events that is interactive and user friendly.
- Simple way to find what is happening and how they can get involved.
- Includes items that we are partners with (and not necessarily driving).
- Advocacy for the SWMPC that is done indirectly by not “imposing” our organizational story on them unless they want to search for it. Advocacy for the SWMPC is implicit in the efficiency and function of the site.
- Searchable source for all content.
- Emphasis on visuals over text.
- The website is one of our primary sources for awareness-building.
- Emphasize our staff – humanize the SWMPC, make it less 30,000 foot/analytical, more human. Tell stories about who has been impacted by our work.
- Be “product specific.”
- Be highly graphic.
- Have simple navigation. Abide by a philosophy of a three-click navigation maximum.
- Rules for when material is added, deleted, and who manages what.
- Potential automatic notifications of an entry on a page that is more than one-year old.
- Compatible across all devices (mobile and desktop)

# Project Team

**John Egelhaaf**, Executive Director

John will manage the internal team and serve as the point person for the selected vendor. He is ultimately responsible for the success of this project.

**Marcy Hamilton**, Deputy Director/Senior Planner

Marcy is a key person who will be kept informed of all the details of the project as it proceeds. She can represent the interests of the SWMPC when John Egelhaaf is not available.

**Kim Gallagher**, Senior Planner

Both Kim and Marcy have experience on the client side of designing websites. They both have keen insight into the necessary details of our design needs.

**Kris Martin**, Associate Planner

Kris is very involved in the social media components of our work and regularly works “under the hood” of our website on technical issues.

**The following planners all regularly maintain the web pages over which they have responsibility:**

- **Jerrid Burdue**, Associate Planner
- **Brandon Kovnat**, Associate Planner

**Jill Plescher**, GIS Mapping Specialist

Jill manages the mapping components of our website. She regularly pushes our website into new mapping territory.

**Patrice Rose**, Office Manager

Patrice has a unique perspective on our digital outreach as she is also a township clerk and sees the website from the perspective of a user.

# Users

Our website is our digital front door. The primary visitors are the representatives of the units of government we serve. At the center of most of our work is public engagement and opinion. Accordingly, our website is also a way for the residents of all ability levels of southwest Michigan to engage us and participate in the work we do. A board of community representatives who govern us also use our website. We understand the reality that our particular world of non-profit regional planning is not a natural, intuitive thing for many of those we work for and with. Thus, our website also needs to bring clarity for an organization that may not get it from its name alone.

Additionally, colleagues who may be looking at our processes and products as models for their work may visit our website. Elected officials, the press, and people who have been redirected to us from elsewhere will find their way to our site. Economic development practitioners, realtors, our board members, MPO transportation advisory committee and policy committee members, and Chicago visitors to the southwest region should also find our site useful.

# RFP Timeline

<b>RFP Issue Date</b>	December 20, 2019
<b>Request for Extensions Due</b>	January 6, 2020
<b>Responses Due</b>	January 24, 2020
<b>Finalists Selected and Contacted</b>	January 31, 2020
<b>Finalists Presentations/Discussions</b>	February 2-7, 2020
<b>Winner Selected and Contacted</b>	February 12, 2020

# Project Timeline / Launch

The new web design must be completed and delivered to LIAA by **June 1**.

## Budget

The SWMPC has budgeted \$18,000 for the design of their new website. In addition to the process of engaging the SWMPC and iterating through draft designs, the design of the site must involve collaboration with the Land Information Access Association to insure that they can implement the design.

While we prefer the most cost-effective solution, all proposals that fall reasonably within this range will be considered based on the value they provide.

All invoices for this project must be billed before June 30.

## Existing Website Info

We have a tendency as an organization to focus on human built networks and systems, natural systems, data, and digital mapping. The truth is that the people who use and are impacted by these things are at the center of what we are. Their input and engagement are vital to our success. It is far too easy to let the analytical side become our public face. Our website is full of lots of words. It seems to expect that the visitor will land, read, and explore. We know better. The site probably asks for too much navigation initiative on the part of the visitor. Also, the information on the home page tends to wash over the visitor with lots of choice and little prioritization of those choices.

# Functionality Requirements and Services

Because public engagement is such a centerpiece for us, we need to make sure our partners know about the essentials of our work. At the top of that list is probably something akin to a calendar of upcoming events with the details of the “when” and “where.”

The next thing would be a way to post highly current information that has some kind of clock ticking in the background e.g. registration for an upcoming summit or submission of a form that will get your community in a queue for a particular service we provide.

After that, we have the need to post quite a few pieces of work product that should be available for a long while. Thus, the site needs to act as an intuitive, searchable tool for our visitors. They need to have confidence that we have what they’re looking for and it should be clear how to find it.

We would expect that our social media would be seamlessly connected to our website. Content should be automatically integrated between the website and our social media.

Occasionally we host events or have other reasons that would involve a request for visitors to fill out forms and then submit them. Rather than having the forms only available via download, we would like to have the capacity to have the visitor fill out and submit the form on the website.

Next, we have a wide range of work that is in motion at any given time. We recognize the need to represent that on the site. At the same time we don’t want to bludgeon our visitors with too much information about rather complicated projects. The site should function in a way that exposes the visitor to these projects and gives them the option of drilling further for more information about them. One possible solution? A sort of slide carousel of project pages or images that rotate in an inset pane alongside each page the visitor lands on. Said differently; something of an involuntary cycle of information within the intentional pages they visit.

Finally we expect our site to be ADA accessible (WCAG 2.1 AA) and for it to have a tool that will allow content to be translated into multiple languages.

# Integrations / Tech Requirements

The new site will need to integrate with the following existing systems:

- Mailchimp (for newsletter signups)
- Google Tag Manager

## Proposal Requirements

SWMPC expects that the design process will involve a series of meetings whether virtual or in-person to engage SWMPC staff. The organization has documented their positions and priorities across a range of topics related to the next iteration of our website. If the proposal would benefit from these documents we would share them if requested. The design process should not exceed six months in length. At critical benchmarks through the process, the designer should engage with LIAA to insure that the design motifs being considered are possible to implement in the Community Center content management software. The collaboration with LIAA may result in minor course corrections throughout the design process. That is entirely okay. However, if that engagement only happens near the end, the corrections may be significant and require us to unnecessarily retrace steps we've already covered.

The SWMPC loves to innovate. We are not afraid to break new ground if it helps us accomplish our goals. A designer that is interested in exploring fresh, innovative solutions will find a welcome client in the SWMPC.

Please include the following in your proposal response:

- Company description
- Project process overview
- Recommended approach of how you will meet our goals
- Proposed timeline
- Team bios



- Three recent relevant project samples
- Three client references
- Line-item pricing
- Terms and conditions

# Comparables

- <https://www.ms.gov/>; <https://www.nebraska.gov/>

Uncluttered, Simple, Clean, Big

- <https://opendata.utah.gov/browse?limitTo=charts&q=fish&sortBy=relevance;>  
<https://www.llbean.com/llb/shop/29?page=outdoor-gear-hunt-fish&nav=gnro-hp>

A modern search page for maps as PDF and all the other reports created at the SWMPC

- <https://www.networksnorthwest.org/>

A nice example of another regional planning organization with a fresh, new website that works well.