

Date: 1/28/08

To: Greater Lansing Housing Coalition

From: Tyler Smeltekop

Re: GLHC Site Analysis and Recommendations

Objectives and Initial Observations

The GLHC website is in need of an update to meet today's web standards for your users. The redesign would be marked by three components: a new graphic layout, a re-organization of the site navigation, and increased functionality. I will go more in-depth as to what each will involve, and the best ways to go about maximizing the work you can do—the more work you do, the less you have to pay the developer/designer to do for you!

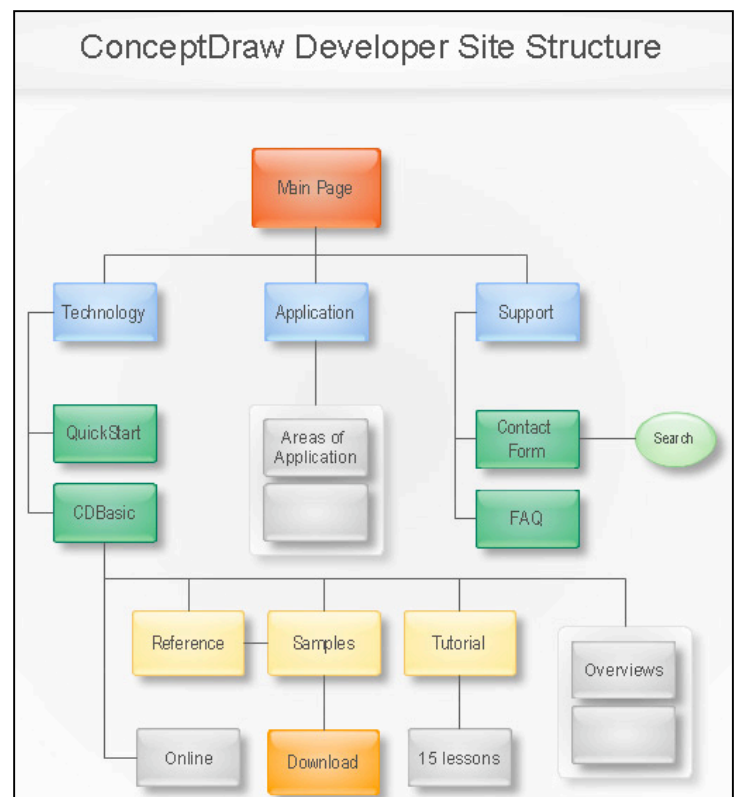
This site's intended purpose, as I can assess it, is to provide information/resources, and contacts for people who need to find affordable housing in Lansing. These resources come in the form of bulletins and listings of homes that are currently and soon-to-be available. I was expecting to find some tip-sheets or advice on how to search for and secure housing. While every item on the left navigation bar is clear as to what it leads to, it is not favorable that the user should scroll down to access all of it.

Restructuring the Site and Content Considerations

Accessing information on websites is driven by three factors: the navigation scheme, the site layout, and its information architecture. This last item is a term used by developers to describe the way bits of information lead users from the home page into the secondary- and tertiary-level pages. Another way to think of it is as the map of how you want the user to progress through your site—literally plotting out all the webpages and how they're connected is a common practice for developers when approaching any redesign project. Below is an example of site mapping, as done by Concept Draw.

<http://www.conceptdraw.com/products/img/ScreenShots/webwave/ManagerSiteMap.jpg>

By doing this yourself, you may find areas where several webpages can be repurposed into one, that the site is lacking information that should be available to users now, and also that some content might need updating or rewriting.



Graphic Facelift and Coding Update

The current site is structured in tables and HTML, with graphics mainly restricted to images of people or homes. By designing the site in CSS and HTML, adding and managing content and pages will become much easier. CSS is a coding language that allows designer-created presets for text and images to be called upon in the HTML. These presets will allow for consistent site structure and text styling throughout the site. CSS is also much more flexible in terms of being rendered by a variety of browsers, and is the standard today for coding websites.

A designer will be able to help you update your graphic layout, incorporating color and elements like a banner, to give the site that visual facelift. They may suggest redesigning your logo as part of a “package”—in my opinion, your logo is quite well-designed and should be kept the way it is. You should be able to find a competent and receptive designer for about \$50 per hour. Expect the work to take 15-20 hours to complete, but if you choose to leave the site reorganization up to the designer, you will need to add nearly as many hours to that estimate as it would take you to do the process yourself.

Additional Functions for the Site

I was informed that you are seeking a way to allow visitors and members to donate (or make payments) to the GLHC through the website on their credit card, *without* the use of secondary services like Paypal. Signing up for a Paypal account is time-consuming and is more than a user should have to use to make a donation.

The main difficulty facing non-profits who want to integrate such a functionality into their website is that their hosting space is often not on a *secure server*—a server that is enabled with Secure Socket Layer encryption, which encodes all data (including credit card information) to a degree which it is considered a safe transaction. Check with your webmaster or contact your hosting service to verify this. I have found a link to a page online that has collected a lot of information regarding online donations for non-profits:

<http://www.stepbystepfundraising.com/resource/onlinefundraiser.htm>.

If you do not have a secure server, there is a service available called Network for Good, provided by Groundspring. They will help you to install a form on any webpage on your site that you wish, that allows any user to fill it out and submit a donation. The service more or less lets you outsource secure server space for the specific purpose of raising money for your non-profit organization. In reviewing their site, I would give Benjamin DeBonis, the sales associate there a call at 415-561-7818, or an email at bdebonis@groundspring.org, if you have any questions after looking the site over.