

Date: 1/22/08
To: Matt Penniman
From: Tyler Smeltekop
Re: LNC Site Analysis and Recommendations

Objectives and Initial Observations

The Lansing Neighborhood Council has expressed interest in updating their website to today's web standards. This memo will put forth my recommendations as to what should be focused on in order to bring this project to a successful redesign. I will do my best to not only explain *why* certain aspects and components should be updated, but also offer suggestions on how to go about it. From the analysis I have done, there are things that LNC can do that would improve the site before it even comes under the hand of a designer.

The purpose of the site, from what I can see, is to be a massive, catch-all community resource for anyone in the area looking to network, start a progressive project of their own, or simply learn more about the area they live in. However, with the amount of content on the site, it's difficult to see how a user would easily go about finding all the information they seek.

Content Reorganization

Most, if not all, well-constructed informational websites operate under the concept of *top-down design*—the intended user uses an analytical approach to determining where their desired bit of information will be. This is done by progressing through more general categories to more specific sub-categories (i.e. About us → Contact info → Phone number). There are certain components the redesigned LNC site will need to have in order to best facilitate your visitors' needs.

Site structure and content go hand-in-hand, so the best place to begin the LNC site redesign is by taking a look at your content. Consider your users: who are they, and what do they come to the site to do? If you're unsure of the answers to these questions, the best way to find an answer is to ask—a survey can help. If you would like to do this, we can help you formulate questions that will lead to helpful answers. Having the target users and their needs in mind will make the next process much easier.

Take stock of what content you have, as well as how it is presented; you may stumble onto pages that are not accessible easily or pages that are redundant. There are many ways to go about this, from creating a map of your site, noting what content is linked to what pages, to browsing the site in a systematic way—do what is best for you. The goal is to assess all the content in criteria of how easy it is to find, how important it is, and what users would find it useful. Any content that is not important or useful should be considered for elimination or to be combined with other content. Ultimately, it should become easier to categorize the content into just a few main navigational items—ideally to five or six, or less. This grouping will in large part determine the structure of the new site.

Graphic Facelift and Coding Update

The current site is structured in tables and HTML, with few images used. 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. 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 content 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.