



REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

FROM: Brian Masschaele, Director of
Community and Cultural Services

Jennifer Ford, Director of Finance

DATE: September 19, 2023

SUBJECT: County Websites Hosting and
Redevelopment Project Award

RECOMMENDATIONS:

THAT the Warden and Chief Administrative Officer be authorized to execute an agreement for the redevelopment of County of Elgin websites pertaining to all County services, including tourism and economic development, to Sandbox Software Solutions at a total cost of \$114,725 plus unrebated HST and annual maintenance costs with funds drawn from 2023 and 2024 budget years subject to the terms, costing analysis and conditions laid out in the report titled “County Websites Hosting and Redevelopment Award”; and,

THAT the Warden and Chief Administrative Officer be authorized to execute an agreement for the immediate transfer of all existing County websites to a hosted solution through Sandbox Software Solutions at a cost of \$4,800; and,

THAT the Province of Ontario be notified of this award under the terms of the funding agreement with the County of Elgin through the Rural Economic Development Program for the project “Re-Imagining Elgin County’s Websites: Creating Tech-Forward Municipal and Tourism Hubs”.

INTRODUCTION:

County websites need major redevelopment in light of considerations such as accessibility upgrades, cyber-security concerns and new program interfaces for all departments. The last rebuild of County websites took place in 2017 and was intended to have a four-year lifecycle. However, challenges associated with the pandemic, the development of an Intranet site in 2021 and the County’s cyber-security incident in 2022 all made it necessary to defer this work. However, it is now time to re-engage in this project to meet contemporary needs and to establish a new platform that will serve residents, staff and County Council for a lifecycle of at least three years beginning in 2024.

The County’s Economic Development Department recently secured \$50,000 of funding through the Province of Ontario’s Rural Economic Development Program (RED) to support the re-development of the County’s main site, along with tourism and economic

development sites, by the end of 2024. The success of this application and its terms further supports the need to engage in a major rebuild of County websites.

This report outlines to Council a recommended path forward for this redevelopment project by leveraging the existing investment and knowledge base already in place as a result of the development of the County's Intranet site launched in 2021 by utilizing the same vendor (Sandbox Software Solutions) who already has the necessary expertise, familiarity with County operations and proven value-for-money approach to successfully complete this project on a timely basis and in a cost-effective manner.

DISCUSSION:

The County currently maintains the following websites and on-line tools:

- www.elgincounty.ca. This is the County's main website under which each department forms a subsection.
- www.pregressivebynature.com. This is the County's economic development website.
- www.elgintourist.com. This is the County's tourism website.
- Staff and Council Intranet site. This is an internal tool (not public facing) that is utilized by staff and County Council for access to information such as policies, workplace events and a staffing directory.

The Pressing Need for Redevelopment

The three external websites now require major redevelopment in light of the following considerations:

- Accessibility upgrades. The County's Accessibility Coordinator has informed County Council through the most recent annual report of the need to redevelop current websites to a minimum standard of AA under Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) before the end of 2024 in order to meet provincial accessibility requirements. The County's three main sites do not currently meet this requirement.
- Security upgrades. The County's main website is currently hosted on County servers and the economic development and tourism sites are hosted on external servers. All of these sites are vulnerable to destabilization or cyber-attack. The County's website was down approximately five weeks during the network security incident in 2022 which caused major disruptions to many County services like the library and has been off-line periodically since that time due to network stability issues.
- Inability to fully integrate Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) which allow for the integration of external applications like GIS and on-line payment services within the web environment. This is impeding the ability to move ahead with digital initiatives like on-line permits, digital payments for services and posting of jobs within Dayforce (to name a few).
- The programming language for the economic development and tourism sites is currently based in Drupal 7. This language will no longer be supported as of

January 2025, meaning that a migration and re-build of these sites must be completed before that time.

Essential Features for Re-Development of the County's Websites

In response to these pressing issues, and at the direction of the County's CAO, a Website Redevelopment Taskforce has convened for the purposes of leading this project and developing a comprehensive list of essential features that any website re-build must encompass. These features include:

- Robust accessibility features and tools – All sites must meet or exceed [O. Reg. 191/11](#) under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* by meeting WCAG 2.1 AA criteria with AAA standing wherever possible. This means it must have features such as text resizing tools, a text-to-sound reader and colour contrast tools.
- Ability to integrate with existing County software such as Laserfiche, eScribe, Salesforce, Encore/Sierra, Engage Elgin, Dayforce and social media feeds through API integration; and ability to integrate future web and Cloud-based software solutions through similar API integration.
- An open-source platform based on a non-proprietary content management system (CMS) that is easy to use and gives County staff creative licence to maintain and update the site. A WordPress platform is being recommended in this regard.
- A Cloud-based hosted solution in Canada with robust security protocols and user permissions. Cloud-based hosting is the most secure solution and comes with the assurance of regular security updates and back-ups.
- The ability to develop micro-sites at minimal or no cost for special initiatives like fundraising campaigns or emerging services (such as the fire training school).
- Robust and easy to use analytics tools to monitor usage and integrate improvements based on user feedback.
- Optimization for platforms such as tablets, smart phones, desktop computers and apps.
- Integration of current external websites for tourism and economic development under a single unified site for the County as whole, yet a site that is also able to deliver on the distinct service needs and audiences of each department.

The complete list of requirements as developed by the taskforce is attached to this report as Appendix A.

Single-Source Procurement to Sandbox Software Solutions

Staff are recommending that this redevelopment project be awarded to Sandbox Software Solutions based on the following considerations:

- The company was the successful proponent through a competitive Request for Proposal process in 2021 for the development of the corporate Intranet site. The scope of work and budget allocated to that project is similar in scope to the

current website redevelopment project given that the Intranet was a completely new initiative. Four proposals were received and Sandbox demonstrated best value for money during that recent process.

- The County is already paying Sandbox for external hosting of the Intranet site at an annual cost of approximately \$17,495 + unrebated HST per year. The company has confirmed that capacity exists to host the County's websites as part of this existing service for an additional cost of less than \$6,620 plus unrebated HST annually. A hosted solution for all the County's websites could not be achieved at this cost if the project were awarded to another vendor. In other words, this project leverages an existing and on-going County investment.
- Staff are already trained on CMS tools and procedures employed by Sandbox as a result of the Intranet project. Synergies will be achieved in terms of staff training and support to maintain both the redeveloped websites and the Intranet site. A trusted business relationship already exists between the two parties.
- Sandbox has extensive experience developing website for corporations of various sizes in the public sector. Clients include Hamilton Health Sciences, Kitchener Public Library, Barrie Public Library, Region of Halton and the Town of Espanola.

The County's Manager of Procurement & Risk recommends proceeding with this contract renewal on a single-source basis according to Section 4.7.c(iii) of the County's Procurement Policy which states as follows: "There is a need for compatibility with goods and/or services previously acquired or the required goods and/or services will be additional to similar goods and/or services being supplied under an existing contract (i.e. contract extension or renewal)."

Proposal summaries from Sandbox Software Solutions

Attached to this report as Appendix B are two proposals from Sandbox; the first to engage in immediate migration of all existing sites and the second to complete the redevelopment work leading to the launch of a new website. These proposals can be summarized as follows:

- All existing County websites, including those for tourism and economic development, will be migrated to Sandbox's Cloud hosted solution immediately in order to mitigate major security vulnerabilities with these sites. This migration will also allow Sandbox to complete ensuing redevelopment work within an environment that is under their control.
- Redevelopment work will take approximately 26 weeks from the date of engagement in phases that will involve interviews with key County staff, design, build, quality assurance, staff training and formal launch.
- The site will then be hosted in the Cloud through Sandbox as part of an annual maintenance and support agreement. County staff will have access to up to 8 hours of technical and maintenance support per month as part of an annual maintenance agreement. This agreement may be cancelled by the County upon 30 days written notice anytime after the site is launched.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

There are four costs associated with the entire scope of work being proposed by Sandbox:

- Migration of existing websites (www.elgincounty.ca, www.elgintourist.com and www.progressivebynature.com) from locally hosted solutions to a secure Cloud-based solution - \$4,800 + unrebated HST (2023 budget year).
- Redevelopment of all County websites - \$114,725 + unrebated HST (2023 and 2024 budget years).
- Possible additional microsites such as Elgin Middlesex Fire School - \$2,500 + unrebated HST
- Annual maintenance and hosting fees - \$24,115 + unrebated HST annually (2023 budget year and beyond). Note: Fees for the existing Intranet site are already being experienced annually at a cost of \$17,495 + unrebated HST. As a result, the impact to the annual County budget is potentially \$6,620 + unrebated HST beginning this year. After the retirement of current external site hosting for tourism and economic development, the annual increase in costs for the new site are expected to be \$3,600 + unrebated HST.

Associated costs will be spread out between 2023 and 2024 budget years. Project revenue of \$50,000 will be received from Province of Ontario's Rural Economic Development Fund to offset the above implementation costs of \$114,725 and current website hosting of \$4,800 + unrebated HST, leaving the County share at approximately \$69,525 plus at least one microsite is \$72,025 + unrebated HST.

The remaining costs will be contained within the County's existing budget from a Capital project that has been carried forward for website development with a budget in the amount of \$57,000. This will leave approximately \$15,025 + unrebated HST left to cover. Given the delay in redevelopment of the current website, the 2024 Capital project contains a placeholder for Website development in the amount of \$42,000. During the budget process, staff will reduce the 2024 project to \$21,000 to accommodate the remaining portion of this project plus unrebated HST. Given our experience with this project, staff recognize that future project budgets are underfunded and suggest that the remaining budget be moved forward to support future website development costs.

Staff conducted a market analysis for similar redevelopment work in other municipalities, the results of which further validate Sandbox's proposal in terms of value for money:

Haldimand County	\$198,000	(2023)
Dufferin County	\$111,000	(2023)
Hastings County	\$119,980	(2022)
City of Quinte-West	\$105,250	(2020)
Township of King	\$155,000	(2019)

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Serving Elgin	Growing Elgin	Investing in Elgin
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensuring alignment of current programs and services with community need. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exploring different ways of addressing community need. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engaging with our community and other stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Planning for and facilitating commercial, industrial, residential, and agricultural growth. <input type="checkbox"/> Fostering a healthy environment. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Enhancing quality of place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensuring we have the necessary tools, resources, and infrastructure to deliver programs and services now and in the future. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Delivering mandated programs and services efficiently and effectively.

LOCAL MUNICIPAL PARTNER IMPACT:

The scope of work being proposed in this report pertains to County websites only. However, local municipal partners will always have the option of joining the County's hosted solution through Sandbox should they wish to explore this option. County staff are willing to facilitate such discussions should there be interest from local partners in this regard.

COMMUNICATION REQUIREMENTS:

Council and the public can expect to receive further updates as the redevelopment work proceeds, including through social media channels.

CONCLUSION:

The total scope of work outlined in this report will set the course for the next generation of the County's website. In the short-term, it will result in critical security updates to existing sites by hosting them in a more secure, Cloud-based environment. Subsequent work will then see the redevelopment and launch of a completely re-designed County website which will overcome pressing challenges with regards to accessibility by meeting and exceeding existing standards. It will unify existing sites for the first time under a common homepage and it will position the County to be future ready when it comes to the integration of existing and emerging program interfaces and applications. The County will continue to own the data and programming content associated with this work and it will be based on open-source tools that will make future migrations and updates easier whenever contemplated.



All of which is Respectfully Submitted

Brian Masschaele
Director of Community and Cultural
Services

Approved for Submission

Don Shropshire
Chief Administrative Officer/Clerk



Appendix A

Elgin County Website Redevelopment Requirements


Category	Requirement
Accessibility	All websites must be AODA compliant by meeting WCAG 2.1 AA criteria as per O.Reg. 191/11 , we are looking for an accessibility first approach.
Accessibility	The Solution provides features/functionality to promote the development of accessible content, such as the ability to require fields/meta data (alt tags, captions, descriptions, etc.) when uploading assets such as images, videos or other media.
Accessibility	The Solution supports responsive design (PC, mobile, tablet) and is able to be viewed with a full and consistent experience across all platforms without limitation, including all accessibility features/settings and the ability to complete forms. Ability to work with commonly used assistive technology products.
CMS	Ability to integrate with Laserfiche, eScribe, Salesforce, Encore/Sierra, Bang the Table (engageelgin.ca , an external engagement tool, possibility of embedding) and the ability to integrate with future external tools. The Solution supports the ability to create pages using dynamic data where content is managed from external lists, databases, files, Web APIs, etc.
CMS	The Solution allows for the creation of image galleries.
CMS	The Solution allows integration with Salesforce OR includes the functionality for a local business directory that can be used to promote local industry and businesses. The directory should be an interactive index that can include name, address, links, photos, etc. Business information should be able to be entered by our staff, submitted by the business (subject to approval by County staff), or imported from another source (Salesforce).
CMS	The Solution has document controls such as the ability to lock pages for editing, to prevent overwriting changes or other conflicts by two or more individuals attempting to simultaneously edit the same page.
CMS	The Solution has the ability to include social media widgets for displaying social content/feeds.
CMS	The Solution implements a crawler to parse and index all textual content (e.g. web pages, metadata, documents such as PDFs, etc.) posted on the County website in order to support robust search capabilities. The Solution can exclude a specific web page, document, image, etc. from being crawled and indexed so it does not appear in any search results.
CMS	The Solution includes a highly configurable caching mechanism within its core platform to maximize the performance and responsiveness of the County's website.

Category	Requirement
CMS	The Solution includes advanced search capabilities including the ability to perform full text search within webpages, documents, images, and other assets on any combination of the following: a. All specified keywords b. Exact phrases c. One or more specified keywords d. Date specified e. None of the specified keywords. The Solution is able to display alternate search results for a misspelled query.
CMS	The Solution is built upon an easy-to-use CMS that allows non-experts to create, edit, and delete all types of content. The CMS must allow pages to be saved in various states, including but not limited to draft, approved, unpublished, and published (live).
CMS	The Solution provides a method to publish emergency alerts throughout the site on demand via banner or similar approach.
CMS	The Solution provides a method to view website analytics, either through a tool native to the CMS or integration with Google Analytics 4.
CMS	The Solution provides features and functionality to maximize Search Engine Optimization (SEO).
CMS	The Solution provides grammar and spell-checking tools.
CMS	The Solution provides online help for template creation and support.
CMS	The Solution provides the ability for site administrators (or content editors with appropriate permissions) to add, edit, update and move menu items, affecting overall site structure and organization.
CMS	The Solution provides the ability to accept submissions in different formats (database, PDF, html).
CMS	The Solution provides the ability to auto generate metadata (e.g. author, date, status, etc.).
CMS	The Solution provides the ability to create calendars that: a. Can be added/edited by multiple contributors; b. Allow visitors to sort/filter based on specified criteria; c. Events can be added through APIs from other applications; d. Allow members of the public to submit events; e. Provide approval functionality; f. Ability for visitors to "add to calendar" through .ics or ical; g. allows for event registration (this could be facilitated through an online form); h. occurs in multiple instances across various sites and functions separately
CMS	The Solution provides the ability to define mandatory page elements.
CMS	The Solution provides the ability to edit individual elements of the template (e.g. navigation, top navigation, footer, etc.).
CMS	The Solution provides the ability to embed third-party applications via iFrame.
CMS	The Solution provides the ability to integrate with a variety of payment engines, and the ability to change payment engines. Our current tool is BrainTree but we are interested in switching to a more

Category	Requirement
	robust tool or receiving further training on how to make BrainTree work for our needs.
CMS	The Solution provides the ability to manage, update, and repair hyperlinks.
CMS	The Solution provides the ability to schedule the delivery of data (e.g. email, FTP, API).
CMS	The Solution provides the ability to support live chat, such as Formilla.
CMS	The Solution provides the ability to track and report on the lifecycle of content, such as providing the ability to archive pages; a prompt to review and potentially delete large media files no longer active on any live page to conserve space. The Solution supports functionality to identify, track and preserve any digital assets (webpages, images, documents, etc.) that have been deleted from the content repository and allow the recovery of digital assets which have been deleted.
CMS	The Solution provides the ability to trigger workflows and actions based on visitor website behaviours and activities (e.g. the submission of a form, uploading of a document, etc.) either through native capabilities or integration with other third-party systems via APIs.
CMS	The Solution provides users the option to subscribe to content update notifications for any page on the site in order to automatically receive any updates to that page via email. The Solution provides functionality for an E-newsletter tool.
CMS	The Solution supports client-side scripting languages.
CMS	The Solution supports complex form creation with and without programming that are AODA compliant. With automatic response ability upon user submission.
CMS	The Solution supports linking and the upload of multiple media types (audio, video). Ability to display YouTube videos.
CMS	The Solution supports scheduled automated publishing and unpublishing of content pages.
CMS	The Solution supports the ability to create user roles and groups to ease user administration. The Solution supports the ability to control and increase the number of site administrators and editors as required.
CMS	The Solution supports the ability to create, modify, and save templates, master pages, and layouts.
CMS	The Solution supports the capability of authorized users to manage permanent and temporary redirects of pages.
Information Management	The Proponent confirms that Elgin County website content and data ownership remains with Elgin County and can be exported to Elgin County at the end of the agreement.

Category	Requirement
Nice-to-have	The Solution provides a quick preview feature that allows visitors to hover over an individual search result to display a preview of the matching web page, document, etc. without having to click through.
Nice-to-haves	The Solution provides an out-of-the-box, fully accessible "e-book viewer" solution for viewing online magazines, newsletters or catalogues (e.g. community guide, wish book).
Nice-to-haves	The Solution provides the ability to create areas of the site where user consent is required to proceed for a Tourism Member Portal.
Security	The Solution has the ability to collect sensitive data from forms securely.
Security	The Solution supports two-factor authentication (2FA).
Technical	The County would need to review the Service Level Agreement to be aware of items such as uptime guarantees, business continuity, recovery plans, etc.
Technical	The Solution allows the ability to manage and license current domains and URLs, along with any future additions. The Solution has the ability to add sites, sub-sites, and sub-domains quickly, without additional costs (beyond fees related to incremental storage and/or traffic increases). The Solution is scalable to host other organizations or agencies in future.
Training and Documentation	The Proponents is able to provide recommendations and assist in the development of reference materials for website governance, including: roles, style guidelines, content governance, policies, and standards.
Training and Documentation	The Solution provides online documentation for content providers, administrators, technical staff, and developers as well as training prior to and following launch of live completed site.

List of tools that require various levels of integration: Formilla, Sierra/Encore, Laserfiche, eScribe, Salesforce, Bang the Table, BrainTree



Appendix B – Sandbox Website Hosting and Redevelopment Proposals

