



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

Briefing Note

To: Council

File No.: 1495-20

From: Acting Director of Corporate Services

Date: January 28, 2026

Subject: AVA Digital Gold Award for Courtenay's Website Redesign

PURPOSE: To inform Council of the international AVA Digital Gold Award for the City website redesign.

BACKGROUND:

AVA Digital Awards is an international competition that recognizes excellence by creative professionals responsible for the planning, concept, direction, design and production of digital communication.

The City's new and improved website, www.courtenay.ca, launched on July 22, 2025. The project was a major organization-wide initiative that has significantly enhanced the City's digital presence and improved access to essential and quality-of-life information for our residents, businesses, staff, and visitors. The new website is a crucial tool for connecting with our community and providing efficient, accessible services.

The website redesign was completed by Upanup, a full-service digital agency with offices in Victoria, Calgary and Kitchener. The City selected Upanup based on their extensive expertise with local government websites, their detailed methodology and work plan, experienced team, and their overall website design approach, which focuses on the needs of website users. Their "user experience first" motto emphasizes web accessibility, usability, and overall great website experiences for everyone. They specialize in serving municipalities and public-sector organizations, with hundreds of clients across Canada and the United States.

DISCUSSION:

The City's previous website was over 10 years old and no longer met design and functionality standards. Consultation with community groups in 2023 completed through the City's Communication Strategy project identified that equity-deserving communities went first to the City's website as a main resource when looking for information; but sometimes struggled to navigate the site. The Communication Strategy recommended the website as a primary information centre for everything happening in the City, creating a trustworthy, barrier-free and reliable resource for residents.

With this priority in mind, the website project launched in spring 2024 with the vendor selection process with a goal of modernizing the website design, reviewing and updating website content, and greatly improving the overall user experience. The website redesign began in summer 2024, with continuous collaboration and development with the City team and Upanup until launch in July 2025.

Key website improvements and features:

- **Enhanced user experience:** The redesigned website features a clean, informative, and accessible interface. The dynamic homepage is tailored to different user groups (residents, businesses, visitors) with customized entry points and curated content for improved navigation.
- **Accessibility:** The website emphasizes a user-first experience, aligned with internationally recognized Website Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 Level AA accessibility standards.

- **Streamlined and localized navigation:** The website's navigation is based on industry best practices, refined to meet the specific needs of our community through input from a website steering committee and local user experience testing. Content is organized into five main categories accessible from the Home menu: Services, Community and culture, Parks and recreation, Business and building, and City Hall. Each category includes logical subcategories for a more intuitive browsing experience.
- **Improved content:** every webpage was reviewed by Upanup and updated by City staff, aligned with the City's style guide and a new website governance guide, with enhanced content development and copyediting throughout led by City communications staff.
- **Improved search functionality:** The site search aggregates results from courtenay.ca, engagecomoxvalley.ca/courtenay, and eSCRIBE council minutes and agendas, presenting them in a single, user-friendly list with filter options and Boolean search functionality.
- **Filters:** The site offers the option to filter results on various page types, including search, parks and greenways, job opportunities, facilities and projects, allowing users to curate search results for their specific needs and interests.
- **Interactive features:** The website incorporates interactive maps on various page types including parks, facilities and projects. Online webforms simplify public feedback and applications.
- **Multilingual support:** GTranslate provides multilingual support in over 80 languages, broadening accessibility for all residents.
- **Advanced content management:** The website utilizes robust content management with defined user roles, editorial workflows, and moderation capabilities.
- **Enhanced communication and engagement:** Courtenay's engagement platform landing page is prominently featured on the home page, with links to active engagement opportunities available on related project pages.
- **Subscriptions:** The website offers the option to sign up for email updates on various categories, including news, events, alerts, bids, careers and public notices, as well as the City's newly-launched monthly e-newsletter.
- **Technical enhancements:** The platform boasts strong security, compliance measures and scalable hosting infrastructure.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

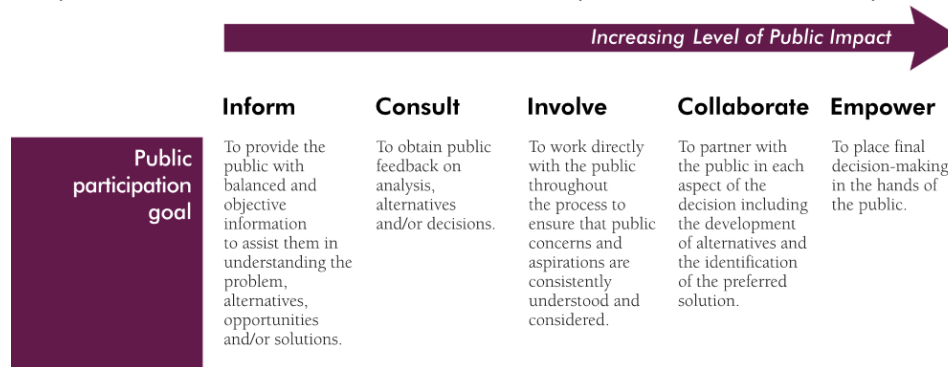
The Website Redesign was funded as part of the City's annual budget in 2024 and 2025. The application fee for the AVA Digital Award was funded by the website developer, Upanup.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

Support for and involvement in the development of the website redesign was within the 2024 and 2025 Corporate Services annual work plan. The project was further informed by a variety of City departments. There are minimal staff implications within communications resulting from the AVA Digital Gold Award.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Communication and engagement for the website redesign ranged from inform to involve. Staff has informed the public about the award based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation:



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RECOMMENDATION: THAT Council receive the “AVA Digital Gold Award for Courtenay’s Website Redesign” briefing note.

ATTACHMENT:

1. AVA Digital Awards – City of Courtenay Website Design Upanup Studios Inc.

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