WEBSITE FOR SUTTON MASSACHUSETTS

An Interactive Qualifying Project

Submitted to the faculty of

WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Science

By:

_____

Paul George Patoulidis

_____

Brian Joseph Lehtinen

Date of Submission: March 1, 2002

Approved:

_____

Professor Alexander DiIorio, Major Advisor

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to work closely with officials from the Town of Sutton to generate a useful and informative town website. The execution of this project involved several research phases, including analysis and review of previous town websites and survey of town officials to create a product suited to the needs of the citizens of Sutton. The outcome of this project is a physical website to be launched on the World Wide Web with the approval of town officials.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the computer age has progressed over the last decade, the internet has taken a huge stride forward from its original state. It has since evolved into a vital communication tool for both commercial and social use. Today, email and web commerce have become the centerpieces of American business. Many cities and towns have also turned to the internet in order to relay important news and information to their citizens. As a perfect example of science and technology interacting with societal structures, the Town of Sutton, Massachusetts has decided to make this stride into the 21st Century and implement a town website of their own.

Accomplishing this required, first, a survey and reference phase during which town officials were surveyed and previously launched, yet incomplete, town websites were used as examples in order to decide which information would be most appropriately displayed on Sutton's site. After reviewing the collected information, it was organized into a physical layout which stood as the blueprint for the town's website.

The next phase to be completed was a research period in which the actual content for the website was gathered and organized. This included the following information.

- Contact information for town officials and departments
- Town Statistics and Census information
- Links to other relevant websites (i.e. schools, etc.)
- Town Charter / Bylaws
- Community Events information
- Church information
- Local Industry and Commerce information
- Pictures of Sutton
- Announcements, etc.

Once armed with the blueprint and this information, website construction began. This required, first, selecting the appropriate software with which to create the site, standardizing an aesthetically pleasing format and style, and inputting the data and information collected above. Before this phase was complete, the website required vigorous editing to ensure content validity and style consistency.

There were several points beyond our responsibility which must be completed before the website can be launched. These will be handled by Sutton officials and included registration of the website address and appropriation of funds with which to purchase server space. Once these are completed and our website design is approved, the site will be officially launched on the World-Wide-Web.

When completed, this project displayed the usefulness of a town website even in the most rural of communities. Computer and internet technology will, no doubt, continue to advance and strive forward, and with the implementation of the website, the Town of Sutton can now be connected to a gateway of information, constantly updating and evolving. Once in place, this website will serve as a foundation to be renovated and added to over time to sufficiently serve the needs of the citizens of Sutton.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout the course of this project we received tremendous support and cooperation from many individuals from the Town of Sutton who worked with us to ensure project success. We would like to extend our gratitude to the members of the web and technology group in Sutton, Jen Hager, Joanne Donnelly and Tammy Caruso, and also the members of the Sutton Long-Range Planning Board whose input and feedback made our job much easier.

We would also like to thank Laura Rodgers, the town clerk of Sutton, whose efforts in assisting our research of town information was unparalleled and allowed the project to flow much more smoothly.

We would also like to thank Gene LaCava for volunteering to be the webmaster once our involvement with the project was expired. He was also invaluable in providing technical information and advice regarding website construction.

And last, but certainly not least, we would like to thank Alexander DiIorio, of the WPI Biology department, who served as our project advisor. His countless efforts and hours of assistance warrant our highest level of gratitude and we want him to be aware of our appreciation. So, thank you from your group.

AUTHORSHIP PAGE

This project was authored completely and equally by each of the group members. Each member contributed to the writing of the report and was responsible for a specific area of the website. Brian Lehtinen was responsible for gathering and inputting the content for the education, community, and industry pages of the site as well as organizing and uploading many photographs of interest spots in Sutton. Paul Patoulidis was responsible for the style and format of the site as well as the government page which included inputting and validating all the information in the Town Directory. In addition, each member participated in the periodical presentations of the project to Sutton town officials.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In today's high paced world of technology, computers and the internet have taken center stage in regards to empowering the average citizen with an endless means of information and communication. Many cities and towns have even turned to the internet to relay important news and information to their citizens. Town websites have proven successful in providing helpful tools for communities of all sizes, from simple town contact numbers, to interactive secure sites on which to pay bills, and submit applications. The idea of an Interactive-Qualifying-Project (IQP) is to investigate relationships between science / technology and societal structures and values. Therefore, this project will investigate the need for a town website in Sutton and implement this website to be launched on the world-wide-web.

The Town of Sutton is a community which has not changed much over the last few decades and seems to have been left in the dark when it came to the computer age. The town seemed to have been stopped in time and advancements in computer / internet technology were not seen as a necessity. However, recent increases in industrial and residential development in the community have stirred public opinion, and after trading ideas on ways to increase communication, officials decided that a town website was ideal for this day and age. Alexander DiIorio of the WPI Biology Department and a member of the Sutton Long Range Planning Board saw this as a great IQP opportunity.

Our underlying project goal was to create a solid base for a town website that could be used as the foundation for a permanent website for the Town of Sutton. This website would need to be simple in design to provide for constant update by numerous

town officials. It would need to be aesthetically pleasing in appearance and be consistent with the values and traditions of the town in order to be accepted by its citizens. Accomplishment of this goal would require the implementation of several sub-goals.

The main goal of any website should be to inform, so it is only natural that a sub-goal of this project would be to make this website as informative as possible. There are two separate target groups which we need to inform with this site; the citizens of Sutton and non – Sutton Citizens. We designed this website for Sutton citizens to use in order to receive information relating to numerous aspects of the town. These include, contact information for town officials, departments and committees, community events calendars and articles, information on local area schools, church and industry information, and important town notices and announcements.

As for the non-Sutton citizens, we felt that they should be informed about the town as well. The town of Sutton has a long and colorful history dating back to 1716. It is a shame for a town so rich with American culture to go overlooked. This website will serve as one of the few tools available that can be used to inform individuals world-wide about the town's existence and history.

Another issue that arose with the initiation of this project was the need for a web and technology group made up of town officials. This created a minor problem in that none of the officials initially selected for the group were particularly fluent with computer technology. Therefore, another sub-goal was created for our group was to help educate the web group on the basics of web development. Although we would be doing the actual web design, we felt it necessary that this group have a general knowledge of

issues such as web-address registration, server space, etc. since they would be in charge of the site when we were done with the project.

Although the audience for this project will eventually be users of the World-Wide-Web (Sutton users in particular), for the time-being, the project audience are the members of the Web and Technology group of Sutton. These officials are the only people to see the website thus far, as it has yet to be launched. We displayed the progress of the project to them at periodic meetings throughout the duration of this project and they have responded with approval and suggestions for improvement.

In the following chapters, we intend to elaborate with significant detail on the processes which were fulfilled in order to accomplish this project. Chapter two will discuss the background information and references used to obtain our project ideas. Chapter three will provide a very in depth analysis of the step-by-step procedures used to construct the website. And chapter four, will include our final conclusions after completing the project and our recommendations for the future of the website.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND & LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. LEGAL ISSUES SURROUNDING MUNICIPAL WEBSITES

In a memorandum from Kopelman and Paige, P.C., Attorneys at Law to their municipal clients, the legal guidelines for the most common problem areas surrounding municipal websites are highlighted. Sutton was no exception, so these guidelines had to be implemented throughout the course of this project to prevent liabilities to the town. These guidelines and how they pertained to this particular project are summarized below [see Appendix B for actual memorandum text].

2.1.1. TERMS OF USE

In establishing the terms of use for any website, it is crucial to understand that the site owner, in this case, the Town of Sutton, is entirely responsible for all material and content included on this website. The town is responsible for the accuracy and validity of all content and the protection of all private/personal information contained within the site. They must also assume responsibility for any site defects (i.e. viruses, etc.). Content was repeatedly checked and disclaimers were employed in order to escape any liability for the above stated terms.

2.1.2. COPYRIGHT LAWS

There are two main concerns when it comes to copyright laws and websites. The first is that any material added to a municipal site must remain property of that municipality. Although we are the ones physically inputting the content into the site, the town will eventually retain ownership at which point it must copyright the information to protect the town's rights against external reproduction of the material for capital gain.

Secondly, municipalities must be aware of copyrights which may already be in place for materials added to the website. The town of Sutton could face liability for copyright infringement if content inputted onto the site was previously copyrighted. This, however, does not pertain to links on the website. The Town of Sutton cannot be held liable for content of another website simply because that site is linked on the town site. By making use of links, we can have certain information posted on the site with no danger of copyright infringement.

2.1.3. PUBLICATION OF BY-LAWS

For municipal websites which display copies of by-laws and/or charters, it is important to note that the substance of these copies cannot be considered "official." Stated under the Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 66, "Electronically stored data does not constitute an official public record." If in the event that by-law material the Sutton website differed from that of an official Town Clerk copy, the clerk's copy would be deemed as the valid version. While this site does include a copy of the town by-laws / charter, a disclaimer alerts users that it is not an "official" version.

2.1.4. SINGLE MUNICIPAL WEBSITE RULE

Although not stated in the enclosed memorandum, it is state policy that each municipality have no more than one official website. This was a significant problem that was discovered very shortly after the project initiation. In preliminary online research, this group discovered another website for the Town of Sutton already in place .

2.1.4.1. WWW.SUTTONMASS.COM

This pre-existing website was discovered by this group during the very initial stages of this project. After investigation, we found that none of the Sutton officials had any knowledge of this site or the site owner. The site itself did not present significant problems to our project since it was a historically based website concentrating on cemetery records, church information, and genealogy. There was very little overlap between the content of this site and the one which we were developing. However, administratively, this provided a significant problem. There was obviously someone operating a website in the name of the town with no formal permission to do so from town officials. This person was eventually contacted and notified of the situation. It was later determined by this group and the web and technology group that cooperation could exist between this site and the one we were developing. This issue will be dealt with when the website is to be launched.

2.2. REFERENCED WEBSITES

During initial research stages of this project, this group referenced several municipal websites which were already in place on the World-Wide-Web in order to gather ideas for what a town website should include. The towns which were chosen for this purpose were selected for their industrial and residential similarities to the Town of Sutton and that due to these similarities, they would have similar needs for a municipal website. More information on this selection process and how they were used to complete our project is contained in the following chapter.

After referencing these websites, we extracted the following list of ideas to utilize on Sutton's website

- Office hours of public buildings
- Links for town officials and committees
- Community Information (Calendar, Lost & Found, yard sale listings)
- Links to school websites
- Private sector links (Industry)
- Town Directory – contact Information, office location, etc.
- Pictures of Sutton
- Sutton history and statistics
- Important notices and announcements on main page
- Town recognition page – Recognize accomplishments of residents, officials, students, etc.

2.3. ORIGINAL IDEAS

In addition to referencing other websites, this group along with the web and technology group and input from town citizens, came up with many ideas which would provide a unique flare for Sutton's website. These included:

- A town email directory for those citizens who want their email addresses released
- Display of meeting minutes from various committee meetings which outlining specific decisions, votes, etc of that committee.
- A town forum page on which citizens could have their comments regarding town activities, events, policy, etc. posted for public view (Would require a disclaimer)
- A "Who to contact" directory in which frequently needed services are displayed and users can be linked directly to the most appropriate committee / department. **[Below is an actual view of part of this directory as it appears on the website]**

If I Need This Information:	*I Should Contact the:*
Abutters List Certificates	Assessors Office
Accounts Payable Information	Accountant
Animal Complaints	Animal Control Officer
Auto Dealer License	Selectmen
Bandstand on the Common permits	Selectmen
Classified Chapter Land	Assessors Office
Copies of Birth / Death Certificates	Town Clerk
Copies of Tax Bills	Town Collector
Dog Licenses	Town Clerk
Economic Incentive Information	Planning Board
Elderly Issues	Council on Aging
Elderly Lunch Program	Council on Aging
Elderly Exemption Information / Applications	Assessors; Council on Aging
Fish and Game Licenses	Town Clerk
Genealogy Requests	Town Clerk
Gravel Pit Information	Earth Removal Board
Homestead Act Forms and Information	Assessors; Council on Aging
Inspectors	Building Department
Lake Manchaug Greenway & Wildlife Corridor	Land Use
Meeting Room Reservations	Selectmen
Motor Vehicle Excise Values	Assessors Office

CHAPTER 3: PROCEDURE

3.1. RESEARCH

3.1.1. SELECTION OF MODEL WEBSITES

A model for the Sutton website was needed for a foundation of the project. Knowing what characteristics and the layout of the page was necessary in creating our page. To get a better view of what a Massachusetts website should look like we looked at other municipal websites. We looked at towns with similar characteristics as Sutton. Characteristics included town structures, historical aspects, commerce, and size. We looked at the following town websites: Fitchburg, MA, Townsend, MA, Ashby, MA, Saugus, MA, and Leominster, MA. We specifically did not model after municipal websites for larger cities, such as Boston, because those did not present the same web needs as a smaller town, such as Sutton.

3.1.2. GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

The majority of government related information that was included on this website was obtained from Laura Rodgers, the Town Clerk for Sutton. The directory was received in paper form from her office and from this document an electronic, hyper linked form on the website was generated. This directory included every town department and committee name, office address, contact number, staff and committee members' names, office hours, and the duties and responsibilities for each department / committee.

Also sought as a useful item for the site, were the recorded minutes of various committee meetings. Although not available until the site is to be launched, these minutes will be obtained by the webmaster from the various committee secretaries.

3.1.3. ATTAINMENT OF RELEVANT LINKS

Links play an important role to a website. Links connect one page to another, whether or not they are on the same root address. You cannot easily find out what links are related to Sutton by searching the Internet. We needed to be given the links and notified of what pages should be contained on the website. Jen Hager and Laura Rodgers were very helpful in getting us information on links related to Sutton, MA.

Important links for the Sutton website were those for the school web pages. The elementary school, middle school, high school and historical school websites are all linked on the "Education" section of the site.

This group thought it would be valuable to have links for various industry and private sector members of the town. The site has links to a town directory, providing information on stores, restaurants, etc in and around Sutton. In this instance it is important that the town provide a disclaimer informing that they have no control over the content of these links so as to avoid liability due to material on those sites.

Another important link was connecting the website to a larger audience. Most Worcester County websites have a link to the Worcester County website that has information dealing with all of the towns in the county.

General statistics about Sutton are critical when you want to accurately inform people about the town. There is a link to another outside address on the website that gives statistics on any Massachusetts town. The website was found through a search

engine looking for information on Sutton. The website gives statistics on Sutton, but also other towns in Massachusetts.

The history of Sutton was best described by the original Sutton website. As mentioned before, town officials planned to initiate some cooperation between this site and the original once the site is launched. So for the time being, the history tab on our website has been linked to the history page of the pre-existing town site.

3.1.4. ATTAINMENT OF COMMUNITY INFORMATION

The community members are the people who should get the most use out of this website. The website should be used to keep citizens informed and updated on what is going on in their town. To get information on town events we talked to Jen Hager and Laura Rodgers on the town hall. We also wanted to be able to post information and messages on a bulletin board. The website contains a calendar of events and the capability for a bulletin board to post messages to visitors. All of the information on the community page can be obtained from the town hall. The town hall has all the information pertaining to seasonal events, church events, etc.

3.1.5. SURVEY OF TOWN OFFICIALS

The website is designed for the town of Sutton; therefore the town must accept its character and presentation. It should represent the town in everything it encompasses. We felt the town officials could give us the best idea of what they would like to see in the website, whether in design, format, or in content. The town officials sought after community information, government information, and assistance from resident documents.

A calendar of events and a bulletin board are important for getting citizens interested and involved with their town. Another major component of getting the citizens more informed is posting minutes of committee meetings for those unable to attend. This will be extremely useful for the town's abundant elderly population, many living in care facilities that could provide internet access for those unable to attend the meetings. Another way of helping the citizens was to put forms on the website that people can print out and mail to the town hall to save time.

3.2. WEBSITE BLUEPRINT

The information we received from the town officials and the internet was organized into a sensible flowchart. We then designed the site on paper creating a blue print of how the site should flow. This blueprint [which can be seen in Appendix A] served as one of the most useful tools in this website construction as it kept us on track with a definite direction.

This website begins, as all sites do, with the main page. This page contains the most important information that we want to present to the user. This includes the town name, information on the town, a few pictures, current events, and links to the other pages. From there, the main page was linked to the government, education, industry, and picture pages. And as the blueprint shows, each of these pages was linked on to other pages and so on. One important factor is that each of these pages be linked directly back to the main page.

3.3. WEBSITE CONSTRUCTION

3.3.1. SOFTWARE SELECTION

The decision of which web software to use would rely almost entirely on the site update program decided on by the Web and Technology Group. It was originally decided that each committee chair would have the ability to update their own portion of the site which would result in many different people being involved. This led our software search to a choice between Microsoft Word and Microsoft Front Page. Front Page is software specifically designed for creating websites and mostly used by intermediate to skilled webmasters. Front Page does have many options and tools not available on Word, however we chose Word because of its simplicity and because it is very user friendly. Most people with only basic computer knowledge are still somewhat experienced in Word and would be capable of updating this website using that software.

3.3.2. FORMAT AND STYLE DESIGN

From the information we received from other websites we created a guideline of what our pages would look like and how they would be linked together. Our format should enable easy updating. With basic fonts and colors it made it possible for pages to be updated often. The pages were also fairly short in length which decreases the scroll time. Scroll time is a significant factor that provides comfortable surfing of the site. The main page consists of 5 sub-links and only a few significant announcements such as current weather and other information users would want to see immediately as they enter the website.

Links are an important part of the format to a website. Providing links to various parts of the site on all pages of the site minimizes the number of clicks it takes for a user to get where he/she wants to go.

Also included in this format is the last updated dates on each of the pages within the site, the organization of town photographs for easier navigation by the user, and the concentration on the colors green and white (Sutton's town colors) for the bulk of the text. The design of this format and style consistency throughout the site is done to present an aesthetically pleasing and professional looking website to the viewers.

3.3.3 CONTENT INPUT

With the format and style design in place, the information that we received in the research phase of the project could be inputted to the corresponding pages using the proper disclaimers if necessary. Photographs were arranged in an easily viewed manner and large documents (i.e. Town By-laws) were placed in separate pages for easy downloading.

3.3.4 EDITING AND REVISIONS

Now that the website was created it was time to present it to the public. We presented the website first to the town officials in the website committee. We then presented the pages to the Long Range Planning Committee. We placed a note on the main page of the website that all questions and comments should be emailed to us. The following were some recommendations to change the website:

"You might want to consider using a picture of the town seal in room 1A. It is the same as the black and white, but painted in color. The school (town?) colors are green and white, it might make these predominant."

22

"I believe the link to educational information should include a link to the DOE web site (by opening a new window) this will be the best location for general information about the School District."

"Whitinsville Water should be moved into a third group of Private Utilities with Mass Electric, Charter Cable, and Verizon

"How about a main section on recreation including links to the bikeway, the state park/land, youth sports, etc."

After we made an effort to fit everyone needs on a website, all of the information was checked over by both group members, by the project advisor, and the town officials. The content was also approved by the town officials at the presentation of the website.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS AND ANALYSIS

Although the project has yet to be released to the World Wide Web, it has had a tremendous impact with Sutton's infrastructure. There are many diverse areas that can be researched and observed in a website and it is very difficult for one website to contain all areas. This project is an introduction and a first step towards an all inclusive website. The project created the need for an official or webmaster to run the website and to maintain it. The town has created a new mechanism to get information out to their citizens, other than the cable access channel.

Town of Sutton officials were very concerned about management of the website after its creation. The major problem arose when it was realized that someone would have to assume the job of webmaster. With the work that the group accomplished we were able to make an easily editable and very user friendly website. Anyone who knows how to use the common program, Microsoft Word will be able to work with the files. In this case the town would not need to hire someone on a part-time basis to maintain the website: mainly to update the site when necessary and make revisions when committees require information on their pages. In this way committees can also have a copy of their page and email the webmaster the updated Word document.

The Town of Sutton decided it would need someone to maintain this website and fortunately, Gene LaCava, a town resident, volunteered for the job. He looked up our website and decided to translate our site to a different program. Using more graphical user interfaces he gave the page a more professional and complete look. He gathered the information for his version from this group and our site. This new site, while very

professional in look and easy to surf, is more difficult to understand from the technical

side and thus will be more difficult to translate to website novices. There are

complexities behind the code, since it does not use merely html, as did our site. It also

lacks information that can be gained from the groups' website that will have to be

transported over. Either site will be beneficial to the town as the content is equivalent.

Gene LaCava is going to be taking the position of temporary webmaster. All of the

information of the first website will be saved by the Webmaster to use for informational

and transfer purposes, as well as a copy for the Town Hall.
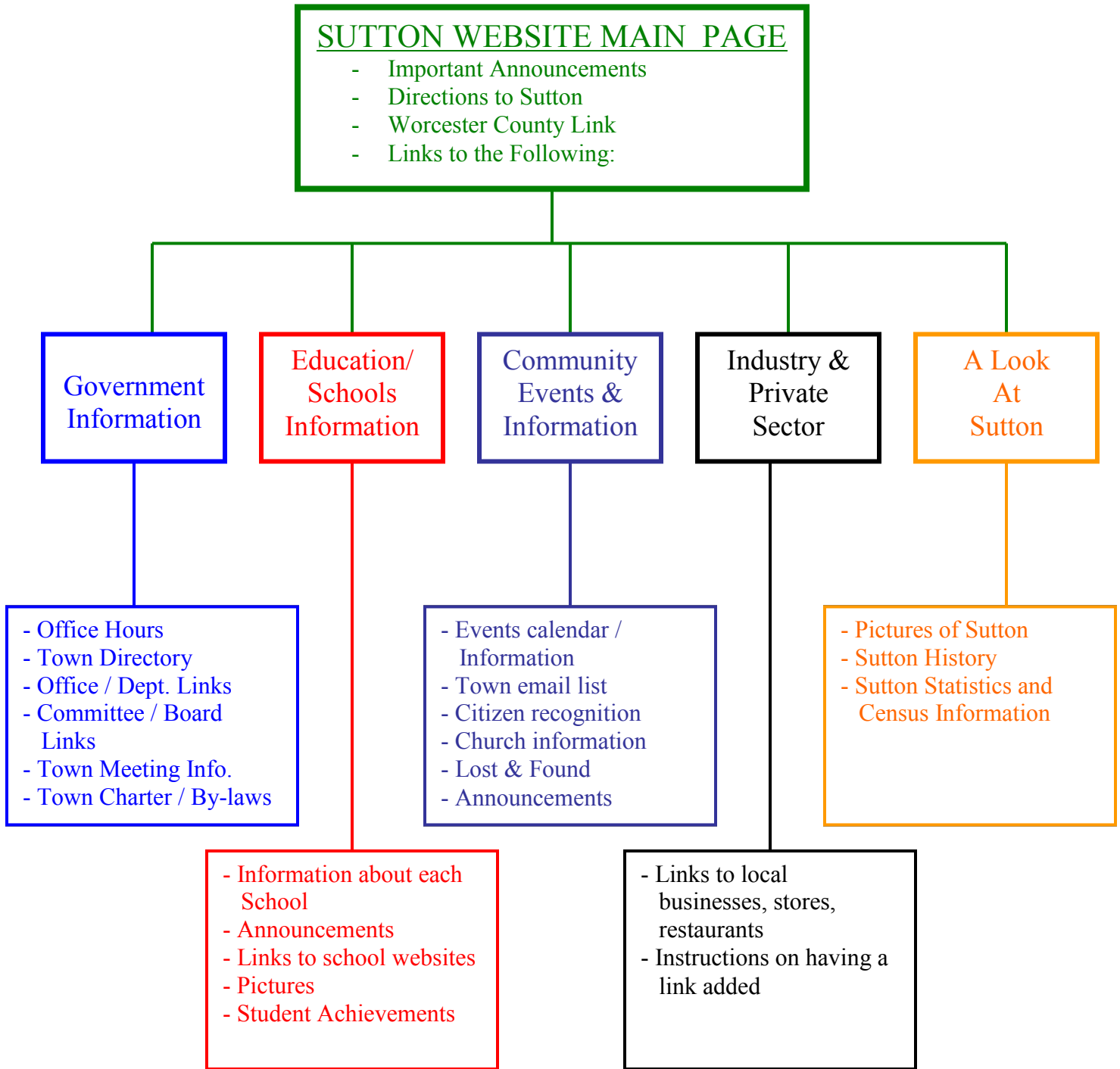
CHAPTER 5: FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important for all towns to keep citizens informed of what is transpiring behind the scenes within the town government. It is critical that a town website be used to its capacity and that it is a continuous source for information to the town's citizens. We recommend that the Town of Sutton keep records of all information that can be used on their website and should also collect all versions of current Sutton websites.

Finally, the Town of Sutton also needs a server for the website. We would like to recommend several options. The town uses Charter Communications as a cable server, but the town could also use this company for holding the server. Charter Communications also works with the World Wide Web. The town officials should contact Charter Communications for price options and whether they would give the town this service. Another option for a server is contacting the State of Massachusetts to place the website on their server.   The option of using the Sutton school server for the website is not a very likely option due to the inconsistent quality of that server. The last option, purchasing a server for the Sutton Town Hall, is not reasonable in the current economic climate as the hardware is expensive and would probably require a part-time employee to maintain it. Our primary recommendation to the Town of Sutton is to work closely with the webmaster to ensure that website content remains accurate and up to date.

APPENDIX A: WEBSITE BLUEPRINT

SUTTON WEBSITE MAIN PAGE
- Important Announcements
- Directions to Sutton
- Worcester County Link
- Links to the Following:

Government Information
- Office Hours
- Town Directory
- Office / Dept. Links
- Committee / Board Links
- Town Meeting Info.
- Town Charter / By-laws

Education/ Schools Information
- Information about each School
- Announcements
- Links to school websites
- Pictures
- Student Achievements

Community Events & Information
- Events calendar / Information
- Town email list
- Citizen recognition
- Church information
- Lost & Found
- Announcements

Industry & Private Sector
- Links to local businesses, stores, restaurants
- Instructions on having a link added

A Look At Sutton
- Pictures of Sutton
- Sutton History
- Sutton Statistics and Census Information

APPENDIX B: LEGAL ISSUES MEMORANDUM

LEONARD KOPELMAN
DONALD G. PAIGE
ELIZABETH A. LANE
JOYCE FRANK
JOHN W. GIORGIO
BARBARA J. SAINT ANDRE
JOEL B. BARD
EVERETT J. MARDER
JOSEPH L. TEHAN, JR.
ANNE-MARIE M. HYLAND
THERESA M. DOWDY
DEBORAH A. ELIASON
RICHARD BOWEN
DAVID J. DONESKI
JUDITH C. CUTLER
ILANA M. QUIRK
KATHLEEN E. CONNOLLY
———
EDWARD M. REILLY
DIRECTOR WESTERN OFFICE
———
DAVID C. JENKINS
WILLIAM HEWIG III
JEANNE S. McKNIGHT

KOPELMAN AND PAIGE, P. C.

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

31 ST. JAMES AVENUE

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02116-4102

(617) 556-0007
FAX (617) 654-1735

PITTSFIELD OFFICE
(413) 443-6100

NORTHAMPTON OFFICE
(413) 585-8632

WORCESTER OFFICE
(508) 752-0203

KATHLEEN M. O'DONNELL
SANDRA M. CHARTON
PATRICIA A. CANTOR
THOMAS P. LANE, JR.
BRIAN W. RILEY
MARK R. REICH
MARY L. GIORGIO
CHRISTOPHER J. GROLL
DARREN R. KLEIN
THOMAS W. MCENANEY
JONATHAN M. SILVERSTEIN
KATHARINE I. GOREE
GEORGE X. PUCCI
LAUREN F. GOLDBERG
JASON R. TALERMAN
GREGG J. CORBO
AMANDA ZURETTI
LISA CARRABINO ADAMS
ELIZABETH R. CORBO
SUSAN P. PACHT
DANIEL C. HILL
VICKI S. MARSH
BRIAN E. GLENNON, II
JONATHAN D. EICHMAN
AMY E. KWESELL

September 10, 2001

MEMORANDUM TO MUNICIPAL CLIENTS

TO: BOARD OF SELECTMEN/MAYOR/TOWN AND CITY COUNCIL
        TOWN MANAGER/TOWN ADMINISTRATOR/EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Re: Municipal Websites

Each day, there are more and more people, corporations and other entities launching websites to establish an Internet presence and increase their exposure to the public at large. Municipalities are no exception -- according to the Massachusetts Municipal Association, nearly 50% of Massachusetts municipalities have an "official" website (i.e., created and maintained by the city or town government), with many others having links to a regional or Chamber of Commerce website. These sites can provide valuable information, as cities and towns are posting public meeting notices, advertising available municipal property or employment openings, or even posting complete sets of by-laws or regulations. More recently, some municipalities are adding the capability to accept tax payments online, receive direct e-mail and make assessment data available for viewing.

With the ever-expanding new and sometimes invaluable uses for the Internet, however, new problems and potential liabilities are being illuminated. This memorandum is not intended to provide an in-depth analysis of all issues that may arise with websites, but rather to highlight some of the most common potential problem areas that deserve your consideration as you seek to create or expand the capability of your municipal website.

Memorandum to Municipal Clients
Municipal Website
September 10, 2001
Page 2

1.   Establishing Terms of Use

Terms of use and privacy policies are an essential provision of any website. They are basically disclaimers that allow the website owner to limit its exposure to claims for damages during use. This can include exposure to viruses or other equipment damage issues or accidental release of personal information. A terms-of-use statement should also caution against reliance on the veracity or accuracy of information found on the website.

The recommended disclaimers will vary according to the scope of the website; for example, sites that provide for online payments will have much more significant privacy issues to address. I have enclosed a sample disclaimer and terms-of-use notice with this memorandum. This includes general disclaimer language as to the accuracy of the content, as well as a warning about any links that the municipal website may have to other websites. While the risk of liability for a link to the Department of Revenue's Division of Local Services, for example, may be slight, links to commercial or other private sites require that additional precautions be taken.

Municipalities should also have a content neutral policy for what links, if any, may be established on their websites. While the courts have not found a municipal website to constitute a "public forum," a municipality could still face First Amendment claims if it allows certain private links while appearing to deny others based upon objectionable content or viewpoint. Links to county or state government websites would not appear to implicate this issue.

Also enclosed is a disclaimer related specifically to general or zoning by-laws. While providing on-line access to by-laws is beneficial to the public, the Massachusetts General Laws do not yet accept such electronic storage as an "official" repository for by-laws. Therefore, in the event that a by-law found on the website differs in any respect from the official version in the city or town clerk's office, the municipality could be subject to claims by developers or other parties that they relied on the website version in taking action and suffered damages as a result of inaccuracies.

1.   Copyright Issues

There are two distinct issues concerning copyrights that could arise from municipal website use. First, if a municipal employee, or independent contractor hired by the municipality, develops original website programs or other material subject to copyright laws, the municipality will generally be considered to own the copyright to the material. Any such material should have the name of the municipality, the term "copyright" or the copyright symbol [©] and the year of creation included to assert the municipality's rights in this regard. This will not prevent citizens from printing copyrighted material from the website for their own information, but will protect the municipality's rights if anyone attempts to use copyrighted material for commercial gain.

Caution must be taken to avoid the use or incorporation of previously copyrighted material into the municipal website, unless the copyright owner has given his or her express permission to do so. One issue, unresolved by the courts at this time, is whether the act of providing a link to an unrelated website that contains unauthorized copyrighted material is itself a copyright infringement. At least one federal court has ruled that such "vicarious" copyright infringement is actionable where the website providing the link has knowledge that the linked site contains unauthorized material. While the act of providing a link to most websites will not raise such concerns, website administrators would be advised to take care in establishing links to other websites.

3.   Publication of By-laws and Ordinances

The availability of general or zoning by-laws online is an undeniable convenience to municipal residents and property owners. Until such time as the General Court amends the relevant statutes to allow electronic by-laws or ordinances to be the "official" version, however, the town or city clerk's office must remain the repository of the official printed versions.

Electronically stored data does constitute a "public record" pursuant to the Public Records Law, General Laws Chapter 66. The Public Records Division of the Secretary of the Commonwealth's office requires that printed paper versions of all data be maintained, however, for statutorily mandated record retention purposes. As referenced above, another potential issue is an individual's reliance on an Internet version of a zoning by-law or ordinance that differs from the version on file with the city or town clerk. In order to guard against this possibility (and to avoid it appearing as an element of a civil court action by a permit applicant), the website should contain clear disclosures.
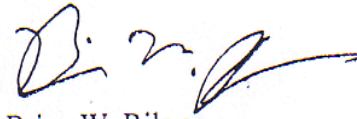
4.   Insurance

Large scale commercial websites, particularly those of corporations selling merchandise online, clearly face potentially large scale liability for spreading viruses, loss of business or invasion of privacy, and such business risks can be insured against. While the relative risks for municipal sites may not be as great, the same issues are present, particularly for websites that (1) provide for online tax payments, (2) provide e-mail access to municipal departments, and (3) provide links to other websites. Because this is still a relatively new medium, many comprehensive general liability policies may not cover such a claim or contain exclusions of coverage for website-related liability. As your city or town's website expands its applications and the type of data that is received from private parties, it may make sense to evaluate if insurance coverage is available and/or advisable.

This is by no means an exhaustive look at the variety of issues that are developing in the realm of the Internet. Caution should be exercised, however, in establishing and maintaining a website that can provide valuable information and resources to the public, while not creating exposure in the expanding field of Internet-based liability.

Very truly yours,

Brian W. Riley

BWR/das
Enc.

133151/K&P/0001

APPENDIX C: WEBSITE – MAIN PAGE

Government Information

Department/Committee Directory

Town Meeting Information

Town Constitution / ByLaws

If I Need This Information: *I Should Contact the:*

Abutters List Certificates	Assessors Office
Accounts Payable Information	Accountant
Animal Complaints	Animal Control Officer
Auto Dealer License	Selectmen
Bandstand on the Common permits	Selectmen
Classified Chapter Land	Assessors Office
Copies of Birth / Death Certificates	Town Clerk
Copies of Tax Bills	Town Collector
Dog Licenses	Town Clerk
Economic Incentive Information	Planning Board
Elderly Issues	Council on Aging
Elderly Lunch Program	Council on Aging
Elderly Exemption Information / Applications	Assessors; Council on Aging
Fish and Game Licenses	Town Clerk
Genealogy Requests	Town Clerk
Gravel Pit Information	Earth Removal Board
Homestead Act Forms and Information	Assessors; Council on Aging
Inspectors	Building Department
Lake Manchaug Greenway & Wildlife Corridor	Land Use
Meeting Room Reservations	Selectmen
Motor Vehicle Excise Values	Assessors Office
Properties in Tax Title	Treasurer
Property Record Cards (Info on all properties)	Assessors Office
Septic Issues	Board of Health
Street Lists	Town Clerk
Street Numbers	Assessors Office
Street / Road Information and Status	Town Clerk; Highway Dept.

Schools and Education Information

Sutton High School
Boston Rd, Sutton, MA 01590-1823
Phone: (508) 581-1600

Sutton Middle School
Boston Rd, Sutton, MA 01590-1823
Phone: (508) 581-1600

Sutton Elementary School
Boston Rd, Sutton, MA 01590-1823
Phone: (508) 581-1600

The Historic Schools

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Back to main page

Community Connection

Calendar of Events

Recent Local Events

Lost & Found

Local Garage/Yard Sale Listings

Calendar of Events

Some Helpful Information:

Sutton Police	**Sutton Fire Dept**	**Sutton Historical Society**
4 Uxbridge Road	4 Uxbridge Road	General Rufus Putnam Hall
Sutton MA 01590	4 Uxbridge Road	Sutton MA 01590
508-865-8747	508-865-8737	
	911 Emergency Only	

Sutton Free Public Library Hours:

```
DAY          WINTER      SUMMER
MONDAY       Closed      Closed
TUESDAY      2-8         2-8
WEDNESDAY    2-8         2-8
THURSDAY     Closed      Closed
FRIDAY       12-8        12-8
SATURDAY     10-3        10-3
SUNDAY       Closed      Closed
```

Church Information:

First Baptist Church Study	*First Congregational Church*
Central Turnpike	Boston Rd On the Common
Sutton, MA 01590	Sutton, MA 01590
Phone: (508)865-9370	Phone: (508)865-6914

Industry and Private Sector Information

Whittier Farms
http://www.whittierfarms.com/

Sutton Foundation

http://www.suttonedfoundation.org/

The Town of Sutton has no control over the content of these links and the opinions or ideas displayed are not necessarily those of the Town of Sutton
If you would like to have a link to your website added to this page please contact the Webmaster

Back to main page

A Look At Sutton, Massachusetts

Pictures of Sutton Bikeway

Sutton History

Some Statistics on the Town of Sutton

Back to main page

APPENDIX I: HTML FILE SOURCES

Accountant	Accountant.htm
Animal Control	AnimalControl.htm
Board of Assessors	Assessors.htm
Board of Health	Board%20of%Health.htm
Building Dept. (Including Inspectors)	Building%20Dept.htm
Cable Advisory Board	Cable%20TV.htm
Cemetery Commission	Cemetery.htm
Conservation Commission	Conservation.htm
Council on Aging	Council%20on%Aging.htm
Cultural Council	Cultural%20Council.htm
Earth Removal Board	Earth%20Removal.htm
Finance Committee	Finance%20Committee.htm
Fire Department	Fire%20Dept.htm
Highway Department	Highway%20Dept.htm
Historical Commission	Historical%20Commission.htm
Housing Authority	Housing%20Authority.htm
Land Use Study Committee	Land%20Use.htm
Board of Library Trustees	Library%20Board.htm
Sutton Free Public Library	Free%20Library.htm
Manchaug Public Library	Manchaug%20Library.htm
Long Range Planning Committee	Long%20Range%20Planning.htm
Moderator	Moderator.htm
Planning Department	Planning%20Dept.htm
Police Department	Police%20Dept.htm
Recreation	Recreation.htm
School Department (All Schools)	Schools.htm
School Committee	School%20Committee.htm
Selectmen	Selectman.htm
Sewer	Sewer.htm
Town Administrator	Town%20Administrator.htm
Town Clerk	Town%20Clerk.htm

Town Collector	Town%20Collector.htm
Treasurer	Treasurer.htm
Tree Warden	Tree%20Warden.htm
Veterans Agent	Veterans%20Agent.htm
Waters Farm Preservation Inc.	Waters%20Farm.htm
Zoning Board of Appeals	Zoning%20Board.htm
Transfer Station	Transfer%20Station.htm
Manchaug Water District	Manchaug%20Water%20District.htm
Whitinsville Water Company	Whitinsville%20WaTER%20Company.htm
Wilkinsonville Water District	Wilkinsonville%20Water%20District.htm

PROJECT CD-ROM

THE ENCLOSED DISC INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING:

- **IQP REPORT** – ELECTRONIC COPY OF THE REPORT SEEN ABOVE

- **WEBSITE FILES** – TO ACCESS WEBSITE, SIMPLY OPEN "WEBSITE FILES" FOLDER AND SELECT "MAINPAGE"

- **RELATED FILES** – INCLUDES PICTURES AND APPENDIX FILES.