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Virtual Yachats Project

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Background:

News from the Finance Committee about a softening of tax revenue from local businesses serves as a reminder of the connection the City has with the health of the local economy. The current budget estimate of transient room tax balance is \$533,000. Over the past 4 years, the percentage increase in the balance for this revenue source has averaged 26% a year. The projected balance increase from last year to this year is almost \$110,000.

The Problem:

Simply put, people aren't coming to the coast in the numbers we have seen in past years. We are already looking at a 4% decline in expected transient tax revenues. I believe it is in the best interest of the city to take any action that might reduce the potential of a reduction in city tax revenues from visitors. The City is best positioned to play a constructive role exploring new ideas to attract visitors to our village. We need to seriously consider new options. Failure to act is simply too expensive to consider.

An Option:

This project concept contains three distinct pieces. The first part would put a public wireless network along Hwy 101 through the downtown business district. The objective is to make the area attractive to visitors that value Internet connectivity. This is consistent with recent efforts to attract businesses to town for meetings, retreats, conferences, etc. The City would contract with a network provider for this service and no additional City staff would be required.

The second part would be a content management system designed to serve the needs of local businesses. A number of ideas are possible. The service could include a profile for each business that described the goods and services they offer, phone number, e-mail, web address, etc. Each business would be able to edit and maintain their data. It would also include time sensitive information about sales, events, offers, etc. that businesses would post and maintain. This site would differ from the Chamber web in the sense most of the data would be time sensitive and each business would maintain their data. All the data would be searchable. The exact nature of the content and system functionality would be determined after consultations with local businesses.

Part three would be a virtual tour of Yachats and a dynamic map. The City should contract for virtual tours of public areas like the wetland park behind the commons, the Little Log Church, the State Parks and beach, and if we can afford it, I would include Cape Perpetua and the Gerdemann Garden. In short, we need to put on display local assets that would attract people to visit. Any business that wanted to pay for a virtual tour could be added to the site as well.

This project concept reflects the thoughts and inspiration of a number of individuals. However, I feel it appropriate to acknowledge the creative inspiration provided by Lisa Gray. Her

suggestions about the virtual tours and dynamic map had not occurred to me and these may end up being the elements that most excite people about this effort.

Funding:

The scope of the work proposed is directly related to supporting the interests of people that visit Yachats. With over half a million dollars in the visitor amenity fund, using this money is the only resource that makes sense. We need to think of this in terms of investing in the economy of Yachats to ensure the long term economic health of our business community.

Project Process:

- Council gives conceptual approval and appoints project leader
- Purchase domain name: VirtualYachats.com
- Test for additional or better ideas – businesses, Chamber, staff, commissions, council
- Identify people interested in working on project elements
- Sub-groups are identified for each project phase
 - Networking
 - Content management system (web and database)
 - Virtual Tours & Dynamic Map
 - Other???
- Prepare budget estimates for each phase
- Obtain council approval of final project scope and budget
- Prepare scope of work for each phase; include local check points
- Solicit quotes for work
- Work out project timeline for each phase
- Council awards contracts
- Monthly check points and sub-group reviews
- Provide monthly status reports to council with feedback from sub-groups
- Make design changes as needed based on community feedback
- Deploy solutions
- Integrate with existing web sites
- Send out press releases and public announcements when fully operational

Timing:

Timing is critical. All indications suggest local businesses have been experiencing a tough market for most of last year. It will take time to put in motion efforts that will culminate in a solution. By acting quickly, the council can send a strong and positive message to the business community that the council is concerned about their economic health and want to act quickly.

Marketing:

Yachats unique physical characteristics and small size create a marketing opportunity. I believe we can move faster implementing a solution that could make a difference. This project has the potential to pull the business and residential community together in a new and mutually beneficial partnership. When completed, we should saturate State media services with information this project.

Prepared and submitted by Greg Scott, Yachats councilor

Virtual Yachats Thoughts and Possibilities

Project Goals:

The fundamental goal of this project is to bring revenue to local businesses in order to maintain steady revenue for the city and show support for local business owners. Ideas for accomplishing this include creating the exciting and newsworthy project of offering free wireless Internet throughout the downtown shopping district of Yachats, creating a large multifeatured and dynamic "what's happening in Yachats" tool, and creating a fun and interesting virtual tour of our little village and all of its features.

Project Elements:

I'm imagining three elements in this project: Free WiFi in the shopping district, a multi-user content management system for a What's Happening in Yachats Tool, and a Virtual Tour of the Town.

1. **Free WiFi in the shopping district:** Greg Scott approached me with this idea a few days ago, and I think it's a very exciting idea. It is more possible for our little village than for most rural towns because we are so compact (and of course it's much more affordable than trying to do it in a large metropolitan area). If we choose to go forward, we will be the first Oregon city to offer this, which will generate a tremendous amount of excitement and attention. Yachats has a reputation for being progressive, and offering something like this will fit right in with that "brand." Eventually, going WiFi will become the norm – no longer a progressive idea, and at that point it's not useful as a marketing tool. If we do this now, and promote it widely in newspapers and magazines, it will give Yachats broad attention, both in Oregon and around the country.
2. **The What's Happening in Yachats Tool:** With a tool like this, each business can sign up for their own admin, and can enter all of their own information. Here are some possibilities with a content management system like this:
 - a. **A flexible calendar of events**, sortable and filterable by whatever criteria the viewer wants to see (for example show only live music, show only events for children and families, show only events at the Commons, show only events under \$25, show only events on a particular date or date range, and more). This calendar of events would be set up for both full-sized computers and handheld devices. We could set up a separate domain designed to function just for mobile devices so that users can choose their interface (full sized or mobile) and therefore have a positive viewing experience whether they are using a standard computer at home looking for what to do on their trip to Yachats in the future, or whether they are walking around Yachats that very minute with their mobile device trying to decide what to do next.
 - b. **Sales and Specials:** Businesses with current sales and specials can list them here.
 - c. **Current and Upcoming Weather and Road Conditions:** We can embed these resources right in the What's Happening in Yachats Tool, providing useful information about weather and road conditions in addition to what to do.
 - d. **Tide Calendar:** Again, we can embed this information right into the What's Happening in Yachats Tool.
 - e. **Google Mapping:** We can embed zoomable maps and directions right into the WHIYT so people don't have to leave the Tool to find out how to get to their next event or store or lodging.

3. **Take a Tour of Yachats!:** This is also one of those elements that will be so unique that it will garner a lot of press and excitement. Again, our town is small enough to make something like this work beautifully. I'm imagining this tour having three elements:
 - a. **A Panoramic Walking Tour:** In the shopping district we can create a single linked tour so that site visitors can literally "walk around" in the shopping district. If they are viewing the 360 degree tour in the Green Salmon parking lot, they can see the visitor's center from there, and can click the door of the Visitor's Center, and ZOOM – they are suddenly inside the Visitor's Center, and again can see 360 degrees around. From within the Visitor's Center they just click on the outside door, and suddenly they are in the parking lot outside, and can click into the next business etc. We could set this up so that the entire shopping district could be navigated all in one piece, including views inside local restaurants and merchant shops. And in addition to the shopping district, we can provide panoramic virtual tours of all other area's of interest such as:
 - i. the wetlands park
 - ii. the playground
 - iii. important trailheads
 - iv. the viewing deck at the Point
 - v. standing on the delta beach where the river meets the sea
 - vi. the little log church
 - vii. the Gerdemann Gardens
 - b. **A Dynamic Street Map:** The street map will be an artistic rendering of our town. Whenever a site visitor rolls over an element that is "hot" it will enlarge slightly (or wiggle a little – something that let's the visitor know it is clickable). I'm imagining that hotspots will include places of interest such as the wetlands park, the Little Log Church, the Visitor's Center and the Commons, along with restaurants, lodging and shops. When a site visitor clicks on the hot spot, it opens into a nicely laid out profile. The profile can include these elements (each profile doesn't need to have every element, but all elements would be available):
 - i. **A descriptive profile** of what they are seeing (for example if it's a business, it would describe the business including what they sell or what service they offer). Each business would be able to manage their profile from within their admin – the same admin that allows them to manage their calendar.
 - ii. **A little photo gallery:** again, each business or organization would have the ability to add their own photos from within their admin. The program would be a simple upload, and the program would resize the photos for them, so no special computer knowledge would be required.
 - iii. **A virtual tour:** This would be the same virtual tour of the business (or point of interest) as in the big virtual tour above, but would be only the single tour, not clickable into the others, so that visitors stay on that one profile.
 - iv. **Sound bites:** Each business or point of interest can have quick clickable sound bites from their profile section. For example, I'm imagining that if we were looking at the profile of the Visitor's Center, there would be a quick sound bite of Bev talking about what's available at the Visitor's Center, and encouraging visitors to stop by. Sound bites at the Drift Inn could be a couple of different bands playing, and/or a blurb from Linda about the type of meals they serve. A sound bite for Green Salmon might just be the happy hubbub of coffee drinkers in the background. A sound bite of the wetlands might be a short recording of a bird that was captured on audio one day. The possibilities are many, and this would again be one of those pieces of Virtual Yachats that would garner attention and excitement because it is so unique.
 - v. **A link to their business website:** This would open into a new window so that site visitors would also remain on Virtual Yachats, but they could get more info from the business website if they'd like.
 - vi. **Note:** Since adding virtual tours, photos and sound bites would be more time-intensive than a text description, one option would be to provide a profile of every business and organization for no charge on Virtual Yachats, but charge a little something for the extras to help fund the project. That way everyone can be included for no charge, but they can pay for an expanded profile if they want to.

- c. **A Quick Map:** Some folks might like to get some quick info about Yachats points of interest without seeing the full tour, so we can also provide a nice artistic rendering of the town map, but rather than having each point of interest click into a full-featured profile, it will just provide some quick tool-tip info about that point. This page can also link to a black and white printable map of the town that folks can take with them.

Other possibilities:

Here are a few other ideas that could be implemented either upfront or at a later date:

1. **Art and sign gallery:** This could be a little photo gallery of all of the public art in Yachats, like the Spouting Whale, the murals on a couple of businesses downtown, and signs in Yachats, like the interpretive signs at the beach, the Community Park interpretive signs etc.
2. **Embedded video:** Little video clips would be a fun addition. I'm imagining clips of a storm, of a music band at the Landmark, or someone ordering a complex cup of coffee and Green Salmon, of a bird in the wetlands park, of kids on the playground, etc.. These could be very short clips that provide a little video tour of the diversity of what is available in Yachats.
3. **Blog:** I'd love to see someone blogging this town on a regular basis. There is something happening here pretty much every day, and having it recorded in a short blog entry 10 or 15 times a month would really show just how much is happening here.

These are a few ideas for what's possible with the Virtual Yachats project. I'm excited about what's possible here to promote our town!

Lisa Gray