From: City of Austin Communications <coacommunications@austintexas.gov>
Date: February 10, 2021
Subject: Digital Services Project – Notification of Media Interest

Digital Services Project – Notification of Media Interest

KXAN has published a news story on its website today making a number of claims about a City project to improve digital services. We understand they are planning to broadcast a similar story this evening. Over the past few weeks the City's CTM and CPIO Departments have answered multiple questions from KXAN reporters on this issue. Below we are providing a summary outlining the background and timeline of this project. If you have further questions please don't hesitate to contact Interim Communications Director Jessica King or Interim Chief Information Officer Chris Stewart.

Project Overview

In 2017, an audit was conducted on the City's website (austintexas.gov) and areas for improvement were identified. To address these gaps, funding was requested in the FY18 (2017) budget cycle for a project to improve the City's digital services, and updated the following year to include a website redesign.

At the time, the work was projected to span a number years at a cost of $3.5 million. The project budget was not intended only to build a website. It was primarily invested in temporary staff over a period of four years (2017-2020) for research, innovation, testing, and community engagement to inform how we design our digital services.

The 'alpha' site (Austin.gov) was initially developed as a test environment to help the team see what was working and what was not working, to improve workflows, and create and test custom tools based on guidance received from residents and staff. For a period of time, staff considered whether the alpha site could serve as the foundation for a replacement for the current austintexas.gov platform, which continued to be maintained as the City's official website while these explorations were conducted.

Project Consolidation

In September 2020, new leadership at CTM reviewed the alpha project and determined it would not be financially or operationally sustainable to continue it over the long term. In October 2020, CTM and CPIO announced the decision to consolidate resources to the upgraded AustinTexas.gov, instead of continuing to develop and maintain two growing sites in parallel. At that point, the process to decommission the alpha site and move content and apply learnings to austintexas.gov began.

The City's website is used by thousands of Austinites every day to keep up to date with City services and programs. The alpha project played an important part in the research, testing and development of a number of modifications, including making the website easier to use and more accessible, and that work continues.

Timeline

• **September 1, 2020:** Chris Stewart assumes the role of Interim Chief Information Officer, CTM.

- **September 4, 2020:** Chris Stewart (Interim CIO, CTM) issues a pause on all on alpha work.
- **October 6, 2020:** Chris Stewart and Jessica King (Interim Director, CPIO) inform employees that all staff and resources will be focused on AustinTexas.gov, effectively canceling the alpha project (austin.gov).
- **October 8, 2020:** KXAN contacts the City asking for information about the alpha project.
- **October 15, 2020:** [Memo issued](#) informing Council of the consolidation of resources to AustinTexas.gov.
- **February 8, 2021:** Chris Stewart informs employees of staffing reorganization for digital development teams.

Improving Austin Public Health's vaccine registration system

The portal platform used for Austin Public Health's COVID-19 vaccine and testing registration system is entirely separate to the City's main website, austintexas.gov, and is managed by an external vendor. KXAN's conflation of the two is unfortunate and misleading.

However, we know the vaccine platform continues to be a frustration within the community just as many other similar systems across the country right now. We have received an overwhelming level of demand for the limited supply of vaccine -- more than 500,000 accounts have been created in our pre-registration system, with more than 180,000 people currently eligible under the Phase 1A and 1B criteria. We continue to work with our vendor and partners to make updates and improvements to the system as needed.

--Communications and Public Information Office