



City of Montpelier, VT

Website Accessibility & Usability Synopsis of Issues

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Introduction

The Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD) conducted a review of the City of Montpelier, Vermont's website, www.montpelier-vt.org. This review consisted of an internal assessment by deep content experts, which focused on applicable portions of the World Wide Web/Web Accessibility Initiative (W3C-WAI) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1) and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act along with research involving diverse users who contribute insights and perspectives based upon their lived experiences with disabilities.

The generated catalog highlights important issues for not only accessibility compliance, but also usability and inclusive design. Each issue serves as an example that should be remedied in all occurrences. The report includes a screenshot, issue details, and issue tags. Issue details provide background information on the applicable accessibility guidelines or inclusive design principles and how it affects diverse users, a description of the current issue found on www.montpelier-vt.org, and a proposed solution including engineering or design notes such as code snippets and sketches. Issue tags signify the primary groups of users affected by each issue and cite applicable sections of WCAG 2.1.

Overview

The City's website www.montpelier-vt.org is built on the CivicPlus CMS using jQuery and ASP.NET. While the accessibility features native to the CivicPlus framework typically provide a good baseline for inclusive web design, often going beyond compliance with guidelines to embody best practices, the Montpelier website does present several components that fail to meet accessibility standards. This failure to meet WCAG 2.1 AA standards presents barriers to accessibility for a diverse group of users including those using assistive technology and users with some brain-based conditions.

At the outset, one of the major barriers is the main menu navigation on the home page, where only the five high-level menu items are accessible. For users of various assistive technologies, the popovers at each of the five high-level menu items are not navigable due to improper use and organization of HTML attributes. Poor or sometimes nonexistent heading hierarchy increases the confusion and disorientation that users of assistive technology may experience. It is imperative that the HTML tree is consistent with the visual layout of the page so that the menu and other components are navigable and provide context for a diverse group of users. Keep in mind there is often overlap among screen reader, keyboard-dependent and non-native tech users, i.e. a user may be both keyboard-dependent and a non-native tech user.

Another significant website functionality that many users depend on is the availability of important city information in the form of downloadable documents (and forms) for various action steps. These documents are often in the form of inaccessible PDFs and other file formats that do not present an accessible alternative, and are often the only method to obtain key information or accomplish a certain task. This puts many blind or low vision residents, as well as those with brain-based disabilities at a great disadvantage and undermines their status as equal contributing members of the community.

www.montpelier-vt.org also relies on third party widgets, integrations, and portals. Much of this software contains major accessibility barriers and fails to comply with WCAG 2.1 AA. For example, the homepage link of the video tour of Montpelier directs to elocallink.tv where the icons around the video do not have alt text and the video itself does not have captions or audio descriptions. The experience can be very disorienting to a diverse group of users.

To address these issues, the CSS and JavaScript theming should be redesigned to remedy all occurrences of web accessibility barriers and detrimental usability. In addition, web authoring staff should undergo training covering best practices for posting web content and creating accessible documents. For creating accessible PDFs please review Adobe's [Accessibility Training](#). All third-party software should be properly vetted for compliance with WCAG 2.1 AA and section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. When contracting with vendors developing websites and other software, the City of Montpelier's RFPs and contracts should ensure the finished product is compliant by specifying appropriate accessibility guidelines in calls for proposals, contracts and by conducting web accessibility reviews.