STRATEGIC ANALYSIS:
City of Calabasas

Alex Piwtoratsky

Executive Summary:

As a response to their Request for Proposals (RFP), this document serves as a complete content strategy for the City of Calabasas' website redesign project. This project has come to fruition as the City's current website, created in 2009, lacks three main features that hinder its success. As identified by the RFP, the current website does not fully satisfy accessibility goals and doesn't take advantage of technological advancements, is not scalable and has issues with cross-browser compatibility, and cannot be easily modified and maintained by non-technical staff.

To assist the City with their strategic business goals and plans for the future, this document will help to align content strategy and identify areas of concern that fail to align with the City of Calabasas' vision.

Key Findings and Recommendations:
The City needs to take a holistic approach to content design and user experience. Calabasas has a decent amount of content to choose from to serve to its audiences. While the website does not do exactly the greatest job aligning to business goals, the social media content could be a way to get those "content pillars" started. To assist with this issue, some of these recommendations could be implemented to ensure future content is valuable to users:

- Consolidate content into organized pages. Remove extraneous areas of information like the "What's New" tab

- Implement website modifications to SEO like descriptive title tags and meta descriptions to heighten searchability

- Simplify language used on website so that it can be easily consumed and consider using practices like lists, short scannable copy, and textual hierarchy to heighten readability

- Introduce a clear navigation system that does not rely heavily on the search bar

- Make sure that pages are optimized for mobile viewing

- Develop online resources and interactive forms so that citizens may make secure transactions to the City online

Introduction to the City of Calabasas:

As identified in the Executive Summary, the City of Calabasas has three main areas of concern that must be fulfilled through the website redesign project. The majority of the concerns are functional and design-oriented - meaning that the current website is behind on the latest technological updates and trends. The site also lacks a comprehensive content strategy, leading to a confusing information architecture and infrequent website updates. While a website redesign can elevate usability and appearance, implementing a strong content strategy along with a redesign can help to provide consistency and drive long-term success.

About the City of Calabasas
Calabasas is located in Los Angeles County, California. Originally occupied by the Chumash tribe of Native Americans, this area became riddled with turf wars when Spanish expeditions and squatters began to claim the land for themselves. The name "Calabasas" is believed to have derived from either the Chumash word for "where the wild geese fly" or from the Spanish word meaning "pumpkin." Today, this city remains fairly small with only about 24,202 in population according to the World Population Review. While modest in size, this city has been the location of filming for many acclaimed movies and boasts many famous celebrity residents. Calabasas truly exudes the trait of "richness" in its history, culture, and inhabitants.


Fig. 1: From Google Maps

Fig. 2: Source

Fig. 1: Location of the City of Calabasas on a California map
Fig. 2: Example of the type of architecture and lifestyle found among Calabasas inhabitants

Strategic Alignment Summary:

Business Goals:
As identified by the City's RFP, the new website should contain major updates in design, functionality, and content management. Overall, the new website should be "an aesthetically-pleasing, resourceful information platform that is easy to navigate by both the community and visitors." Stakeholders are looking for a website that can:

- Fulfill the technological and functional needs of residents and businesses

- Easily be updated and managed by a non-technical staff via an updated Content Management System (CMS) that allows for the uploading and sharing of photos, videos, audio, and livestreams

- Enhance transactions between residents and government through electronic transactions like payment of City Fees and submission of interactive forms

- Improving accessibility through responsive web design, browser compatibility, and modern SEO practices

- Increase traffic/local following for Calabasas TV (CTV) and other community events/activities

These asks described in the City's RFP have led me to create the following business goals for Calabasas:

1. Assist residents and businesses in fluid online transactions with the City

2. Promote the City's local and community events through timely and accessible online information

3. Improve website accessibility and SEO for maximum usage and traffic

Content Objectives:

This table demonstrates how content can support the business goals of Calabasas. Each of the unique content objectives listed below will allow the City to serve valuable and timely content to its desired audiences. These objectives are not limited to the City website, as they extend into other areas like the official social media channels, printed documentation, and various areas like community organizations. Content objectives are to serve as guidelines and should flex with the City as its priorities shift.

BUSINESS GOALS	CONTENT OBJECTIVES
Assist residents and businesses in fluid online transactions with the City	Build comprehensive and intuitive resources/applications for online transactions and submissions Heighten city government's relationship with the locals and promote an aligned community
Promote the City's local and community events through timely and accessible online information	Advertise local events to increase community traffic and reach Synthesize a connection between local organizations, city government, and citizens
Improve website accessibility and SEO for maximum usage and traffic	Promote practices that allow for content to be easily viewed across multiple platforms and devices Enhance SEO by implementing tagging, keywords, and metadata

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):
After outlining potential content objectives for the City of Calabasas, we must know how to measure them in order to ascertain whether or not they are successful. To do this, we should ask ourselves a Key Performance Question (KPQ) for each goal we wish to measure; in this case we will be drawing from the goals in the table above. From there, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) should be chosen. These KPIs will be the definitive way for the City to see if their content is creating their desired results. The desired results could be anything from increased visitation to heightened engagement from a certain audience. The quantitative/qualitative data from those KPIs are called metrics. The following breaks down the business goals identified above into KPQs, KPIs, and metrics to get an idea of how the City of Calabasas can position and create content for maximum impact.

KPI Breakdown #1:

BUSINESS GOAL Assist residents and businesses in fluid online transactions with the City	**CONTENT OBJECTIVES** Build comprehensive and intuitive resources/applications for online transactions and submissions. Heighten city government's relationship with the locals and promote an aligned community.
	KPQ How can the City help residents securely pay city fees with more convenience?
	KPI Increase of online transactions to pay city fees by 30% in the first six months of rolling out the online resources
	METRIC More users visit the website topay city fees vs. mailing in their checks within the first month of implementation

KPI Breakdown #2:

BUSINESS GOAL

Promote the City's local and community events through timely and accessible online information

CONTENT OBJECTIVES

Advertise local events to increase community traffic and reach. Synthesize a connection between local organizations, city government, and citizens.

KPQ

What can we do to better promote the local and community events on our website?

KPI

Increase of views on the Home and Visit Us pages where event information is stored

METRIC

75% of people who visit the Home or Visit Us pages click through to an event page

KPI Breakdown #3:

BUSINESS GOAL

Improve website accessibility and SEO for maximum usage and traffic

CONTENT OBJECTIVES

Promote practices that allow for content to be easily viewed across multiple platforms and devices. Enhance SEO by implementing tagging, keywords, and metadata.

KPQ

How can we increase our searchability and presence online?

KPI

Website traffic increases in the first three months after implementing the redesign

METRIC

Decrease in bounce rates and an increase in time spent on the site

User Needs:

In order to create the best final product, the City must take into account who will be using their website and for what purposes. To truly understand your users, take into account their identities, needs, mindsets, and behaviors. Below is a break down of the largest audiences for the Calabasas website.

• **THE RESIDENTS.** Because the residents are the largest audience and overarching driver for the Calabasas website, a majority of its content must tie into Business Goal #2. The user needs here are to create content that:

- Is extremely timely and accurate. Event details must be thoroughly communicated and any emergency notifications must be prominently displayed

- Heightens Calabasas' feeling of a warm, friendly community

• **THE VISITORS.** One can argue that the majority of the online and city traffic are due to tourists and visitors. As Calabasas is a great location for sightseeing and has many attractions, it is important to cater to this revenue-generating audience. In order to help Calabasas fulfill its goals, content must be created that:

- Can be easily found without confusion. Separating the touristy information from the resident's information is crucial and helps makes the visitors feel valued and confident

- Promotes the Calabasas community. This can result in multiple visits and can heighten rankings at travel agencies as a "best place to vacation."

• **THE CITY GOVERNMENT.** The local government for Calabasas plays a big part on the current website. Because the City is very community-oriented and keeps the residents at the forefront of all happenings, many council members and organizations use the website as a primary publishing source. To appeal to these users, content must:

- Display the city government's and multiple organizations' materials in an organized, searchable, and easy to understand fashion

- Government and city organization employees must be able to edit and publish materials without the need to go through a third party

Pain Points:

Based on my audit of the website, I have come to identify a couple of pain points users may be experiencing:

The first pain point is that there is little to no hierarchy on any of the website's pages. Elements are formatted much like those of a Word document and are not conducive for a pleasurable user experience. Visually, the website could be greatly improved by using more pictures and implementing a layout that creates a better hierarchy through color, scale, and proximity.

The second pain point users may come across is lack of purposeful organization on the website. For example, let's take a look at the "Connect" tab on the website. This tab has a drop-down menu of items that seem like they should be filed underneath either the Resident's or Government's tabs. None of these items seem to be inherently connected and are a bit random to display in their own tab - not to mention the sheer amount of items in that tab. Due to the strange organization of materials on the site, I would not be surprised if many of the website's visitors go directly to the search bar or the A-Z search page just to avoid having to navigate through the extraneous information.
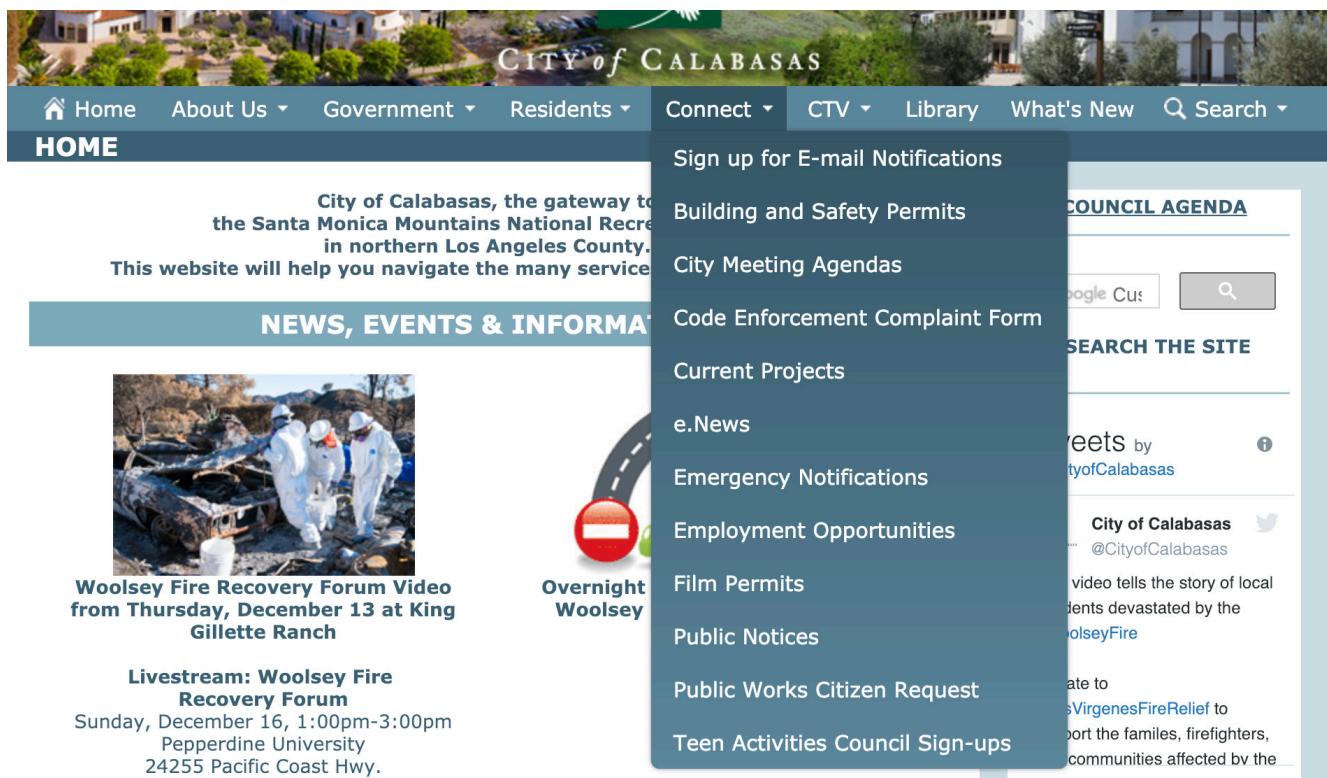
Fig. 3: Screenshot of the Connect tab on the Calabasas website

From these observations, we can see that the City should consider taking another look at how it's pages are organized, what content is on those pages, and how visual hierarchy can be used to improve user experience.

Content Audit:

What Does The City of Calabasas Already Have?:
Luckily for the City, they have a lot of great areas to pull content from and a lot of content already created. Within the RFP, the City mentioned that during the content management system update it was imperative that all of the site's existing information was seamlessly transferred over. Let's take a look at what the website currently has going on.

Website Architecture and UX:
As we can see on the current City of Calabasas website, the primary function is to house information pertinent to its residents; including information about city government, local happenings, and community resources. Most of these pages have limited context and a majority of them only contain hyperlinks to other pages and forms. The homepage, as can be seen below, is fairly cluttered with the no real emphasis on the City's main message or mission. The right sidebar with the Tweets ticker serves little purpose takes up around a third of the main page and confuses the user with a third option of navigation. Cutting down on information on the homepage and extraneous methods of navigation could help to increase successful searches and overall user experience.
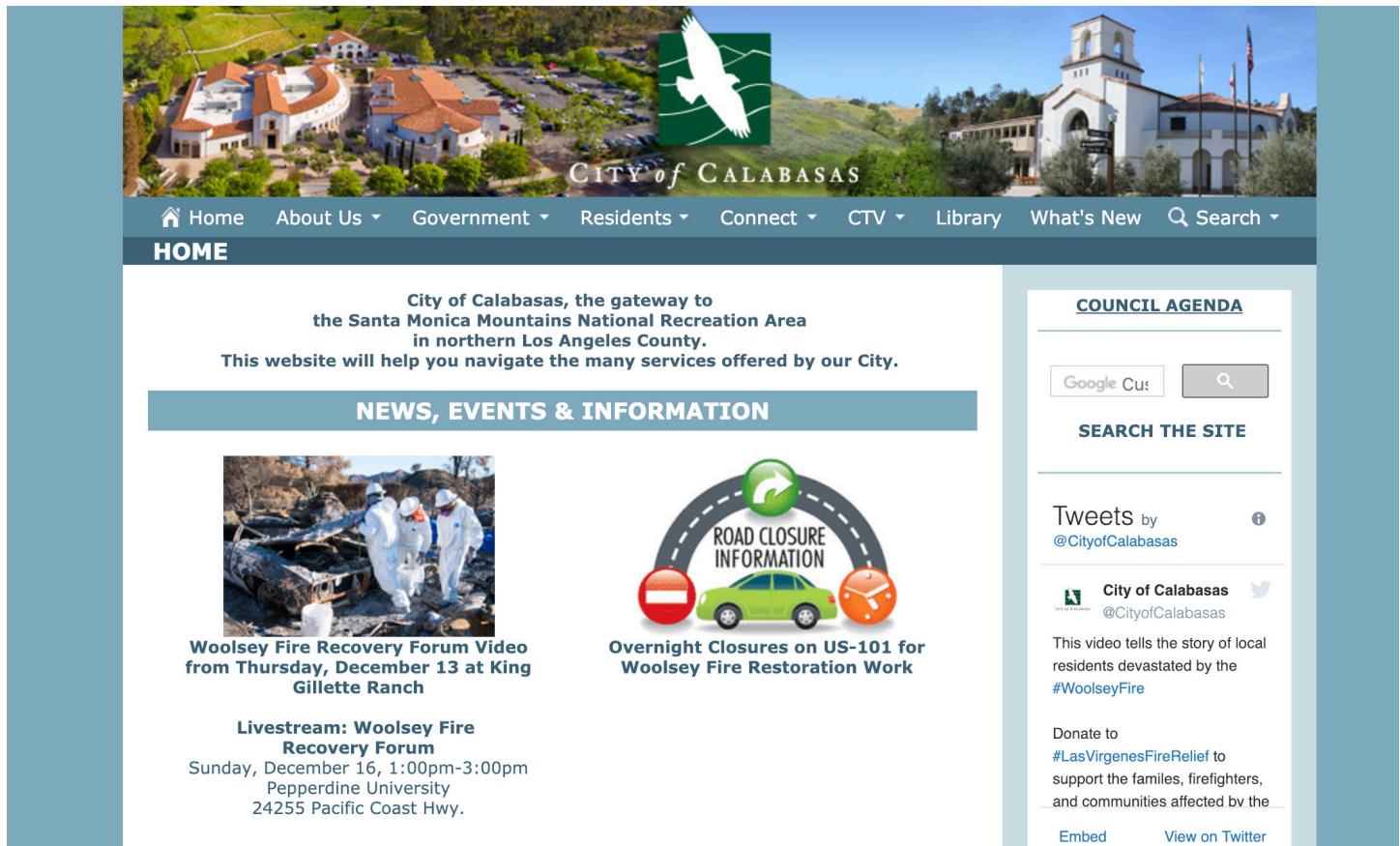

Fig. 4: Screenshot of the Calabasas website homepage on desktop

A Look at Mobile:

On the RFP, it was stressed that the new website was to be responsive and compatible with all types of devices and web browsers. The current site, as is shown in the screenshot to the right, is not mobile-optimized in the slightest. The sized-down icons make visibility and usability extremely difficult. For a person who may have impaired motor or vision, this site would be hard to navigate. By optimizing for mobile, the site would likely increase in its traffic as in the last year, visits from mobile devices made up 63% of all web traffic. The mobile redesign should be a priority within this redesign project so the City can reach its audiences through the most accessible means.

Repurposing Existing Content:

After auditing the website there seem to be a few content types that are heavily featured:

- Text
- Links
- PDFs
- Video
- Images
- CTV and City Council Livestream

Fig. 5: Screenshot of the Calabasas website homepage on mobile

From my perspective, a majority content can be repurposed as the site is relatively straightforward. The content that should remain untouched is information that pertains to the city government. Content that resides on the Residents and About Us pages may also be reused, however I would recommend that they go through some streamlining to organize them in the most cohesive way. Many of these pieces of content need to find better homes on the website or be made more apparent. Because the website is fairly simple in terms of content, I do not think they need a complete overhaul but in the future it would beneficial for them if they assumed more of a strategic lens.

Content Recommendations:

As mentioned above, I don't believe that the website needs to have a complete content overhaul, but rather, undergo an adjustment. The first step would be to scrap the What's New tab in the navigation bar. Much of the information housed here should instead be migrated to the homepage or underneath their respective tabs.

The second thing I would recommend is to use more dynamic and engaging imagery. Only a few of the pages use photography and when they do, it is not for the effect but rather as a supporting element. As humans are extremely visually-driven, I believe that it is important to give images their time to shine, especially as this region is known for its landscapes, architecture, and culture.

SEO Analysis

For a website to be successful organically, it must consider implementing Search Engine Optimization (SEO) best practices. SEO's processes can enhance a website's searchability and improve its rankings on a Search Engine Results Page (SERP). By using Screaming Frog's SEO Spider tool, I was able to find several areas that desperately needed improvement:

City of Calabasas, CA Home
www.cityofcalabasas.com/ ▾

City of Calabasas Notification System In Case of an Emergency. Resources for ... Calabasas Photograph/Clip of the Week Submit a photo or video clip today!

Results from cityofcalabasas.com 🔍

Building & Safety Division
The primary goal of the Building and Safety Division is to save ...

Departments
About Us. Calendar · Contact Us · Demographic Information ...

Calabasas Information
It is generally accepted that Calabasas means pumpkin ...

Recreation
Parks and Facilities, Address, Phone Number, Virtual Tour ...

Fig. 6: Screenshot of the Calabasas website's title tags and meta description on Google

• **Title Tags:** Title tags are little snippets of information shown on areas like a search engine results page or in a web browser tab. The City's title tags were extremely inconsistent. Some would be very detailed like, "Calabasas Creekside Park & Community Center" while others would be nondescript like, "Sandbags." Each title tag should be unique and relevant to pull in the highest amount of click-throughs. To secure better rankings among search results and an enhanced back-end, the title tags need to be addressed.

• **Meta Descriptions:** Meta descriptions are HTML attributes that provide concise summaries of webpages. The SEO Spider crawl revealed that 100% of the meta descriptions are missing from the City of Calabasas' website. Without these critical bits of information, the City cannot control how their pages are introducing themselves to viewers. In the above screenshot, you can see how the meta description is just pulled from the City's homepage and doesn't provide the potential visitor with any useful information right off the bat. This will drive away viewers and defeat the purpose of the website redesign if left unaddressed.

Social Media Audit:

The City of Calabasas currently has social media profiles on Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube. Posts on their social media pages exclusively feature community happenings, events, and information regarding the surrounding areas. The content types are assorted images, videos, links, and curated content.

The social media content does not align completely with business goals, as most of the posts are random updates that do not roll up into one larger picture. By creating a social media content calendar that aligns to business goals and key strategic themes, the City could use social media to their advantage to build a true online community. Currently, it appears that the profiles are used as an instantaneous way to receive information that is on the website without having to go to it. Recent content themes that appeared on these profiles related to:

- The November California Fires
- Community events
- Local infrastructure developments
- Weekly episode of CTV's "The Buzz"
- Supporting local organizations and businesses

Below is a brief look at the City of Calabasas' social media profiles:

FACEBOOK: 2,414 Page Likes | Posting Weekly
- Focuses around community events
- Good balance of text, photos, and video
- Engagement numbers indicative of no paid promotion

TWITTER: 9.1k Followers | Posting Daily
- Content curation is the backbone for this account with more than 60% of it being user-generated
- Could be more in line with business goals

YOUTUBE: 1.9k Subscribers | Posting Weekly
- Oriented to showcase CTV content
- Social media most in line with business goals
- Could use this platform for live-streaming events

Competitive Analysis:

What Other Cities Are Up To:
In this area of California, many cities are paying attention to how they reach and communicate with their citizens. To see how Calabasas is measuring up against its neighbors, I will be comparing their website to the cities of Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, and Santa Monica.

What They're Doing Differently:
- The neighboring cities are taking a focus on their visitors. Each website has a tab dedicated to attractions, events, and places to book a stay

- Two out of three of the cities' websites were optimized for mobile

- All three of the competitors had tabs for local businesses

- Navigation was heavily reliant on the main tabs.

- The City of Los Angeles was paying attention to their title tags and meta descriptions to heighten their rankings on SERPs
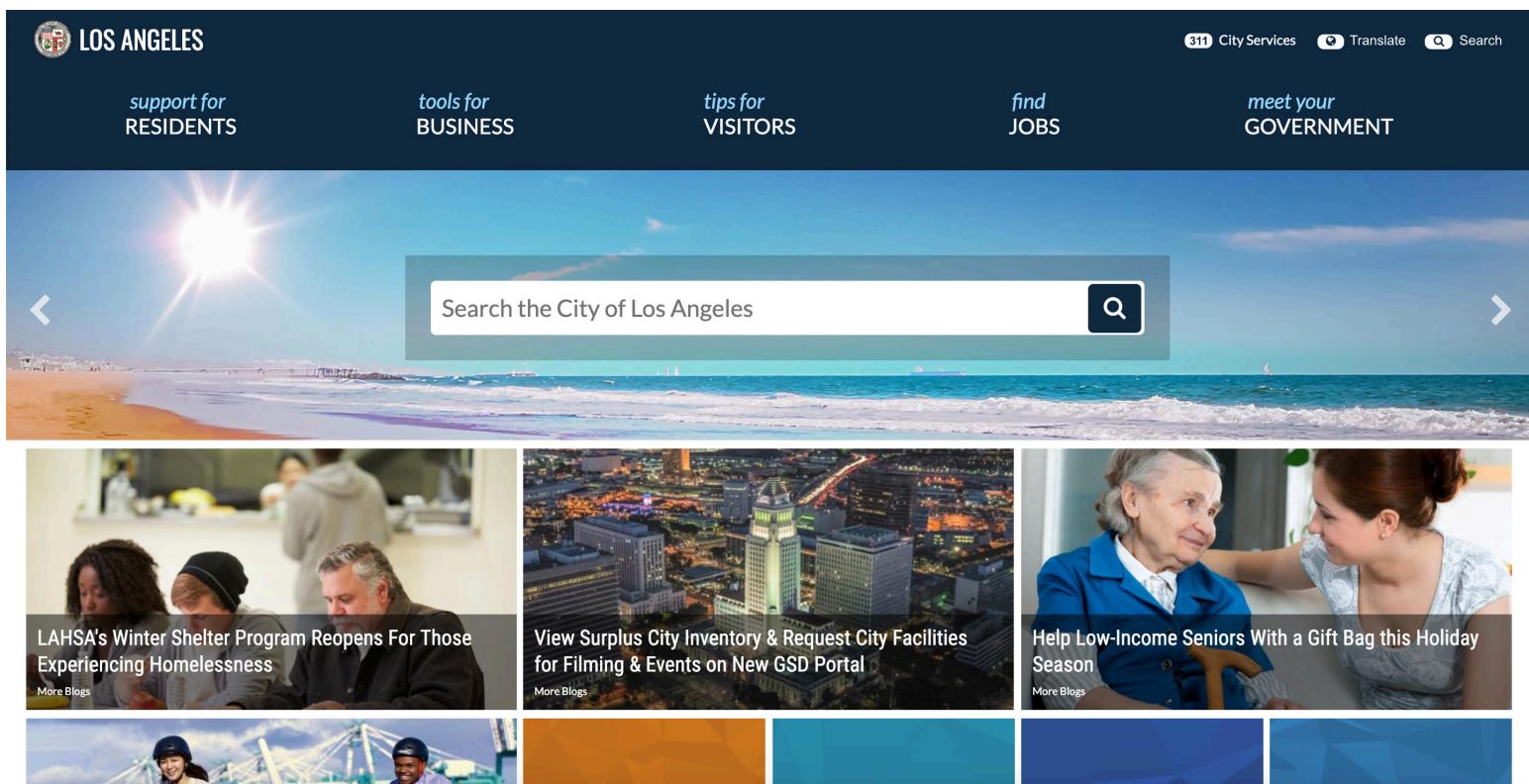

Fig. 7: Screenshot of the City of Los Angeles website

Content Compass:

What It Is:
A [content compass](#) organizes the direction of the content for an organization and helps to prioritize themes and pillars. The content compass is made up of two aspects, the core strategy statement and the messaging framework.

A core strategy statement, as defined by author Megan Casey, is the summation of how an organization will chose to create and serve content while taking into account the business goals, user needs, and desired audiences. This is the core component to your content compass.

A messaging framework supplements the core strategy statement as it clarifies what your audience should know and believe about your organization. Each piece of content created should be modeled around this framework.

Core Strategy Statement:
The City of Calabasas' website plays a critical part in helping their citizens stay connected to their community and local government. By optimizing and redesigning their website to support a new CMS and handle online transactions, the City can increase visits, search engine click throughs, and community participation which will then, in turn, positively impact revenue, local morale, and national identity.

Messaging Framework:
When a user first lands on the site, we want them to feel secure that the content being served to them is indicative of Calabasas' culture and valuable to their search. After navigating through the site, we want the user to understand the full-scale of offerings provided online and how the City is committed to making life easier for its residents. The content presented should leave the user feeling informed Our content drives home that the City is a community driven space where history, nature, and good people come together to create one of California's most beautiful cities.

Content Design:

Prioritization:
By analyzing the City's business goals and user needs, we were able to determine which elements needed to be put at the forefront of the website.

Organization:
Based on what we determined in the section above, I have organized the City of Calabasas' content in a sitemap. This shows how content will be laid out in a way that will promote navigation and searchability.
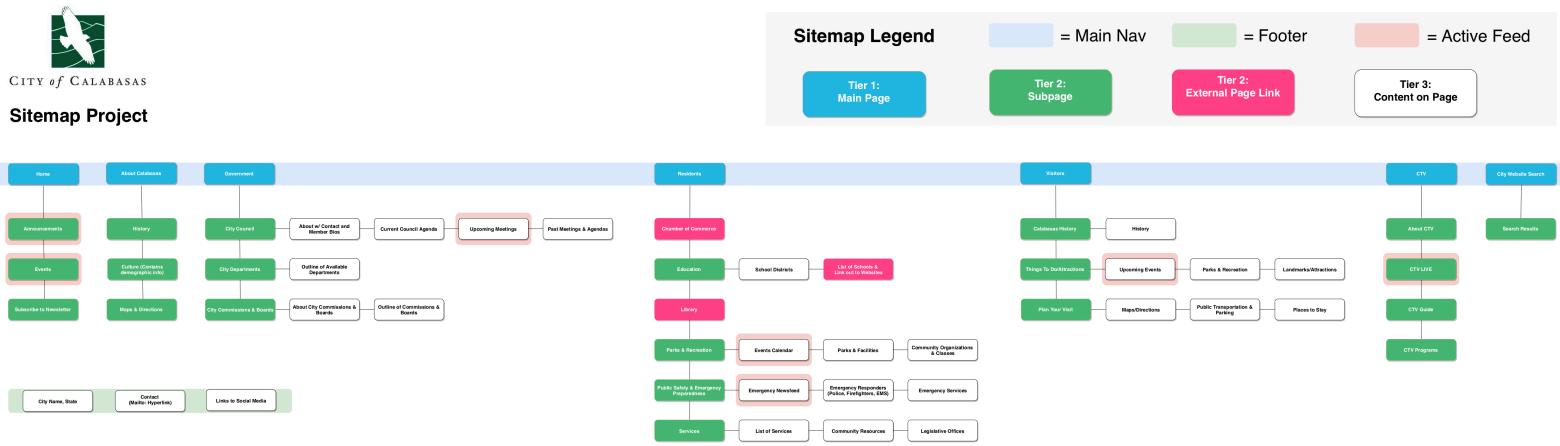

Fig. 8: Sitemap of the City of Calabasas

Presentation:
How the website presents content on each pages needs to be considered as well. User experience and user needs should be taken into account when determining how content should be structured. To outline this, a content model like a core page matrix can be used to outline taxonomy, tags, and content elements on a page. These core pages will allow the City's personnel to see how they can build off of what is already created so that they may have an easier time when managing content by themselves. From here, wireframes can be developed to show the skeleton of a page and demonstrate how navigation and hierarchy will appear

Below are examples of a core page matrix for the City of Calabasas. Wireframes of the website can be found in the Appendix.
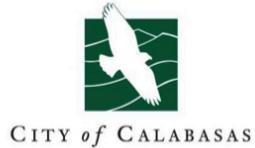
Core Page Matrix

BUSINESS GOAL	CORE PAGES	CONTENT OBJECTS	TAXONOMY	TAXONOMY SAMPLE
Create awareness of Calabasas' culture, community, and happenings through timely information.	Home Page	Announcements Newsfeed Calendar of Events Articles Date of Publication Map Direction Videos	Announcements Name of Event Date of Event Location of Event Description of Event Article Title Video Title	Announcements Calabasas Field Day December 2, 2018 Municipal Building Lawn Community Gathering Overview of Calabasas History 10 Best Places to Visit in Town
Serves as a hub for an introduction to residents and visitors of Calabasas; history and community focused.	About Page	History Culture Maps & Directions Photos Videos	History Content Culture Content Google Map Photo Video	A History of Calabasas Calabasas Culture & Demographics Interactive Google Map Photo Video
Provide Calabasas residents with useful and accurate information regarding policies, organizations, and departments.	Government Page	City Council Members Council Agenda Important Dates City Departments City Commissions & Boards Photos Recordings of Past Meetings	Name of Council Member Bio/Position of Council Member Council Member Email Name of Department Name of Commission/Board Meeting Description	Joe Schmoe Lead Council Member Joe.Schmoe@City ofCalabasas.com Community Services Public Safety Commission General Description
Serves as a comprehensive one stop shop for residents regarding information about city services, school districts, and more.	Residents Page	Chamber of Commerce Education Library Parks & Recreation Public Safety Services	Service Name Service Contact Service Description Photo Links	Parks & Recreation P&R@CityOfCalabasas.com General Description Photo Link to specific program
Promote city's history, attractions, things to do, and lodging for visitors to Calabasas.	Visitors Page	Calabasas History Things to Do/Attractions Upcoming Events Plan Your Visit Maps/Directions Transporation/Parking Hotels & Lodging	Attraction Name Attraction Date/Hours Attraction Location Photo Google Map	King Gillette Ranch Ranch Hours 26800 Mulholland Highway, Calabasas, CA 91302 Interactive Google Map
To garner viewership and share knowledge through online programming and content to residents in Calabasas	CTV Page (Calabasas TV)	About CTV CTV Live CTV Guide CTV Programs Livestream Embedded Video	Page Description Program Title Program Info Episodes Livestream Video	CTV Live The Buzz Program Info Episodes 1 -10 The Buzz Live The Buzz - Episode 1

Fig. 9: Core Page Matrix for the City of Calabasas

Writing Style Guide:

Why It's Important:
When representing oneself online it is extremely important to remember writing style and tone as a part of your content strategy. This helps you most accurately communicate your brand and stance to your audiences. To best write for the web, short scannable pieces of copy are preferred that use [plain language](). This will ensure that the majority of readers will absorb and understand exactly what Calabasas is trying to communicate. For the City, I would recommend using a tone of voice that is positive and invites the viewers to actively explore not only the city in person, but through its online offerings like CTV and city council meetings. Also, be sure to break up long runs of texts into paragraphs. This will trick readers into thinking that they are reading less and it will also help translate the page to mobile more effectively. Below is an example of the new writing style and tone.

Current Copy: The City Council is composed of five members elected at large on a non-partisan basis to serve four year overlapping terms. Municipal elections are held the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November (as of 2015) of odd numbered years, with three Council members selected at one election and two at the next.

Edited Copy: Five City Council members are elected on a non-partisan basis to serve four year overlapping terms. Municipal elections are held on the first Tuesday in November of odd numbered years, with 3 council member selected during one election, and 2 at the next.

It should be noted that there is not a lot of actual copy on the current City of Calabasas website. A majority of what is on these pages are links out to other webpages or documents. Here, the City should consider writing more copy in order to frame up the links and other information it is trying to present.

Conclusion:

After conducting my review it is apparent that the City's current website design and content strategy is not fulfilling core objectives. To get the best outcome from a redesign, a strong focus must be put on creating a strong content strategy that can support their business goals.

Appendix

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Announcement Title
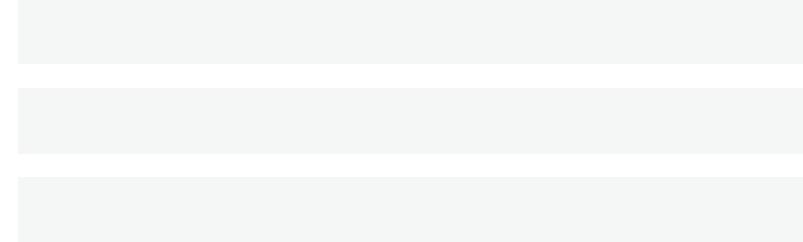
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UPCOMING EVENTS
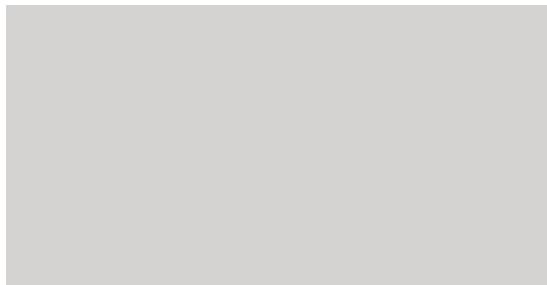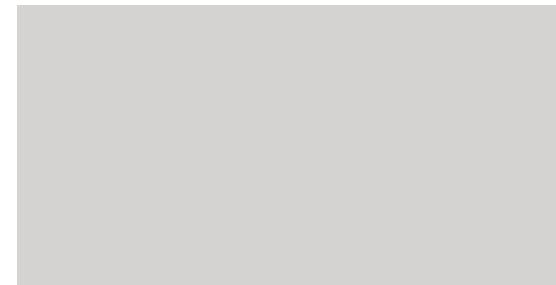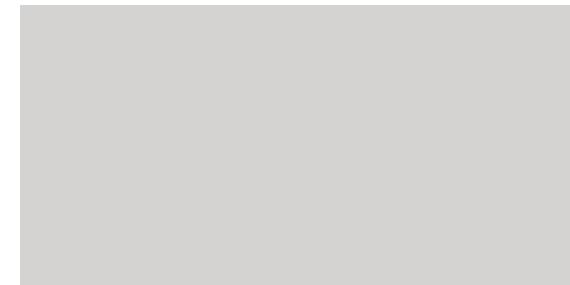
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SEE ALL

STAY IN TOUCH...
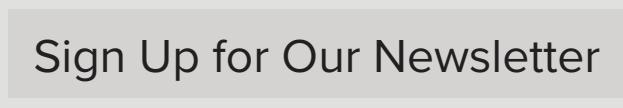
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THE HISTORY OF CALABASAS

Culture & Demographics

City Map and Directions

Interactive Google Map Here

CITY GOVERNMENT

CITY COUNCIL

| About City Council & Members | Current Council Agenda | Upcoming Meetings | Past Agendas & Meetings |

CITY COMMISSIONS & BOARDS

CITY DEPARTMENTS

FOR RESIDENTS

Chamber of Commerce	Library of Calabasas	Public Safety & Emergency Services	List of City Services

EDUCATION

SEE ALL

PARKS AND RECREATION

SEE ALL

VISIT US

CALABASAS HISTORY
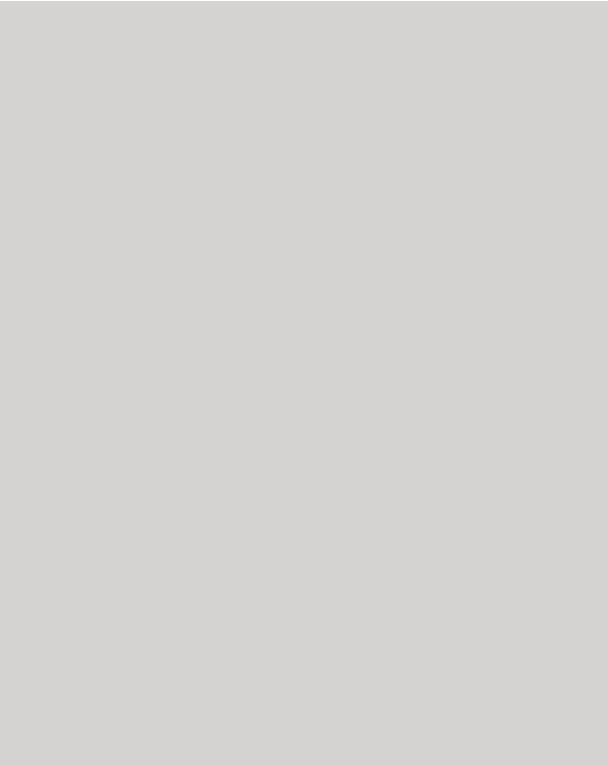
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