



CANTON / TOWNSHIP
ALFRED AND PLANTAGENET

CORPORATION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF ALFRED AND PLANTAGENET

Communications

Website RFP Process Results

DATE: April 22, 2025
FILE: COM-01-2025

INTRODUCTION

The Department is bringing the matter of the website RFP process results to Council in this special meeting as a decision whether or not to withdraw from the RFP needs to be communicated to the proponent by May 2, 2025.

As council is aware, our contract with web service provider GHD Digital is set to expire by summer 2026. More specifically, GHD is transitioning its iCreate clients towards their newest CMS (content management system), GovStack, according to which schedule our website will cease to receive support by December 2025 and will be terminated by June 2026. For reasons listed in the Department Comments section of this report, the Department does not recommend pursuing a new contract with GHD on their new CMS, despite it having been quoted at the lowest price.

In November of last year, the Department came to council in preparation for the budget discussions with a total cost estimate for the development of a new website as well as the recommendation to set aside \$33,000 in the 2025 budget. In response to Council's demands to obtain three prices, the Department participated in a joint RFP with the municipalities of Champlain, Nation, and Clarence-Rockland, to find a service provider whose product could meet the needs of a municipality in the modern age, while considering several mandatory and optional features and services to enhance user experience on citizens' main point of contact with the municipality. Through this process, 20 companies bid, of which 12 were retained, and ultimately only 8 passed the third stage of evaluation.

PURPOSE OF THE APPLICATION

The Department is seeking direction from council as to whether the Township will accept the results of the RFP and accede to the recommendation herein or withdraw from the RFP and pursue a service provider independently from the process, while keeping in mind that the average design and implementation process of a new website takes between 6 to 8 months.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The new website must be compliant with the requirements listed under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) set by the provincial government, whose purpose is to improve accessibility standards for Ontarians with physical and mental disabilities to all public establishments by 2025.

The current requirements are full compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA, but the Department wholeheartedly endorses and recommends a future-forward mindset, and planning compliance up to WCAG 2.2 Level AA. The AODA web compliance requirements include both content produced by the municipality (documents, images, text content) as well as technical requirements in the development and functionalities of the website.

Under the AODA, organizations that fail to comply—particularly in terms of web accessibility—can face significant fines. Corporations can be fined up to \$100,000 per day of violation, and administrative penalties per contravention may apply based on the severity and history of non-compliance.

While municipalities are not required to have a website, it is strongly encouraged, and these platforms help promote transparency through removing barriers to obtaining public documents and information on municipal affairs, projects, and developments.

COMMENTS FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS

N/A

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The agreement proposed by the successful proponent is of a one-time fee of \$68,800 and an annual fee of \$9,840 for a total of \$78,640 in the first year.

The Department recommends reducing the Post-launch Website Hosting Package from Premium to Professional, reducing the annual cost to \$7,800 for a total of \$76,600 in the first year. Further annual savings can be obtained by removing the website support and maintenance package at council's discretion, trading a total maximum of 3 hours + 2 extra hours monthly of support for hourly billing and a \$4,200 reduction on annual billing, **bringing the first-year total down to \$66,400 and the annual fee to \$3,600.**

It is worth noting that the proponent is also offering an implementation discount of \$10,000, pre-factored into the above pricing.

The Township of Alfred and Plantagenet is planning to cancel its contract with Bang the Table Canada, a community engagement platform, freeing up an extra \$8,000 in 2026 which can be put to this project.

Our current web platform, in terms of website hosting, annual licencing, and SSL certificate, cost the Township \$8,205 in 2025. Solely comparing the annual fees between the two platforms, we could obtain annual savings of \$4,605.

Given the scale of work, the department strongly recommends starting the process this year. The administration currently disposes of the sum of 33 000\$ in GL account 14-1314-4190 IT Support and Services.

The remaining required sum of approximately 37 000\$ could either be allocated during the budget revisions in August 2025, or included in the 2026 budget.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

The vision behind this project is to centralize all of the municipality's web services into one area, for the convenience of staff and citizens alike. Several neighbouring municipalities have contracted with services such as Bciti, which effectively offers a similar experience at an additional upfront and annual cost to the development of their websites. The Department reasoned that a well-built, flexible website would replace the need for such a service, while also offering all its benefits.

These ideas tie into the purpose of this RFP. Certainly, our current service provider offered us an attractive price incentive to transfer our content to their new platform and continue as their client. However, this comes with a drawback—theirs is a proprietary software.

As their CMS is a proprietary software, only their team can work on web development for any website under their purview. This means that they are solely responsible for all web development for any new tool, feature, or redesign, and have full control over its pricing, allowing for greater costs—partially incurred from licensing fees—and little community support.

On the other hand, this RFP's goal was to only seek out submissions from companies who work on open-source CMS. The advantages of such a CMS are clear—developers from all over the world can create and build upon the resources that exist to bring in new ideas and features—significantly reducing development time, and therefore expenses. The collaborative nature of such a community fosters innovation and ensures that the platform is constantly being improved and enhanced, serving to significantly reduce the stagnation that occurs as companies with proprietary CMS allocate resources to developing their newest products. Open-source CMS are free from licensing fees and allow for the potential to extensively customize and modify the source code to suit our specific needs as well as reduce the potential costs for future redesigns. The Township would also have greater ability to switch service providers or use in-house support as needed, without needing to completely replace the existing platform, incurring further costs.

Similar complaints about the current website vendor have been echoed from Communications Officers in neighbouring municipalities: little flexibility in both website and module design, limited French-language support, slow to fix identified issues, ongoing unaddressed accessibility issues, all of which lower confidence in the vendor to deliver a high-quality product. This, coupled with the proprietary nature of their CMS, make it difficult for the Department to recommend the current vendor as a worthwhile option.

LINK TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, under the fourth axis: Responsible Governance, priority action 3, lists the implementation of a citizen portal a municipal priority, to modernize our services, enable citizens to access these services remotely, and foster closer ties with citizens.

The price for the development and implementation of the citizen portal is not included in the figures contained in this report, as the exact amount will vary based on the needs of the Township. A discussion with the proponent will be needed to determine the cost of its inclusion. However, the citizen portal can be developed separately when funds are available with no impact to the development of the core website functionality.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION

ATTENDU QUE le canton d'Alfred et Plantagenet a pris part à un appel de propositions conjoint avec les municipalités de Champlain, de La Nation et de Clarence-Rockland en vue d'identifier des fournisseurs de services pour effectuer la refonte de nos sites web respectifs.

QU'IL SOIT RÉSOLU que le Canton d'Alfred et Plantagenet retienne les services de la compagnie canadienne Upanup pour le développement de son site web pour la somme de 66,400\$, en plus d'un frais annuel de 3,600\$.

QU'IL SOIT ÉGALEMENT RÉSOLU que l'administration soit autorisée d'amorcer le processus de refonte du site web dès 2025 et que la somme de 33 000\$ en réserve au compte GL 14-1314-4190 « IT Support and Services » soit utilisée à cette fin ;

QU'IL SOIT ENFIN RÉSOLU que le conseil donne directive à l'administration d'inclure une somme additionnelle aux discussions budgétaires 2026, estimée à 37 000\$, afin d'assurer la concrétisation de ce projet avant juin 2026.

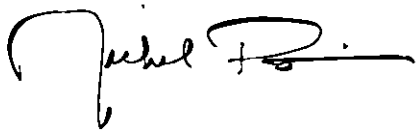
WHEREAS the Township of Alfred and Plantagenet participated in a joint call for proposals with the municipalities of Champlain, The Nation and Clarence-Rockland to identify service providers to redesign our respective website;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Township of Alfred and Plantagenet, following the results of the request for proposals process, retain the services of the Canadian company Upanup for the development of its website for the sum of \$66,400, in addition to an annual fee of \$3,600.

BE IT IS ALSO RESOLVED that the administration be authorized to begin the process of redesigning the website as early as 2025 and that the sum of \$33,000 in reserve in account GL 14-1314-4190 "IT Support and Services" be used for this purpose;

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that council instructs the administration to include an additional sum of approximately \$37 000 in the 2026 budget discussions to ensure that this project is completed before June 2026.

Simon St-Denis
Communications Officer



Michel Potvin
Chief Administrative Officer