

## Ad Hoc Website Review Committee Report & Recommendation

### RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD

#### *CONTRACT — motion needed*

The Ad Hoc Website Committee recommends that the Inland Township Supervisor execute an annual contract with Munibit for their website services at \$979 for the first year.

#### *STANDING COMMITTEE — motion needed*

Recommended that the Board make the Website Committee a standing committee. Current (or future) members will assist in the transition to the new website and ongoing support.

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### BACKGROUND

At the January 8, 2024 Inland Township Board Meeting, the Ad Hoc Website Review Committee was formed with the following members: Jim Brouwer, Ron Thomas, Dan Chapman, Jim Clark, Laura Turmel, and Therese Zielinski. The committee's purpose was to review potential replacements for the Township's current website and recommend alternatives from the dozens of website options available.

The search was divided into two phases: Initial Screening, and Committee Review. As noted in the attached *Overview of Inland Township Website Needs*, each company was evaluated on three factors: capabilities of the offering, ease of transition/maintenance/support, and pricing.

#### **Other Available Offerings on the Market**

Build-it-yourself systems such as Wix (used by many Michigan townships), offer rock-bottom pricing and flexibility — for municipalities that have or can hire in-house development talent. Similarly there are tools such as WordPress, Drupal, Joomla, and Magento that are open source and free to use. While offering flexibility, the hidden cost is what it actually takes to develop a system on par with turn-key offerings in the current market.

Custom developers, such as LIAA (our current provider), offer a step in-between do-it-yourself and turn-key offerings. Most smaller shops that have multiple municipality clients don't focus solely on governmental systems. LIAA falls into this category. It is worth noting that in a discussion with our LIAA support representative Rob Astor, LIAA hasn't done any further township website development since they worked on Inland's current system several years ago. Further, LIAA is winding down their government website division and will not be supporting any of their installed system within the next 5 years.

## Ad Hoc Website Review Committee Report & Recommendation

The website search focused more closely on vendors who catered directly to government municipalities offering ready-made solutions. Such firms ranged in size from new startups such as TotallyTownship (who are only in their beta-testing phase of development) to larger operations such as Granicus. The capabilities of some of these offerings are better suited to cities and municipalities that need advanced features to support long lists of services. Vendors also differed widely on their pricing policies. Some, like MunicipalPros, charge ala cart for 'additional capabilities' such as the calendar and more than 10 pages of content. Others are overbuilt and overpriced for Inland's needs. Additional vendors initially screened included HigherLigoic, PhusionDigital, ActionWeb, IconicWebHQ, FreshSites, and GovUnity.

### **The Final Four Considered**

The four systems reviewed by the committee were CivicPlus, Munibit, TownWeb, and Revize. Each would work for our township as they all met most of the core fundamental needs listed on the *Overview*. The committee evaluated each offering on a number of measures. After all four systems were demoed, the individual committee members took time to review their notes and prepare their recommendation. We met again and the decision was unanimous — Munibit.

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## **SUBSTANTIATION FOR OUR RECOMMENDATION**

### **Munibit's Capabilities**

Munibit addresses all of Inland Township's needs. They focus on smaller townships across America which is evident in their screen layouts and smooth functionality. One key feature they offer is that the system is built over a database. This facilitates the process of quickly and accurately updating website information wherever it appears on the site.

Munibit is continually updating their capabilities. Several features have been added since first contacting them in December of 2023 and more are on the way. After looking at dozens of township websites, the public facing 'front ends' all essentially operate in a similar manner. Munibit provides many customizable features that will allow Inland Township to develop a unique and fitting look. One of Munibit's strengths is their dashboard or 'back end' features that will be used by Inland Township personnel to maintain the website. Munibit's system appears straightforward and easy to learn, where the other systems seemed more complicated and didn't offer the inherent advantage of being database driven.

## Ad Hoc Website Review Committee Report & Recommendation

### **Munibit's Support**

All companies reviewed claim outstanding support, which is most likely true. Though Munibit doesn't have the biggest staff, it has one advantage the others don't. Our Munibit salesman, Ree Schilling, conducted the demos and will be our primary contact and support person. This arrangement all but guarantees that features weren't over-promised and that the system will work as advertised. In addition to presenting one of the better demos, Ree's written responses to the *Overview* questions were the most thorough.

### **Munibit's Pricing**

Munibit sets their pricing based on the population of a township. Inland's annually billed cost is only \$1,068 (this is a 20% discount from the monthly billed price of \$111.25 or \$1,335 annually), where larger townships pay \$4,000 to \$5,000 annually for the same service. Our first year also includes one free month, so year one will cost \$979. This is inclusive of setup, transitioning of current content, initial and all ongoing training, access to all features, and hosting unlimited content (except for meeting audio or video which would be linked in the website to YouTube). There are no hidden fees. This price is very close to the amortized cost of our current system. The only potential additional cost would be \$30 per thousand text messages should we decide to incorporate that function.

The estimated 5-year cost for Munibit (not adjusting for any price increases) is \$5,251, which is considerably less than the other three reviewed systems which ranged from \$7,460 to \$20,584. While a compelling price compared to the others, pricing was not the primary reason for choosing Munibit.



## Munibit Price Quote for Inland Township, MI

Price calculated by population: Inland Township, MI population ~ 2,100  
Enjoy 1 free month + no setup, design, or support fees, ever!

### Annual Price - 20% off

**\$89/mo** (billed annually)

### Monthly Price

**\$111/mo** (billed monthly)

## Here's What's Included:

### Website Builder

- Full readymade Municipal, Visitor or Community website. (No design work required)
- Custom domain setup. You must purchase your custom domain separately through a 3rd party provider (like GoDaddy) or apply for a free .gov domain. We walk you through these steps and help connect your domain once your plan begins.
- Built-in interactive tools, content management, multi-layer navigation and unlimited pages.

### Interactive Tools

- Reservation Management, Resource Folders, Event & Meeting Calendars, Forms with Workflows, In-Page Document Viewer, People Directory, Map & Business Directory, AI Assisted Text Editor, Mass Email & Text Notifications, Searchable PDF Forms (like property cards), Payment Processing, News Posts, Event Posts, Community Posts, Job Posts, Page Alerts, Image Carousels, External Embeds, Property Listings, Quick Links, Ads, Video, & Search.

### Customer Support

- Unlimited customer support (M-F, 8am-4pm)
- Online training sessions, training guides, and videos
- Everything is designed, built & managed in St. Charles, MO, USA

## Overview of Inland Township Website Needs

Inland Township is doing a deep review of its current website ([inlandtownship.org](http://inlandtownship.org)) with the key objectives of improving the quality of its content and ease of use for both users and the staff that maintains it. The following list are specific features and questions we would like to see in a written proposal and demo of your offering.

### **Background**

Inland Township is mostly a bedroom community located in the east end of Benzie County, Michigan. Our population is roughly 2,400 and our all part-time staff consists of a Supervisor, Treasurer, Clerk, Fire Chief, and several fire fighters. The current website is perceived as cumbersome to maintain and doesn't provide the amount of information or easy access our residents believe it should.

As a small township in terms of population and budget, our determination of how to move forward with an update will be determined based on the balance of three key factors: capabilities of the offering, ease of transition/maintenance/support, and pricing.

### **Features / Questions to be Addressed**

- 'Ease of Use' is the most frequent feedback given to the review committee — especially by those individuals who will be given the responsibility of keeping information up-to-date. This should be a major focus of your demonstration.
- Is there a limitation to the amount of information that can be posted?

How does your system support or present:

- interactive forms?
- township policies & ordinances?
- calendar functions: including meeting times, agendas & handouts, events, space rentals?
- live online meetings and posted videos of past meetings?
- township email addresses?
- online payments for space rental and property taxes?
- search function?

### **Layout & Design Considerations**

- Responsive design / mobile-friendly
- Is your content database driven?  
(i.e. Are changes to content automatically updated wherever they are used?)
- What suggestions do you have for content organization?

### **Content Support / Updating**

- What future features are currently planned?
- What ongoing support services do you offer?
- What service do you provide for porting our current information?

### **Costs**

Your proposal to Inland Township should include the details and annual costs for:

- Initial website design and setup.
- Ongoing staff support.
- Ongoing hosting of all offered services.



