City of Rockport Website Usability Review

Corina Aguilar

Summary and Introduction

Summary

This report will go over the methodology and results of a usability test conducted on the official Rockport, TX website. This test was designed to see if the website was adequately helpful to Rockport citizens. Our findings say that, while the content on the website is generally useful, locating that content was difficult. Reorganizing the homepage to put more useful information near the top and changing menus to improve navigation will improve usability and better serve Rockport residents.

Introduction

This usability test focused on three conditions:

1) Is the website easily usable?

2) Does the website offer relevant, useful content?

3) Is the website's aesthetic design effective?

To measure these three conditions, two participants were given a homepage tour, and two participants were given a product reaction test. The follow up questions used in the homepage tours and the terms used in the product reaction test were both informed by these conditions. During these tests, participants found condition 1 to be untrue, condition 2 to be true, and were evenly split on condition 3. The most common complaints were that navigation menus were overcrowded and the organization of elements on the homepage are confusing.

Methodology

Homepage Tour

A home page tour was given to two participants. This test ensured that participant observations would not be limited to the terms set in the product reaction surveys. Homepage tours were given face to face, and notes were taken to record participants' reactions.

Homepage tour participants tended to be more critical than those that took the product reaction tests. Why this divide occurred is not clear, it may have been test design that skewed responses, or it may have been a result of the small sample size. Demographics were not significantly different between these two groups and all participants accessed the site on their desktop, so neither of these factors could explain the difference. Despite this, both groups broadly criticized and appreciated the same elements of the website, so results were likely not heavily skewed.

Product Reaction Test

This test was administered as an interactable survey. 24 terms were selected for the test based on the conditions outlined in the introduction: usability, relevance, and aesthetics. Participants were asked to briefly tour the homepage on their own, highlight the terms they thought were descriptive of the website, and then answer a few follow up questions to elaborate on the terms they selected. This test was designed to ensure that usability, relevance, and aesthetics were measured, while also allowing participants to elaborate on the choices they made and express their own thoughts about the website outside of the selected terms.

Findings

Difficult Nagivation

The most common critique of the website, brought up by every single participant, is that navigation menus are cluttered. The large quantity of links in the menus made them overwhelming and busy to participants. The menus are also not well organized. The "I Want To" menu (Figure 1) in particular does not always follow the syntax implied by the title, which makes the website seem unprofessional. Links are sometimes redundant and in odd places in the menu. Participants noted that an accordion menu in a sidebar might be more effective than the current navigation banner. Since the subheading links lead to other pages that also have all these resources linked, only keeping these subheadings in the navigation menu might be a way to declutter (Figure 2).

Figure 1. "I Want To" navigation menu

BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS
Comprehensive Plan Update
Employee Appeal Board
Parks Board
Planning & Zoning
Swimming Pool Operations
Tree & Landscape
Zoning Board of Adjustment/Building & Standards Co
YMCA Development Committee
Old Agendas and Minutes

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

CITY COUNCIL
Mayor
Council Member Ward #1
Council Member Ward #2
Council Member Ward #3
Mayor Pro Tem, Council Member Ward #4

COUNCIL AGENDAS & PACKETS (PDF)

CITY COUNCIL MINUTES (PDF)

CITY MANAGER

CITY SECRETARY

COMMENT ON FUTURE PLANS

COMMENT ON POTENTIAL GRANTS

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN - APPROVED BY COUNCIL

NEW CITY HALL/DOWNTOWN ANCHOR PROJECT

ELECTED OFFICIALS

ELECTIONS
Election Register
Candidates Packet
Notice of General Election
Resolution calling Election
Notice of Drawing for Place on Ballot
New Ward Map 2022
Election Results

FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY

FIND YOUR WARD (PDF)

GOVERNMENT EDUCATION SITES

HOME RULE CHARTER (PDF)

HOW CITIES WORK

NOTIFY ME

ORDINANCES & RESOLUTIONS

ORGANIZATION CHART

POLICIES ADOPTED

PUBLIC INFORMATION REQUEST

PUBLIC NOTICES

Figure 2. City Government menu

Useful Content

Participants noted that despite the difficulty of finding things, the website's content was generally comprehensive, relevant, and useful. It was also noted that a positive to having so much information in the homepage menus is that finding a particular topic on the website was relatively quick, if confusing. The website has a wide breadth of content which, while potentially niche, could be exactly what someone needs. If the suggestion to reorganize menus and homepage content is taken, this aspect of the website's current design may be relevant.

Unhelpful Page Layout

Although all participants thought that content was generally useful, many of them thought that some of the most useful content was buried too far in the homepage, and less useful content was given too much prominence. For example, both homepage tour participants said that the "Pay Online" card should be placed higher in the homepage, and one thought that the other large cards surrounding it were much less useful (Figure 3). Other elements that participants thought should have more prominence were the ones advertising upcoming events, the "Newsflash" element (Figure 4), and COVID-19 information. Evaluating what people use this website for the most will give valuable insights into how to potentially redesign the homepage.
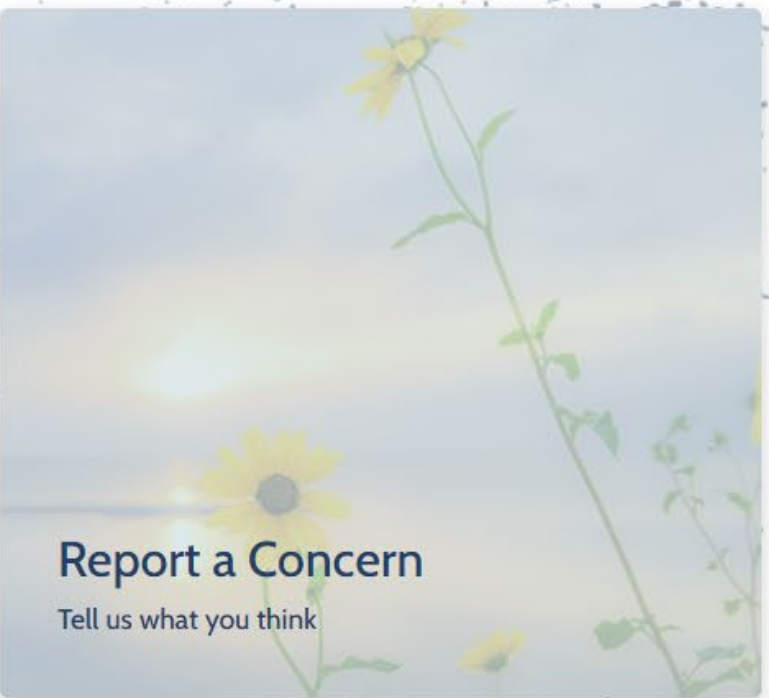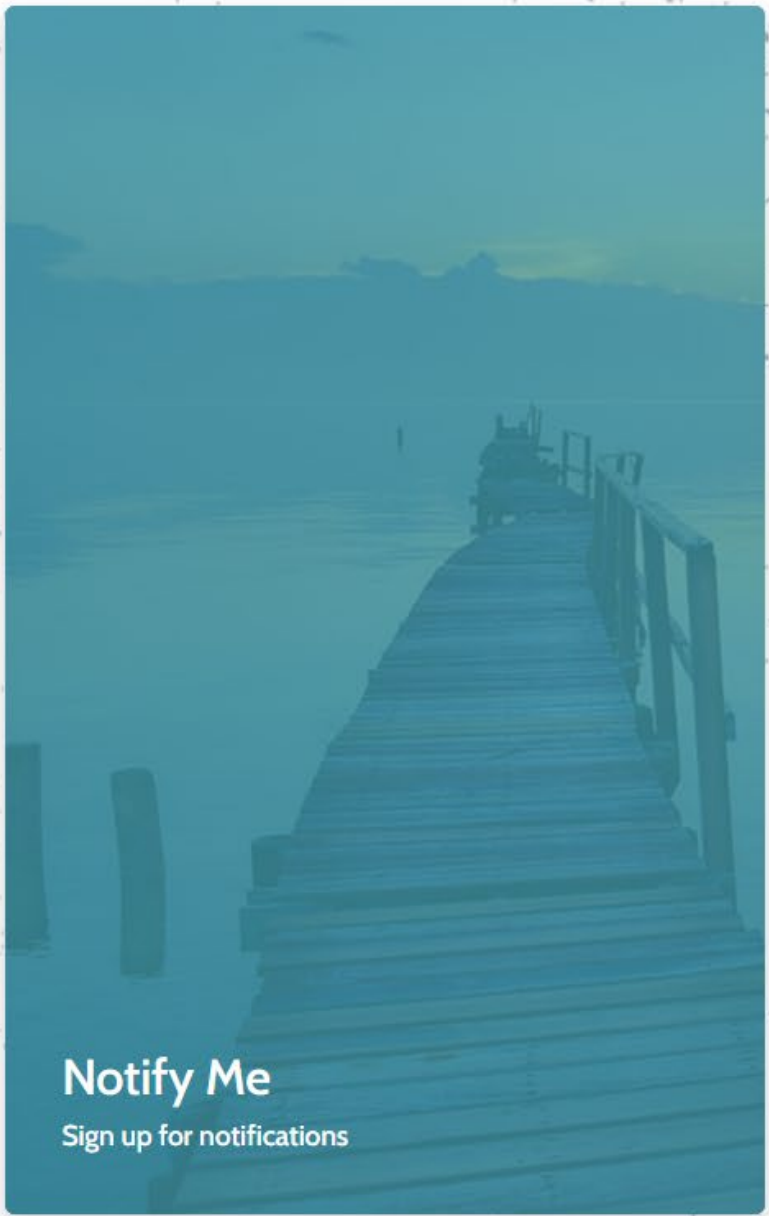
Figure 3.

Figure 4.

Conclusion

The website's content was evaluated here based on ease of use, usefulness, and aesthetics. The general impression was that information, while useful and comprehensive, was difficult to find. Consider reorganizing link grouping, consolidating some links into one subheading which can lead to an alternate page, and using an accordion menu in a sidebar to aid usability. Also consider reorganizing the homepage to put more important things like announcements and the "Pay Online" link near the top. Overall, the website is serviceable, but there are organizational changes which will make it better if implemented.

Appendix

Homepage Tour Follow Up Questions

These questions were only asked if the participant did not address them during the tour

- Do you think you could find what you're looking for easily?

- Do you think this information could be helpful to you if you lived in Rockport? If so, how much of this information is worthwhile?

- Was there anything on the site that confused you?

- What do you think was the strongest aspect of the site?

- If you could change one thing about the site, what would it be?

Common Homepage Tour Points

These are paraphrased points that both homepage tour participants brought up.

- The "pay online" link should be more prominent.

- The large buttons were odd and took up too much space.

- Not enough useful information "above the fold"

- Much of the content provided is helpful (particularly the "pay online" link) but the organization makes it difficult to find.

- Menus are cluttered

- Aesthetic elements did not work

Product Reaction Test Respondent #1

Accessible

Appealing

Attractive

Boring

Busy

Comfortable

Comprehensive

Confusing

Dated

Distracting

Dull

Easy to use

Engaging

Hard to Use

Helpful

High quality

Inconsistent

Intimidating

Intuitive

Inviting

Overwhelming

Unattractive

Unrefined

Usable

Product Reaction Respondent #2

Accessible

Appealing

Attractive

Boring

Busy

Comfortable

Comprehensive

Confusing

Dated

Distracting

Dull

Easy to use

Engaging

Hard to Use

Helpful

High quality

Inconsistent

Intimidating

Intuitive

Inviting

Overwhelming

Unattractive

Unrefined

Usable