To: Steve Schainker, City Manager

From: Susan Gwiasda, Public Relations Officer
           Stan Davis, Information Technology Manager

Date: September 24, 2010

RE: Website Redesign Update

Attached are the most recent options for the new City of Ames website. The 35-member City of Ames web master group, called the "Websters," has been meeting for several months to develop an improved, redesigned web. We are continuing to work with Vision Internet, and we remain on schedule to launch the new web with the new year (January 2011).

These two versions of the web are very close to our final design. The look of the new website, along with the navigation buttons and drop-down menus, were researched and designed after seeking internal and external input. Our internal Websters who post to the web daily, as well as our website users who often check the web daily were asked to provide comments. The designs attached also reflect data gleaned from our current website and includes information about what pages City of Ames website users are most likely to access. With the assistance of Vision Internet, we sent an interactive electronic survey (via Survey Monkey) to individuals and groups around the community and asked for their opinions. Also, we posted the survey on our existing website so any user could respond. We received almost 75 completed surveys. Additionally, we gave updates about the website redesign project to the Student Affairs Commission and held two (lightly attended) student focus groups.

As you would expect, there was a range of opinions about what the City's website

should look like. However, certain descriptive words were mentioned repeatedly: simple, bold, exciting, professional. We feel our current designs reflect the wishes of our users. But equally important, by working with Vision Internet, we feel our new website reflect what experts in the field are recommending about good website design. The key to improving our website is creating a homepage that positively represents our community, is interactive, and allows users to find the information they are seeking. Using commonly accepted web navigation conventions (buttons, drop-downs, tabs) helps us achieve that goal.

An important note is the increasing number of "smart phone" users and the trend in Internet-enabled devices. Our new web site will recognize Internet use via a cell phone and immediately offer a mobile version of the City website. This version will be an extremely simplified version, with a link to the full-scale home page for those who prefer to view the entire site.

As we move forward with the next steps of the web redesign, we will continue to refine the navigation (or how the user will "click through" to find information), as well as focus on page content and editing out unused or outdated information. The process has gone very well to date, and we are looking forward to the additional features, ease of update, and increased usability of the City's new website.

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