

Towns develop online presence

Longmeadow volunteers started their town's Web site more than 10 years ago.

Tuesday, March 18, 2008

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Brimfield residents can learn plenty about their town's volunteer fire department by going online to www.brimfieldfd.org, but they won't find a Web site to keep them up to date on how their town government operates. That could change soon. The Board of Selectmen is moving, cautiously, toward getting a town government Web site started.

"My personal feeling is that if people can have information about the Town Meeting warrant, it will encourage more involvement," Selectman Thomas C. Marino said.

The three members of the board decided several months ago that it was time for Brimfield to join the Internet age and they requested proposals for a business to design and maintain a town Web site. "If you try to do something and you really don't have any money and try to implement it, it can backfire on you," Marino said. "Now you are getting people frustrated. You look incompetent." Chairman Stephen R. Fleshman said there is no disagreement on the board about whether a Web site would benefit the town. "I wish we had one," Fleshman said. The board was considering three proposals from Web designers, but when the town budget process began the Web goal slipped on the priority list.

The selectmen still believe it is time to move and hope to hire someone for design in the next few months.

Brimfield is not alone in not having a Web site, but it is in a shrinking minority.

Common Cause, a nonprofit organization that advocates for open government and citizen participation, is releasing a list today of 32 towns with no Web site and another 38 that have Web sites with no municipal government information.

At a 1 p.m. ceremony in the Statehouse as part of its Massachusetts Campaign for Open Government, Common Cause will also present awards to 83 cities and towns that have Web sites containing agendas and minutes of the main governing board, as well as information on the municipal budget, the municipal bylaws or ordinances and, warrants and results of town meetings in towns that have them.

Pioneer Valley communities scheduled to receive awards today are Amherst, Longmeadow, Northampton, Palmer, Pelham, Southampton, Southwick, Springfield, West Springfield, Westfield and Wilbraham.

[Longmeadow recently celebrated the 10th anniversary of starting its town Web site, and Selectman Kathleen E. Grady said it is really appreciated by residents.](#)

[Agendas and minutes of the selectmen and other town boards can be easily found on the Longmeadow Web site, and there is information about the town budget, Town Meeting warrant and votes and town bylaws.](#)

Pamela H. Wilmot, executive director of Common Cause in Massachusetts, says that is the way it should be.

"This is the 21st century. Local government should embrace this," Wilmot said. "There is really no excuse for not having your community's select board agendas, budgets and minutes, on your Web sites." "It is really just seconds a month to provide this information to the community," Wilmot said.

In Amherst, town department heads update the Web site as part of their responsibility.

Kristopher Pacunas, the information technology director for the town, says the time for maintaining this municipal Web site is somewhere between 20 and 30 hours a week.

"The cost is in staff time," Pacunas said.

In Longmeadow, the Webmasters for the municipal Web site, James R. Moran and Mark Gold, spend up to 30 hours a week maintaining the site. "It would cost the town probably \$15,000 a year to do what we do," Moran said.

He takes pride in quickly posting information about town issues and budget matters to the Web site, which he maintains mostly from his home computer.

Springfield City Councilor Timothy W. Rooke said the city's Web site has become much more informative as it was made more user-friendly over the past four years. "What I have found out is that more people are better informed," Rooke said. "If somebody wants to know how much is budgeted for a department, or sidewalks, they can go in and find out. "People know the information is posted, and that makes them feel better," Rooke said.

Springfield Republican, March 18, 2008