

# Hillsdale sets Website Usability Standards for Small Municipalities



**"Town Web did bring us into the 21st century to, have modern usability standards and practices, which were previously not really there. So it's much more accessible, and it's easier for residents and employees of the town to use the site."**

**Tod Wohlfarth**

Hillsdale Economic Development Committee

Hillsdale sits at the heart of Columbia County, NY, nestled between Massachusetts to the East and the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains to the West. Hillsdale's long history spans back to 1788—today's population of 1,891 doubles at weekends with the influx of visitors from New York City.

Hillsdale wanted to promote itself and its local businesses to weekend visitors and provide residents with quick access to local government information. However, Hillsdale's website was a decade old, looked dated, and had an inefficient architecture that made information hard to find.

Frustrated website users called the municipality for help and interrupted the work of Hillsdale municipal employees. Upon analyzing its website traffic, Hillsdale discovered that the pages visitors sought most frequently were buried deep within the website and impossible to find. The Hillsdale team decided they needed a new website.

The usability objectives for the website redesign were as follows:

- Empower users to find the information they need quickly.
- Simplifying the Hillsdale clerk's task so uploading information using the website's backend software would be easy and would not require advanced computer skills.
- Ensure ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliance by enabling individuals with accessibility challenges to use the website.
- Provide a mobile-friendly solution to generate a great user experience regardless of the platform.



Town of Hillsdale, NY ~2000

The Hillsdale team identified two service providers specializing in municipal websites and invited both to bid for the project. Todd Wohlfarth, a Hillsdale Economic Development Committee member, relied on his background designing websites and extensive UX experience to evaluate the bids.

Wohlfarth states, "As a Creative Director, I am very particular about what I'm looking for, and the Town Web team was really willing to work with me. Like most municipalities, Hillsdale must be fiscally responsible. The fact that Town Web was a third of the competitor's price confirmed it as the better option."

Rather than an off-the-shelf template, the Hillsdale team chose a custom design to express their vision freely. For example, municipalities typically have a local government website and a tourism website, but the Hillsdale team wanted to integrate both so visitors could navigate seamlessly between the two. They expected the new Hillsdale website to last ten years and wanted to create a lasting design.

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The project went as planned and was completed in only eight weeks. The Town Web team was flexible and tailored the website design to Hillsdale's needs. The first step was restructuring the menu and submenus. Tom Wohlfarth sketched skeletons, and the Town Web team built the shell of the new website. Wohlfarth's requests were integrated into the build over several iterations, focusing on usability and mobility. The government and tourism websites remain separate but are fully integrated so that switching between the two is transparent.

Tom Wohlfarth explains, "What I loved best about the Town Web team that built our website was they would do things on the fly. We would be on the phone or a Zoom call; they would change things and tell me to refresh the screen. I loved that I could look at it and say, "Okay, that's it." Or, ask them to move it to the left by 10 pixels."

Town Web is built on WordPress and benefits from its open-source architecture and proven record as the most popular Content Management System. Wohlfarth was already proficient in WordPress and did not need the training that Town Web typically offers.

Three-yearly website refreshes are included in the Town Web maintenance package, a feature that Hillsdale has already taken advantage of.

**"I wanted the Hillsdale website visitor and the clerk to have a good user experience—Town Web gets the human factor"—Todd Wohlfarth, Hillsdale Economic Development Committee.**



Hillsdale has created a first-rate municipal website that boosts its image through a modern and user-friendly online experience.

Crucially, all initial objectives were met:

- Usability.
- All the heavy-traffic pages are available from the home page.
- A new "How Do I?" section guides users in their information search.

**"Town Web gets the human factor. They are so accommodating, which allowed us to create a fantastic website. And if the clerk struggles to upload something by themselves or organize information, Town Web will do it for them."**

Hillsdale already has plans for the next three-yearly refresh of the website and wants to further optimize public notices and notifications of upcoming meetings. Today, there are still occasional phone inquiries, but Wohlfarth intends to bring the number down to zero by making minutes of meetings even quicker to find.

Join the Town of Hillsdale & more than **800 Municipalities** who chose **Town Web** to make their Clerk-work easy!

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