Delaware Municipal Web Developers Group
MEETING SUMMARY

July 13, 2006
Haslet Armory Building, Dover
10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon

AGENDA

1. Attendees/Absentees

Attendees:

Cathy Beaver (Townsend), **Jennifer Brook** (Smyrna), **Linda Collins** (Millville), **Mark Deshon** (IPA – University of Delaware), **Ev Hall** (Greenwood), **Greg Hughes** (GIC), **Jonathan Justice** (IPA – University of Delaware), **Ivan Mitchell** (IPA – University of Delaware), **David Potter** (Middletown), **David Redard** (Sussex Co.), **Donna Schwartz** (Fenwick Island), **Pam Smith** (South Bethany), **Eddie Sparpaglione** (Sussex Co.), **Dell Tush** (Dewey Beach), **Nelson Wiles** (Lewes); plus guests **John McKown** and **Javier Santana** of Delaware.net.

Absentees:

Barbara Belli (Wilmington), **Mark Callan** (Dover), **Kathy Clifton** (Delaware City), **Cindy Fisher** (Delmar), **Marian Delaney** (New Castle), **John Giles** (Elsmere), **Rebecca Greene** (Felton), **Lisa Kail** (Bethany Beach), **Tina Law** (Elsmere), **Mike Mahaffie** (Office of State Planning Coordination), **Paul Morrill** (Delaware City), **Jessica Norton** (Odessa), **Tom Roth** (Henlopen Acres), **Rita Shade** (Newport), **Jamie Smith** (Laurel), **Maureen Stewart** (Townsend), **Marie Thomas** (Ocean View), **Angela Townsend** (Georgetown), **Amy Walls** (Seaford), **Randy Westergren** (Milford)

2. Discussion: What Constitutes a Municipal Website?

Following Mark Deshon's brief discussion-starter presentation, "What Every Municipal Website Should Include," a dialogue ensued among attendees with the following points leading the discussion. At the center of discussion was whether municipalities should post their respective email addresses on their websites. Some believed email addresses should be posted so the public has easier access to officials; however, others believed posting is not a good practice. Their rationale for this rejection is that email addresses are easily captured by Web crawlers, spiders, or robots. These are often used to gather specific types of information from websites, like harvesting e-mail addresses. The result is the inbox of a harvested address being filled with spam. **It was**

recommended that municipal websites utilize form-based communications as a safer alternative to displaying email addresses. These forms can be completed by an Internet user and directed toward an office or person without posting an email address. They also benefit Internet users who are using public Web terminals.

Another discussion ensued regarding representative images and copyrighting. An image file can contain metadata that displays attributes such as the owner, file size, etc. Image files from the Internet are often captured and used by someone designing or maintaining a website. **Municipal webmasters should be aware that many images are copyrighted, which, if used, places them in violation of copyright law.** The group decided that issues like image sizing and resampling would be on the agenda of a future meeting.

In addition to Mark's recommendations about what should be included in a municipal website, the attendees had a few more suggestions. A few were torn on whether their municipality should allow businesses (commercial vendors) to advertise for a fee. Representatives of municipalities that permitted advertising stated they had to develop stringent policies to govern the process. However, **municipalities using a ".gov" or ".us" domain are not allowed to have commercial advertising on their sites.** Attendees also thought a municipal website should include a variety of downloadable forms (e.g., meeting minutes, comprehensive plan, permits, municipal code, emergency plan).

3. Member Website Status

- Lewes – needs redesign; planning for redevelopment
- Greenwood – wants to initiate website but has cost concerns; interested in ".gov" domain
- Middletown – newly appointed webmaster seeking to maintain site in the midst of rapid area growth
- Sussex Co. – working on redesign for better navigation (based on user analysis); willing to assist other Sussex towns
- Fenwick Island – recent redesign (includes splash screen)
- South Bethany – has control issues with host
- Townsend – has control issues with host; interested in ".gov" domain
- Smyrna – looking for ways to become better resource
- Millville – wants to initiate website; interested in ".gov" domain
- Dewey Beach – has control issues with host; planning for redevelopment
- Delaware.gov – doing user focus group studies to drive next round of improvements

A few members noted control issues. On control issues, it was suggested that **municipalities should explore software applications such as Contribute**, which allows the creation of web pages, editing, and administration by

designated individuals. One of the guest attendees stated that "the days of paying a host to update your site are coming to an end."

4. **Guest Presentation: Using Websites to Improve Public Budgeting and Financial Management**
Jonathan Justice, PhD (University of Delaware)

Dr. Jonathan Justice's presentation detailed why public organizations use their websites to improve public budgeting and financial management. The impetus behind this is the need for municipal transparency and accountability. In addition to creating transparency and accountability, the availability of financial data enables citizens and other interested parties to conduct comparative analyses. Dr. Justice believes that **making information available via website creates economies of scale.** For example, mailing 2,000 financial reports to constituents may represent a large cost to a public organization. As its constituency increases, the cost of mailing will only grow. However, making financial report available online creates economies of scale for the organization because the information is available to an infinite number of people at one cost.

Dr. Justice mentioned that most financial information is typically presented in a format that can only be understood by specialist. Therefore, **the solution to this problem is transcribing financial information such that it can be understood by everyone, not just by those who generate the data.**

5. **Next Meeting Day**

It was agreed that the group meet on a Thursday in October. The vast majority wanted to continue meeting at the Paradee Center because of its location.