

Santa Ynez Community Services District
Board Memorandum

To: Board of Directors
From: Loch Dreizler, General Manager/Treasurer
Date: January 21, 2026
Subject: Agenda Item – Pursue Phased Improvements to the District Website for Enhanced User-Friendliness

Proposed Motion #1

I move that the Board direct staff to implement improvements to the District website at <https://www.sycsd.com> using a phased approach as outlined in the staff memo, starting with low-effort content updates and consultation with CivicPlus (Streamline), while minimizing staff burden and incorporating Board input on priorities. Staff to provide progress updates on future agendas as the phases advance.

(See more details for Option 1 on the next pages)

Proposed Motion #2

I move that the Board direct staff to explore Option 2 for the District website at <https://www.sycsd.com>, including consideration of developing a new website and evaluating alternative providers through a formal Request for Proposals (RFP) process. This exploration shall incorporate Board input on priorities, such as enhanced user-friendliness, transparency tools, compliance features, and ensuring cost-effectiveness. Staff to provide a preliminary RFP framework and progress updates to the Board at future agendas, with any final recommendations requiring Board approval prior to issuance of the RFP.

(See more details for Option 2 on the next pages)

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends the Board:

1. Direct staff to develop and implement a phased improvement plan for <https://www.sycsd.com> as outlined above, starting with Phase 1 content updates and CivicPlus consultation.
2. Provide any specific suggestions, priorities, or features during meeting discussion or possibly with the Community Interface Committee.

3. Authorize staff to explore low-cost/no-cost options (including CivicPlus upgrades and any community/vendor proposals) and bring progress updates to future agendas as phases advance.

Background: At the Special Board Meeting on December 10, 2025, Director Marymee inquired about improving the District’s website to enhance customer interaction. Discussion noted that the site receives very few customer requests, indicating potential for better resident access to information. A public comment from Marc Gunning suggested improvements could be low-cost and low effort, with an offer of services. Staff proposed agendizing a website overview.

The Community Interface Committee met on January 7, 2026, to further discuss the website. Mr. Dreizler shared that the site was originally created by Streamline, a company specializing in websites for special districts, which has since been acquired by CivicPlus. Director Marymee requested the committee view a demo of “ClearSpend Transparency,” a user-friendly, AI-powered transparency portal (like examples used for the State of Idaho) that displays complex government data in a user accessible format.

Our current website maintains a very basic structure:

- A simple homepage with a “Skip to main content” accessibility link.
- Sections covering “Our Mission,” “About Us” (describing responsibilities for sewer collections, streetlights, wastewater treatment/collection, and recycled water via contract operations), a short FAQ (limited to services provided), a general “Contact Us” invitation without specific details, “About Special Districts,” and a quick link for mailing list sign-up.

The site provides core information but remains sparse; navigation is not as intuitive as more contemporary websites, and resident engagement features are limited to getting meeting updates by signing up.

Analysis: A phased approach to improvements will allow enhancements over time while minimizing staff burden, leveraging existing CivicPlus platform capabilities, and responding to the Director's wishes for better user-friendliness and interactivity. CivicPlus offers accessible, WCAG-compliant websites, simplified content management, resident self-service features, and scalable designs—ideal for small special districts like SYCSD.

Option #1 - Proposed Phased Plan:

1. **Phase 1 (Short-Term, Low/No Cost – 1-3 Months):** Staff performs simple internal updates (e.g., adding specific contact details, phone/email, address; expanding FAQ with plain-language answers on common topics like service requests, billing, outages, conservation, and reporting issues; clarifying services and responsibilities). Simultaneously, contact CivicPlus to assess current platform options and potential upgrades for interactivity without major redevelopment.
2. **Phase 2 (Medium-Term, Moderate Effort – 3-9 Months):** Implement structural enhancements via CivicPlus (e.g., adding a clear top navigation menu, ensuring full mobile responsiveness, improving accessibility compliance, adding basic pages for Board/Agendas/Minutes, service details, and a site search function).
3. **Phase 3 (Longer-Term, As Needed – 9+ Months):** Explore advanced interactive features (e.g., online forms for feedback/service requests, document access, or transparency tools). This gradual rollout spreads workload, allows testing of changes, prioritizes high-impact low-effort items first, and accommodates budget and resource constraints. The ClearSpend Transparency demo highlighted the potential for engaging data display—if the Board is interested in similar budget/transparency features, they could be evaluated in later phases.

To guide priorities, staff solicits Board input on specific desired elements (e.g., prominent contacts, detailed service descriptions, meeting documents access, conservation resources, emergency/outage info, or transparency dashboards).

References:

- Minutes from Community Interface Committee Meeting, January 7, 2026
- Excerpts from Special Board Meeting Minutes, December 10, 2025 (website discussion)

Option 2 – Consider developing a new website and a new provider, most appropriately via an RFP Process.

Key Factors Influencing the Cost

CivicPlus (like similar providers such as Granicus, Revise, or even custom firms) uses a subscription-based model for ongoing hosting, support, compliance tools, and features. A "remodel" often involves:

- **Discovery/consulting** — Assessing needs, compliance (ADA/WCAG, California-specific rules like SB 929/Brown Act), content audit, and strategy.
- **Custom or premium design** — Modernizing layout, mobile-responsive updates, branding, UI/UX improvements.
- **Content migration** — Transferring existing pages, documents, agendas, etc., from Streamline to CivicPlus's platform (CivicEngage or similar).
- **Integrations** — Forms, notifications, and more user-friendly accessibility tools.
- **Launch and training** — Testing, SEO redirects, staff onboarding.

Breakdown of typical ranges (for small-to-mid-sized special districts or similar local agencies):

- **Lower end (\$15,000–\$25,000)**: Basic refresh using CivicPlus templates, minimal custom work, standard migration. This would likely apply because our site is straightforward (e.g., informational with compliance pages, no heavy custom integrations).
- **Mid-range (\$25,000–\$40,000)**: More involved redesign with custom elements, enhanced features (e.g., better agenda tools, chatbots), full migration, and accessibility optimizations. This is common for districts seeking a significant visual/functional upgrade.
- **Higher end (\$40,000+)**: Premium/custom design, extensive integrations, multiple subsites, or added modules (e.g., advanced analytics, resident portals). Larger projects or those with complex needs can exceed this.

These are primarily **upfront/project costs** (one-time fees for the remodel). After launch, expect **ongoing annual subscription fees** (often \$8,000–\$20,000+, depending on district size, add-ons, and multi-year contracts), which include hosting, updates, support, and compliance features. Some contracts bundle a future no-cost redesign after 4 years.