City of Venice, Florida
Website User Experience Review
and Recommendations

Prepared for the Citizens Advisory Board (CAB)

Date: December 17, 2025

Sources used: public pages on venicegov.com and selected peer city websites; CAB member feedback (attached PDFs).

Contents

Executive summary

The City of Venice is preparing to modernize venicegov.com to improve usability for everyday residents, seasonal residents, and visitors. Venice is a retirement-leaning beach community, so the website should strongly emphasize clarity, readability, and "top tasks" (the few things most people come to do), while still supporting more detailed information for power users.

This report identifies usability "pain points" observed on the current site and echoed by CAB member feedback, provides 5 peer city websites that demonstrate modern patterns, and recommends specific improvements and new features—prioritized into practical phases a consultant can use to plan the redesign.

A recurring theme in the CAB feedback is that important tasks (meetings/agendas, contact information, bill pay, permits, and service requests) should be consistently easy to find, without asking users to learn internal department structure or click through long menus.

Audience and goals

Primary audiences for venicegov.com include: (1) full-time residents (many of whom are retirees), (2) seasonal residents ("snowbirds") who return periodically and need quick access to city services, and (3) visitors/tourists seeking events, beach and parking info, and city rules that affect their trip.

For this population, the website experience should prioritize:

- Fast access to top tasks (bill pay, agendas/meetings, contact us, permits, report an issue, trash & recycling schedules).
- Simple language and navigation that does not require understanding city organizational structure.
- Readable typography and high-contrast design (important for older users).
- Mobile friendliness (many seasonal residents and visitors rely on phones).
- Clear emergency information (hurricanes, boil water advisories, closures) with prominent alerts when needed.
- Trust, accessibility, and privacy (including ADA/WCAG-minded design and safe handling of user data).

How this review was conducted

This review combines (a) a structured walkthrough of several public pages on venicegov.com, focusing on common resident tasks and navigation patterns; (b) a synthesis of written feedback submitted by CAB members (see Appendix A); and (c) a review of several peer city websites to identify concrete patterns Venice can adopt.

Because this is not a full analytics study, the findings emphasize observable usability issues (information architecture, clarity, discoverability, accessibility cues) and recommendations that are commonly used in modern municipal websites.

Website pain points (current venicegov.com)

The pain points below are grouped by user experience theme. Each item reflects what is visible on public pages of venicegov.com and/or was raised by CAB member feedback.

Pain point	Why it matters for Venice residents/visitors	Observed / noted in CAB feedback	Direction for fix
Overly long navigation menus and deep nesting	Users (especially seniors) can get lost and give up; seasonal residents may not remember where items live year-to-year.	Multiple reviewers describe the site as not intuitive and too hard to find information.	Rebuild information architecture around top tasks and audience groups; reduce nesting; add cross-links.
Task paths depend on knowing City departments	Most residents think in terms of needs (pay bill, report issue), not in terms of internal departments.	CAB feedback emphasizes difficulty locating services without knowing where the City "files" them.	Add a service catalog / task directory and consistent "I want to…" entry points.
Home page is content-dense (news/events/spotlights compete)	The most important actions can be visually diluted; older users benefit from simpler layouts and clear calls-to-action.	Reviewers noted 'too much information' on the home page.	Adopt a 'top tasks first' home page with fewer competing modules; move secondary content lower.
Search experience likely underpowered for everyday questions	Search is often the fastest path for users who don't understand the menu structure.	CAB feedback includes complaints about search and difficulty finding items quickly.	Implement modern search with spelling tolerance, synonyms, and filters (services, news, documents).
Meetings/agendas and public records are not consolidated in one obvious 'Meeting Center'	Residents frequently need agendas, minutes, videos, and instructions for public comment.	Multiple reviewers called out meeting/agendas discoverability as a problem.	Create a single 'Meetings & Agendas' hub that unifies calendar, agendas, minutes, livestreams, and how-to-participate.

Contact information is not consistently presented across pages	Residents often want a phone number or email without searching a directory; visitors need quick answers too.	CAB feedback asked for clearer contacts and easy-to-find staff information.	Use standardized contact panels on department/service pages (phone, email, hours, location, after-hours).
Readability and accessibility cues are uneven	Venice has many older residents; readable text, strong contrast, and accessible forms are critical.	CAB feedback highlights the need for accessibility and ease of reading.	Adopt an accessibility-first design system (typography, contrast, keyboard support) and regularly test.
Visitor and seasonal-resident needs are not clearly 'packaged'	Tourism and seasonal residency are major drivers; these users need curated information (parking, beaches, events).	Reviewers noted the site is more internally organized than audience organized.	Add a clear 'Visitors & Seasonal Residents' hub with seasonal FAQs and trip-planning basics.
Many important actions send users to separate systems without clear handoff	External systems (bill pay, permitting, meeting portals) can confuse users if branding and instructions differ.	CAB feedback mentions difficulty when leaving the site or finding the right portal.	Use consistent 'handoff' pages: explain what the external system is, what users need, and how to get help.

Notable observations from the venicegov.com homepage

The venicegov.com homepage includes a large set of nested menu items (Departments, Services, and department subpages) and multiple content modules on the page (e.g., "Most Popular," news, events, and multiple "Spotlight" items). The footer notes an ongoing accessibility initiative using the Monsido platform.

Representative CAB feedback themes (verbatim snippets)

A few short excerpts below illustrate recurring themes from the CAB member PDFs (full synthesis is in Appendix A):

- *"Not organized. Not easy to find things."*

- *"Too much information… confusing."*

- *"Need meeting agendas / minutes to be easy to find."*

- *"Search… not effective."*

Peer city websites to use as models

The examples below are not 'perfect,' but they illustrate concrete patterns that improve usability for typical residents. They were selected because they are municipal websites with clear resident tasks, strong navigation patterns, and/or service catalogs.

City of Sarasota, FL

URL: https://www.sarasotafl.gov/Home

What it does well:

- Strong "Search for Services" section and clear shortcut links for top tasks (meetings, pay online, report an issue).
- Clear "Meetings, Agendas & Video" entry point from the home page.
- Prominent "Pay Online," "Permits & Licenses," and public records pathways.

Why it matters for Venice: Relevant because Sarasota is a nearby coastal city with overlapping resident and visitor needs.

North Port, FL

URL: https://www.northportfl.gov/

What it does well:

- Consistent navigation that groups content into broad buckets (community, services & safety, building & planning, city government).
- Pages include 'Quick Links' and clear 'Contact Us' blocks.

- The site uses a consistent municipal platform and clearly signals external systems.

Why it matters for Venice: Relevant because North Port is a neighboring Florida municipality and demonstrates a cleaner, more modern structure.

City of Decatur, GA

URL: https://www.decaturga.com/

What it does well:

- Homepage highlights top tasks like 'Report an Issue,' 'Parking Information,' 'Subscribe to Alerts,' and 'Meetings and Minutes.'
- Includes an events calendar module and a clear path to agendas/minutes.
- Simple, task-forward homepage layout that reduces hunting.

Why it matters for Venice: Relevant as a small/medium city example that prioritizes top tasks and meetings access.

City of Seattle, WA – "Pay or Apply" service catalog

URL: https://www.seattle.gov/pay-or-apply

What it does well:

- A dedicated, categorized directory for fees, fines, permits, and applications—supported by keyword search.
- Clear 'Top Requests' section and consistent category labels.
- Designed around resident tasks rather than departments.

Why it matters for Venice: Relevant as an example of a strong service catalog pattern Venice could adopt at a smaller scale.

City of Austin, TX

URL: https://www.austintexas.gov/

What it does well:

- Prominent translation options and a clearly branded "3-1-1" information center with multiple contact modes.
- Clear participation links (council meetings, sign-ups, email updates) presented as 'Connect with Your City Government.'
- Uses recurring modules (news, events, video) without hiding the top actions.

Why it matters for Venice: Relevant as an example of modern 'service center' thinking patterns.
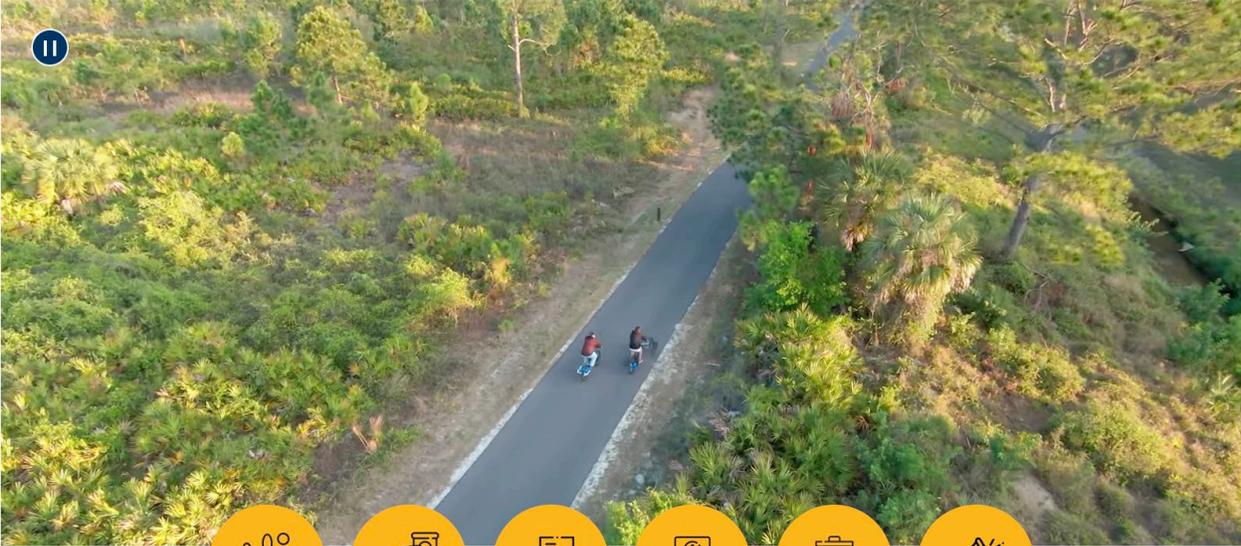
Visual examples (selected images from peer sites)

City of Decatur®

COMMUNITY   BUSINESS   GOVERNMENT   CITY SERVICES

REPORT AN ISSUE   PARKING INFORMATION   SUBSCRIBE TO EMAIL AND TEXT ALERTS   MEETINGS AND MINUTES   PUBLIC SAFETY   EVENTS CALENDAR

In The Spotlight

DECATUR SQUARE

CITY ADMINISTRATION ⌄   PUBLIC SAFETY ⌄   ASSISTANCE AND UTILITIES ⌄   LEARNING AND EDUCATION ⌄   EXPLORE THE CITY ⌄   TRANSPORTATION AND DEVELOPMENT ⌄

Pay or Apply

Apply for city programs and services and find fees, permits, or licensing. We want to make getting things done with the City easier.

⚠ **Beware: Phishing Text Messages and Robocalls Related to Seattle Tickets and Hearings**

Seattle Municipal Court (SMC) Public Services has received numerous reports from constituents who have received phishing texts and/or robocalls relating to outstanding Seattle tickets and hearings. SMC does not use robocalls and does not use text messaging to provide notice of outstanding tickets. To verify if you have a ticket or hearing scheduled with Seattle Municipal Court you may search online using the court's public portal or call (206) 684-5600. Protect yourself and your identity by not sharing personal information with unknown callers and do not click on links in text messages from unknown senders.

Top Requests

📄💲
Pay a ticket

🐕
Adopt a pet

💲
Pay utility bills

All Programs and Services

[Filter by entering a keyword] 🔍

Skip to: **Fees**   **Fines and Tickets**   **Parking**   **Permits and Licenses**   **Reservations**   **Taxes and Personal Documents**   **Utilities**   **Related**

📨💲 **Fees**

Animal Shelter Fees and Fines

Find fees related to animal safety, sanitation, control and licensing.

City Clerk and Municipal Archives

View the fee schedule for requesting records on paper, microfiche, photographs, audio and video

Construction and Inspection Fees

Learn about all the fees associated with construction codes, inspections, permits and trade licenses.

Hearing Examiner Fees and Payments

The filing fee for a case before the City Hearing Examiner is $120 unless

🔺 Austin

Resident   Business   Government   Departments   Connect   🔍

Welcome to the Official Website of
The City of Austin

FY26 Amended Budget Information | Access local food resources

Popular Services

📍 View the City Council district map ›	🐕 Adopt a pet ›	✈️ Get the latest AUS airport information ›	🔍JOBS Apply for a City job ›
♻️ View your recycling, composting and trash schedule ›	⛑️ View the permitting and inspection portal ›	💳 Pay online ›	

All Services

Recent News

Recommended improvements

Improvements are listed in priority order with an emphasis on changes that benefit typical residents quickly, while setting a foundation for more advanced features later.

1: Make top tasks unmissable

On the homepage and every major landing page, present a consistent set of top tasks as large, high-contrast buttons or cards. Suggested top tasks for Venice:

- Pay a bill (utilities and other payments)
- Meetings & agendas (with livestreams and public comment instructions)
- Report a problem / request service
- Permits & inspections (building, zoning, special events as applicable)
- Trash, recycling, and collection schedule
- Contact the City / staff directory

These should be visible without scrolling on desktop and within the first screen on mobile. News and promotional spotlights should be secondary to task completion.

2: Rebuild the information architecture around users

Reduce reliance on department structure. In practice, that means designing a small number of top-level pathways such as:

- Residents (services, utilities, trash, permits, parks, safety)
- Visitors & Seasonal Residents (events, beach/parking info, city rules that impact visitors)
- Business & Development (licenses, procurement, planning/zoning, economic development)
- Government (council, boards, meetings, budgets, public records, city clerk)
- Departments (for users who prefer an org-chart approach)

Within each pathway, pages should be task-oriented and cross-linked (e.g., 'Pay Utility Bill Online' should appear under Residents, Utilities, and a central Pay page).

3: Improve search and "findability"

A modern municipal search feature should support: spelling tolerance, synonyms (e.g., 'trash' = 'solid waste'), and filtering by content type (services, departments, news, events, documents). It should also elevate "best bet" results for high-volume queries such as bill pay, agendas, and permits.

4: Standardize page templates and contact blocks

Adopt consistent templates for common page types (department page, service page, news post, event listing, meeting page). Each service/department page should include a standardized contact panel with phone, email, office hours, address/map link, and 'after-hours' guidance where applicable.

5: Accessibility and readability improvements

The site footer indicates Venice is using the Monsido platform as part of an accessibility initiative. The redesign should build on that by:

- Using larger default font sizes and comfortable line spacing; avoiding dense text blocks.
- Ensuring high color contrast and visible focus indicators for keyboard users.
- Providing clear link text (avoid 'click here'), and ensuring headings follow a logical hierarchy.
- Making PDFs and forms accessible (tagged PDFs, form labels, error messages).
- Offering simple controls such as text-size adjustment and language translation where appropriate.

6: Content governance and ongoing maintenance

Several CAB comments point to content sprawl over time. A redesigned website will degrade again unless the City adopts content governance, including:

- A clear owner for each major section (responsible for accuracy and timeliness).
- A publishing workflow and review dates for evergreen pages (e.g., annual review reminders).
- A 'retire and redirect' process to prevent stale pages and broken links.
- A simple style guide for writing (plain language, short sentences, consistent labels).

New features to consider

The features below go beyond 'fixing' navigation and are intended to make venicegov.com a more helpful digital front door for residents, seasonal residents, and visitors.

Resident service center features

- Unified 'Pay / Apply / Report' hub (one place to start for common transactions).
- Service request intake with tracking (ticket number, status updates), integrated with existing tools where possible.
- 'My Venice' quick links page users can bookmark (top tasks + frequently visited services).
- More self-service "how-to" guides (e.g., trash/recycling, starting a business, building permits) written in plain language.

Meetings & civic participation features

- A single Meetings Center with calendar, agendas, minutes, videos/livestreams, and instructions for public comment.
- Email/SMS subscription options by topic (e.g., council agendas, road closures, boil water advisories).
- A clear 'How City Government Works' explainer for newcomers and seasonal residents.

Visitor & seasonal resident features

- A dedicated 'Visitors & Seasonal Residents' hub: events, parking, beaches, rules/ordinances commonly affecting visitors, and contact information.
- A seasonal checklist ('I'm back in town—what changed?') with quick links to key updates, recreation, and utilities.
- Integrated events calendar filters (arts, parks, public meetings) and simple sharing options.

Maps and situational awareness

- Interactive maps for: parking, parks/beach access points, ongoing road work, and flood/hurricane resources.
- A 'What's happening near me' view (optional) for closures, detours, and city projects—especially useful for visitors.

Transparency and performance

- A curated Open Data / Dashboards area (building on existing open data efforts) presented in plain language.
- A 'Project updates' area where high-interest projects have a timeline, status, and FAQs.

Proposal: AI chatbot / digital assistant

CAB members requested consideration of an AI chatbot agent to help residents find information quickly. A well-designed municipal chatbot can reduce frustration (and phone calls) by answering common questions, guiding users to the correct page, and helping residents start tasks such as reporting an issue or finding a meeting agenda.

Recommended approach (to avoid incorrect or misleading answers)

If Venice adopts a chatbot, it should be implemented as a 'retrieval-based' assistant: the bot answers only from approved City content (website pages, ordinances, meeting documents, and curated FAQs). This reduces hallucination risk and allows the City to audit sources.

Key guardrails and design requirements:

- Always show sources/links for answers (so users can verify).
- Clearly label the bot as informational, not legal advice, and provide escalation to staff for complex issues.
- Refuse or route sensitive requests (e.g., personal data, payments) to secure official portals rather than handling them in chat.
- Log questions (anonymized where appropriate) to identify content gaps and improve the site over time.
- Support accessibility (keyboard navigation, screen readers) and plain-language responses.

High-value chatbot use cases for Venice

- "How do I pay my utility bill?" → direct link to the correct portal + help phone number.
- "When is the next City Council meeting and how do I comment?" → agenda link + instructions.
- "What is my trash pickup schedule?" → link to the schedule page + holiday changes.
- "Is there a burn ban / boil water advisory?" → link to the current alert page (if any).
- "How do I apply for a permit?" → step-by-step guide + link to online permitting services.
- "Where can I park for the beach / downtown?" → parking info + map links.

Appendix A: CAB member input (screened & synthesized)

This appendix summarizes useful points from the two CAB feedback documents provided. Items were grouped into themes and translated into actionable recommendations.

A1. Key points from 'Effron Comments Regarding the website'

- Emphasis that the site feels hard to navigate for ordinary residents and can be confusing due to the amount of information presented.
- Recommendation to reorganize content so residents can find information by what they want to do, not by internal government structure.
- Encouragement to make meeting information, contact information, and emergency/alert content more prominent and easier to locate.
- Suggestion to simplify and modernize the overall design, with better readability and usability for older users.

A2. Key points from 'Board Website Reviews 10.30.25'

- Reviewers praised having many resources available but repeatedly flagged that the site is not intuitive and contains too much competing information.
- A common request was for clearer 'Quick Links' / top tasks (pay, meetings, report an issue, permits) and improved search.
- Multiple reviewers provided examples of other cities' websites they preferred, including Sarasota, North Port, Decatur, Seattle, and Austin.
- Several reviewers emphasized readability, accessibility, and making contact information easier to find.

A3. Recurring recommendations from CAB feedback

Theme	What CAB members were asking for (combined)
Simplify navigation	Fewer layers; clearer labels; less reliance on department structure.
Better top tasks / quick links	Make high-demand tasks visible on the homepage and across the site.
Meetings and transparency	Agendas, minutes, and participation instructions easier to find in one place.
Search improvements	Search that works for everyday terms and common misspellings.
Accessibility/readability	Senior-friendly design: readable fonts, strong contrast, less clutter.

References and image credits

Web page links are provided so city staff and the consultant can verify features directly.

- City of Venice, FL – Homepage: https://www.venicegov.com/
- City of Sarasota, FL – Homepage: https://www.sarasotafl.gov/Home
- North Port, FL – Example department/service page (Fire Rescue): https://www.northportfl.gov/City-Services-and-Safety/Emergency-Services/Fire-Rescue
- City of Decatur, GA – Homepage: https://www.decaturga.com/
- City of Seattle – Pay or Apply: https://www.seattle.gov/pay-or-apply
- City of Austin – Homepage: https://www.austintexas.gov/

CAB feedback documents provided

• Effron Comments Regarding the website (PDF, provided by CAB member).

• Board Website Reviews 10.30.25 (PDF, provided by CAB member).