

Santa Clara Hops Into the Internet Age, Offers Live Streaming of Council meetings and Archives on City Web site

By Robert Haugh

Thanks entrepreneurial thinking between the City Clerk's Office, the City Manager's Office and the City's IT Department, Santa Clara is now heading into the digital age, offering live and archived streaming videos of City Council, Redevelopment Agency and Sports & Open Space Authority meetings at the City's Web site, www.santaclaraca.gov.

Enabling the public to watch meetings live over the Internet, the archived meetings allow viewers to choose specific portions of meetings by clicking on

selected agenda items. They can also perform keyword searches to view items of interest, or view by a selected meeting date.

"This is a quantum leap for the public's ability to focus-in on issues that are important to them. It allows people to link directly to the agenda items that are most interesting without having to wade through the rest of the City Council agenda," says City Clerk/Auditor Rod Diridon, Jr.

"Any time the public has greater and better access to government, it is a good thing. The City will use the SIRE technology to video stream the

upcoming candidate forum and Final Word forum on the website, so "that's a bonus for the public and the Vote Ethics program," adds Diridon.

The City's technology partner in this endeavor is SIRE Technologies Inc. of Salt Lake City, Utah. SIRE specializes in working with municipalities to provide agenda planning management and streaming video services.

According to Diridon, "the idea has been around for a number of years," but "the City's new IT Director Gaurav Garg brought it up again and put a fire under it more recently."

"We now have video streaming, council agenda and records retention process all handled by one cohesive program. This allows City staff to be more efficient, provide better service to the public and do so with less tax dollars," adds Diridon.

Making sense and improving the public's access to City activities, the new agenda software program will be saving the City several thousand dollars. "The budget on the project is very appealing," laurels Diridon. According to him, the previous agenda software program cost about \$26,000 per year, whereas the initial launch of the SIRE technology was around \$30,000 including the first year's contract, with the annual cost of operating the new SIRE system being only \$14,000 per year following that. "So in the first two years we'll have saved the taxpayers money while providing greater service.

Saving tax dollars while providing better service, you can't beat that!" concludes Diridon.

City Manager Jennifer Sparacino says that the City remains committed to televised meetings on MCTV Channel 15, Santa Clara's government television channel. "However, the City's normally televised meetings will also be available on-demand from the web. It's an extremely helpful tool, greatly improving public access to information," Sparacino added.

The City Council, Redevelopment Agency and Sports & Open Space Authority meetings of August 19, 2008 were the first to be streamed live over the Internet.

In a related project, The City Manager's Office has been upgrading the camera and transmission systems for broadcasting the Council Meetings and connecting to the video streaming components, in tandem.