

## Website Auditing Process and Methodology

This report presents the findings of the comprehensive Website Accessibility Audit, a rigorous examination of Stoughton's municipal website against the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). It outlines the methodology employed and offers insights into areas of strength and improvement identified during the audit process.

A website accessibility audit is performed by an accessibility professional who meticulously evaluates digital assets against the current web guidelines. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines are part of a series of web accessibility guidelines published by the Web Accessibility Initiative of the World Wide Web Consortium, the main international standards organization for the Internet. The WCAG standard has been tried and tested and is under routine development by accessibility experts, making it a reliable standard. Accessibility is defined as ensuring a digital product, such as a website, is as usable as possible by everyone, including people with a range of disabilities. These recommendations also include standards for documents, video, social media, integrated apps, and navigating content on highly limited devices such as mobile phones.






Manual accessibility website audits stand out as the most comprehensive form of assessment. Unlike automated tools that may overlook nuanced aspects, manual audits engage human evaluators who meticulously navigate every facet of a website. This approach ensures a profound understanding of the user experience, considering factors like keyboard navigation, screen reader compatibility, and overall usability.




Embracing accessibility as an ongoing process, rather than a one-off project, is fundamental to fostering a truly inclusive digital landscape. Accessibility isn't a checkbox to mark upon the completion of a website; rather, it's an evolving commitment to ensuring that digital content remains usable for everyone, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Regular reviews, updates, and improvements are essential to align with the latest accessibility standards and address emerging challenges.

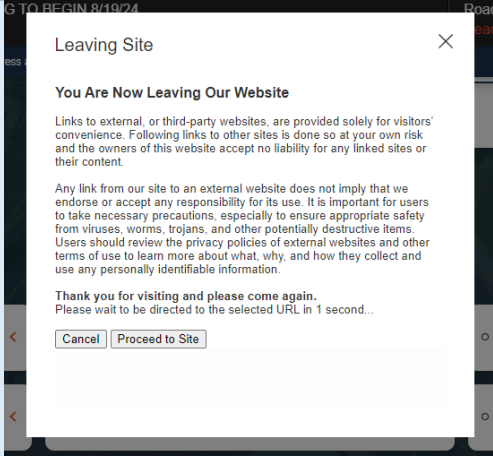



City/Town: Stoughton, Massachusetts



Website: <https://www.stoughton.org/>

Audit Date: August 2024





Element	Specific Feedback (with pictures)	Reasoning
<b>Accessibility Area: Website</b>		
<b>Alternative Text</b> <a href="#">WCAG 2.2 – 1.1</a>	 Site contains images that lack captions or alternative text in the <a href="#">Photo Gallery</a>	Text alternatives for any non-text content provides context for users who use braille, screen readers, assistive technologies, or need simpler language.
<b>Media Captions</b> <a href="#">WCAG 2.2 – 1.2.2</a>	 Closed captioning is available for posted videos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Captions or transcriptions for all prerecorded audio or video media helps users who are deaf or hard of hearing understand content.</li> <li>• A full transcript (of captions and audio description) is useful for people who have both hearing and visual impairments including those who are deaf-blind.</li> </ul>
<b>Color Contrast</b> <a href="#">WCAG 2.2 – 1.4.3</a>	 Color contrast ratios meet the minimum WCAG standard of 4:5:1 or higher.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A color contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 helps increase clarity</li> <li>• <a href="#">Contrast checker</a></li> </ul>
<b>Flashing</b> <a href="#">WCAG 2.2 – 2.3.1</a>	 Website does not contain any flashing images or text.	Web pages should not contain anything that flashes more than three times in a second. A pair of opposing changes in relative luminance can cause seizures in some people if it is large enough and in the right frequency range.
<b>Plain Language</b> <a href="#">WCAG 2.2 – 3.1</a>	 Appropriate-level language is used throughout the site.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use easy to understand words, short sentences, and a simple tense. Content that is readable and understandable ensures accessibility for people of all cognitive abilities.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading level should not be more advanced than lower secondary education level.</li> <li>• A paragraph of more than 50 words should be broken up into two.</li> <li>• Avoid double negatives.</li> <li>• Do not use idioms because they cannot be directly translated without losing their cultural or dependent-language meaning.</li> </ul>
<p>Clear Organization</p> <p><a href="#">WCAG 2.0 – 4.3.2</a></p>	<p></p> <p>Toolbars are consistently formatted throughout the site; links are organized in a logical layout. The “Quick Links” feature allows users to easily access common resources.</p> <div data-bbox="518 940 925 1365"> <p><b>Quick Links</b></p> <p>Calendar</p> <p>News</p> <p>Emergency Management</p> <p>Tax Assessor</p> <p>Stoughton TV</p> </div>	<p>Users often become confused and lost when they do not understand the visual hierarchy of the site, menus, and structure. Clear sub-menus and a well-defined structure will help the user know what is on the site and how to find it.</p>
<p>Sitemap</p> <p><a href="#">WCAG 2.0 – 2.4.9</a></p>	<p></p> <p>A sitemap is not available on the website.</p>	<p>Providing a site map allows users to understand what the site contains and how the content is organized.</p>
<p>External Link Alert</p>	<p></p> <p>An external link alert appears when users navigate to a webpage outside of the Town website.</p>	<p>Alerting users when they will be leaving the Town website systems helps those using assistive devices keep track of webpage navigation.</p>


		
Manual Accessibility Test	<div></div> <div>Website passes the review of keyboard-only navigation:</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Tabbing between sections of a webpage</b> to make sure they can be found without a mouse</li><li>• <b>Testing all menus with the keyboard</b> to ensure none are skipped over</li><li>• <b>Checking for skip links</b> at the top of the page that allow users to jump directly to each page’s vital content</li><li>• <b>Verifying that links and form fields are highlighted</b> when using keyboard commands</li></ul></div>	<p>As advanced as software is, there are still plenty of situations where an algorithm can’t recognize the nuances of website accessibility or usability. Because of this, manual testing is mandatory; it will provide the most detailed feedback about a website’s accessibility.</p> <p>To ensure consideration is given to as many devices and browser types as possible, manual accessibility tests were conducted in a variety of browsers, including the latest versions of Internet Explorer, Edge, Chrome, and Firefox.</p>
Accessibility Area: Documents		
File Type <a href="#">Section 508 - Documents</a>	<div></div> <div>Some documents are uploaded as scanned documents, thus lacking accessibility features. Examples: <a href="#">Building Permit Packet</a>, <a href="#">Temporary Additional Living Area Requirements</a></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Save documents as .docx format to preserve accessibility features. Other formats that can be produced by Microsoft Word (RTF, DOC, TXT, and ODF) may not be accessible.</li><li>• Develop reusable accessible design templates</li></ul>
File Name <a href="#">Section 508</a>	<div></div> <div>File names are descriptive and unique enough to distinguish between documents.</div>	A descriptive file name that identifies the document or its purpose helps everyone locate, open, and switch between documents.

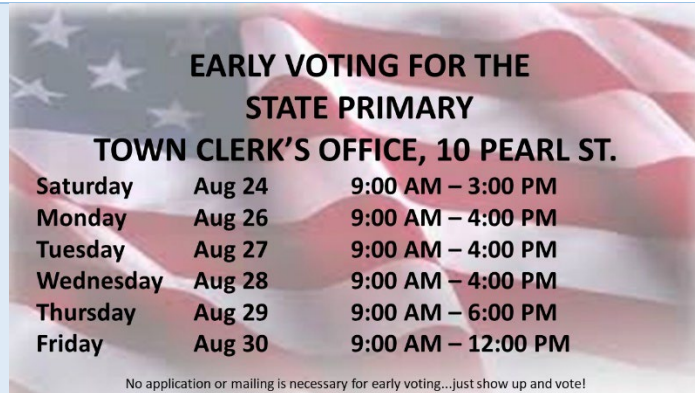
Titles / Labels	 <p>Documents are titled and labeled, but should specify language.</p>	All documents should be titled, tables should include headers, and the language of all contents should be noted.
Date Format	 <p>Stoughton formats their dates appropriately.</p> <div data-bbox="467 493 979 627"> <p><b>Thu, Aug. 22</b>  <b>Planning Board Agenda (PDF)</b></p> </div>	Writing out the month and date in words can avoid confusion.




### Accessibility Area: PDFs







Searchable text <a href="#">PDF508</a>	 <p>Not all PDFs are searchable, such as: <a href="#">Parking Regulations</a></p>	An ADA compliant PDF has searchable text. PDFs created by scanning pages are pictures of the original. Screen readers cannot infer meaning from just a picture.
Bookmarks <a href="#">PDF508</a>	 <p>Bookmarks are not present for documents greater than 9 pages.  Examples of violations include: <a href="#">Zoning Bylaws</a></p>	If the PDF document contains 9 or more pages, bookmarks should be added. Bookmarks allow the reader to quickly navigate to points of interest
Alternative Text <a href="#">PDF508</a>	 <p>Image-based flyers are missing captions or alternative text.</p> <div data-bbox="487 1102 958 1564">  </div>	Type text that describes the image in the Alternative Text field (click Options > Properties)





### Accessibility Area: Social Media

Alternative Text	 <p>Posts are missing alternative text. When important information is only listed on an image, it is not accessible to users who utilize assistive technologies.</p> <p><a href="#">Example:</a></p>	Provide media with alternative text that describes the image
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Media Captions	 <p>Videos on the Stoughton Facebook page do not contain the option to turn on closed captioning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure video content includes synchronized captions.</li> <li>• Ensure audio descriptions for people with visual disabilities are included in the default sound track, or as a separate selectable sound track.</li> <li>• Add captions to photos to ensure individuals understand what is going on in the picture.</li> </ul>
Plain Language	 <p>The Town uses plain language in their posts.</p> <p>The Town of Stoughton does not use hashtags in their social media posts, however they should consider doing so, so content can be more easily searchable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write in plain language, use camel case when appropriate (i.e., capitalize the first letters of compound words. This is helpful as it makes multi-word hashtags easier to read, including for those using a screen reader.</li> <li>• Limit use of hashtags, abbreviations and acronyms.</li> </ul>
Acronyms	 <p>Stoughton's social media accounts do not use any acronyms.</p>	<p>Always spell out the first instance of the acronym and add the acronym, in parentheses after. This is especially helpful for those</p>

		using screen readers, because after the name is heard and the acronym is spelled out, the user will be better able to associate the sound of the acronym with the full name.
Outside content	 <p>When the Town shares others' content, they should note any ADA accessibility barriers such as lack of video captioning. Additionally, they should provide alternative text if there is none.</p>	For content the municipality has not created and thus may not be accessible, make audience aware of these limitations. Provide a note briefly explaining the limitation, such as that: the photo is untagged; the video will auto start; the video does not include captioning; or the audio file is not accompanied by a written transcript.
<b>Accessibility Area: Newsletter</b>		
	 <p>The website allows users to subscribe to E-alerts via the Notify Me system.</p>	
<b>Accessibility Area: E-permitting</b>		
	 <p>Site does not provide options to apply for various types of permits electronically.</p>	
<b>Accessibility Area: Public Notice and Grievance Procedure</b>		
<a href="#">Title II</a>	 <p>The Town lists their Disabilities Commission Board Members and a general contact email, but does not include their ADA Grievance Policy or information about the ADA Coordinator.</p>	The ADA Coordinator is responsible for coordinating the efforts of the government entity to comply with Title II and investigating any complaints that the entity has violated Title II. The name, office address, and telephone number of the ADA Coordinator must be provided to interested persons.
<b>Accessibility Area: Secure Electronic Transfers (E-payments)</b>		
Clear confidentiality language	 <p>The municipal e-pay system, UniPay, is "Digicert Secured" and provides contact information and a link to their privacy policy.</p> <div data-bbox="290 1713 1159 1827"> <p>Need Assistance?  Call: 1-877-227-1157  Monday - Friday: 8:30am to 6:00pm  Saturday: 8:30 am to 1:00pm  Email: support@unipayteam.com  ©2024 UniBank   Privacy Policy   Supported Browsers</p>  </div>	To facilitate and encourage electronic commerce using payment card products, it will be necessary to assure cardholders that their payment information is safe and can only be accessed by the intended recipient.

Functioning Services	 <p>At the time of the audit all electronic services were functioning.</p>	
Contact Information	 <p>UniPay provides an email address, phone number, and hours of operations in the event that residents need assistance.</p>	
<b>Accessibility Area: Other / Integrated Apps</b>		
GIS	 <p>The site provides online interactive GIS maps.</p>	Text alternatives for any non-text content provides context for users who use braille, screen readers, assistive technologies, or need simpler language.
<b>Accessibility Area: Mobile Version</b>		
Layout	 <p>Site layout is compatible with mobile device.</p>	



## Summary and Recommendations

The municipal website of the Town of Stoughton exhibits notable strengths as well as a few areas for improvement. An asset is the site's intuitive layout, characterized by uniform and straightforward toolbar navigations, making it easily comprehensible for users. The accessibility of all links through keyboard, mouse, or touchscreen interaction increases the site's user-friendly design. Furthermore, the implementation of the "Quick Links" feature facilitates seamless navigation for first-time visitors seeking commonly accessed departments. A notable strength are notifications that inform users when they are being redirected to an external website.

The language used throughout the site is succinct and written at an appropriate comprehension level. Files are systematically named and well-organized, contributing to the overall accessibility of information. The website has a mobile-friendly design, ensuring proper formatting and functionality on smartphones. Notably, all headings adhere to color contrast guidelines, meeting the recommended ratio of at least 4.5:1. This commitment to clarity and accessibility enhances the user experience and aligns with established standards.

Stoughton's municipal site could improve upon many of its accessibility features, specifically in compliance with American Disability Act (ADA) regulations. To better serve users who are reliant on-screen readers or assistive technologies, alternative text should be added to all images or flyers. The presence of scanned image PDFs impedes text search functionality for those using screen readers, thus hindering content accessibility. The Town should consider adding bookmarks to sizable files which will facilitate streamlined navigation for users seeking specific points of interest. These adjustments align with ADA guidelines and contribute to a more inclusive online environment.

It is recommended that the Town consistently incorporate online fillable forms in lieu of downloadable PDFs and Word documents. Stoughton's [Application for Abatement](#) is a good model for this. Enabling users to submit information directly through the website, rather than resorting to the traditional method of printing and mailing forms, not only fosters environmental sustainability by reducing paper usage and postage costs but also enhances user engagement by eliminating logistical inconveniences associated with traditional methods. This approach aligns with modern digital practices, providing a more efficient and user-friendly experience for constituents.

The Town of Stoughton adeptly disseminates information through clear and concise language on all of their social media platforms. Areas for enhancement include the addition of alternative text for images to improve accessibility. Moreover, it is recommended that the department be transparent about media limitations when sharing external content, and refrain from conveying vital information solely through static graphics unless accompanied by a textual representation. These refinements will contribute to a more inclusive and informative social media presence, aligning with best practices for accessibility and communication standards.

Overall, the structure of Stoughton's municipal website is fundamentally efficient and effective; nevertheless, there is room for improvement through the incorporation of additional ADA-recommended features. Following the recommendations outlined in this report will reinforce the Town's commitment to ADA compliance and foster a more inclusive digital environment for all residents.