

# City's site shows its stuff



KEVIN O'NEILL / STAFF ARTIST

Matryoshka nesting doll likenesses of Mayor Chris Doherty, right, County Commissioner Mike Washo, left, Uncle Sam and Governor Tom Corbett, hidden behind Doherty, joined together recently to view each other's official government websites.

## Scranton kicks off review of government websites

**W**ebsites can entertain, inform, amuse and disgust us — or often just waste our time. However, as more of our daily business, such as banking, paying bills, shopping, etc., is conducted online, it is more important than ever to have a collection of useful sites bookmarked.

One area that has seen a lot of online progress is dealing with municipal, state and federal governments. Many functions of government that used to require standing in a long line at a dreary office, or waiting weeks for a document to travel back and forth through the mail, can now be accomplished in a matter of minutes on a government website.

Over the next several weeks I'm going to profile the websites of the city of Scranton, Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania and the federal government. I'll attempt to dig through the digital bureaucracy to separate the useful functions on the sites from the political pandering.

### The Electric City

First up is Scranton at [scrantonpa.gov](http://scrantonpa.gov). The city's website is a hybrid of marketing, municipal services and campaign commercials for Mayor Chris Doherty. The homepage is bright and lively, not what I expected of

a government site.

The banner across the top features the iconic Electric City sign with the slogan "Pennsylvania's Progressive City" leading your eye to a picture of a sort-of-smiling Mayor Doherty. Just below the banner are a series of links that take you to the real meat and potatoes on the site. I'll come back to them shortly.

The rest of the homepage is a marketing blitz devoted to telling the rest of the world what we already know — that Scranton is awesome!

There are ads for upcoming events, like the free concerts at Nay Aug Park. A collection of videos touting the city's charms can be viewed. They cover everything from arts and entertainment to real estate and relocation. The videos are mostly well done, although some of the scenes should have been shot when the malls, streets and pools were busy rather than nearly empty.

There's lots of links to articles and rankings in the national media that have mentioned Scranton in a positive light. Maps and brochures can also be downloaded. And for some reason, links to CrimeReports, a website that displays all of the criminal activity in the area, is prominently displayed on the homepage. It's good information to have on the site, I just wouldn't lead with it.

While all the glitz on the homepage certainly gives a good impression of Scranton, if you're looking to conduct city business you'll need to use one of the links under the page top banner.

The first link is a drop

down list of all the city departments. Each department has its own page on the site, and some are more useful than others. All the pages have names and contact information for department heads or other personnel you may need to contact. The Law Department offers nothing but that. A few other departments offer mission statements as well. There are several departments that publish very useful information, as well as downloadable forms so that you can actually conduct city business online.

### Taking care of business

The business administration department has audits and budgets going back several years that can be downloaded. City council's page has meeting minutes, agendas and the home rule charter, which is Scranton's "constitution." You can download an employment application from the human resources department, although there doesn't appear to be a list of job openings.

The Department of Licensing, Inspections and Permits has a lot of good information and downloadable forms for anyone who is planning on building, remodeling, opening a business, getting a dog or any of the many other things the city has decided it can sell you a permit for.

The mayor's page is basically a campaign commercial. The Office of Economic and Community Development has a useful page with lots of information and downloadable forms. The Open Records Office has forms and interesting information. Parks and Recreation has schedules, fees

and maps for the parks and pools. The Department of Public Works also has some good information, a holiday schedule and even a photo gallery of the DPW complex. The Police Department link takes you to a separate website that has a lot of interesting information on the organization and special skills of the department. It's not especially useful, but some of it is impressive.

The rest of the links are also helpful, though they don't have as much content as the departments. There's development & projects, where the mayor lists all the good investments made in the city since he took office. City codes has information on the rules that govern the city. Events is a calendar of things happening in the city. Contacts and links are self-explanatory.

### Gets the job done

Overall Scranton's website is fairly well done. It projects a positive image of the city and has many useful functions that allow you to conduct business online. The design could use some work, though it's not bad. The typography, especially on the homepage needs to be more unified. The navigation is logical and works well with only a few bad links. The clip art pictures should be replaced with actual city images and some of the information needs to be updated. If you want to conduct city business there's a good chance you can either do it online or find the information you need to do it there.

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