
FROM THE MEHRUTHERM BLOG · WEBSITES

Why CivicPlus Is the Wrong Choice for Most Small Towns

CivicPlus was built for big agencies. For a small town it often means paying city prices for a box you fit into. Here is the honest case, and what works better.

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When a small town needs a website, the name that comes up first is usually CivicPlus. It is one of the biggest providers of government websites in the country, so it feels like the safe, obvious choice. That is what towns use, so that is what you use.

But "what towns use" and "what your town needs" are not the same thing.

CivicPlus was built for cities and large agencies, with the budgets, staff, and complexity to match. When a small town signs up, it often ends up paying for a scale it does not have, and fitting itself into a system designed for someone much bigger.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- CivicPlus is built for **large agencies**, and small towns inherit that size whether they need it or not.
- The real cost is usually a **long contract** with renewals that climb over time.
- It is a **box you fit into**, not a site shaped around your town.
- A small town is better served by something **fast, easy to update, and genuinely yours**, supported by people who know your town.

Built for Cities, Sold to Towns

Most of what makes CivicPlus impressive is aimed at organizations far larger than a town of a few hundred or a few thousand people. Sprawling sites, large departments, many editors, complex workflows. A small town rarely needs any of that.

What a small town actually needs is simple and clear: a site residents can use, somewhere to post agendas and notices, a way to get in touch, and the confidence that it is secure and online when people need it. You should not have to buy a city-sized platform to get those few things.

The Cost of a Long Contract

The most common complaint towns have about CivicPlus is the cost, and not just the sticker price. It is the shape of the deal: a multi-year contract, with renewals that tend to climb, for a town that has to justify every line of its budget to the people who live there.

For a small town, that is real money that could go toward roads, water, or staff. And it is money committed years in advance, for a tool built for someone with a much bigger budget than yours.

WORTH ASKING BEFORE YOU SIGN

Ask what the total looks like over the full length of the contract, not just the first year, and what the renewal does after that. A small town should know exactly what it is committing to, for how long, before it signs. The first-year number is rarely the real number.

The good news is that this kind of upgrade is often fundable. State and federal programs increasingly help small governments modernize, so the cost does not have to fall on local taxpayers. (See [grants for Washington town technology](#).)

A Box You Have to Fit Into

A platform built for thousands of customers has to be one-size-fits-most. That means your town fits into the box, rather than the site being shaped around your town.

It shows up in small, frustrating ways. Customization is limited to what the system allows. Changes can behave in ways you would not expect, where adjusting one thing quietly affects others you did not mean to touch. You end up working around the tool instead of the tool working for you.

The result is that a lot of government sites built this way look and feel the same, and not in a good way: dated, clunky, and harder to use than they should be, for residents and for the staff who have to keep them updated.

When Something Goes Wrong

The other thing towns notice is what happens when they need help. With a large national provider, urgent requests, a broken page, a notice that has to go up before a meeting, often meet an automated response or a support queue rather than someone who knows your town.

For a small town, that is exactly backwards. You are not a large account, and you should not have to act like one to get a straight answer. The value of working local is that the people helping you actually know your town, your site, and what you are trying to do, and are accountable to you, not to a ticketing system three time zones away.

You're Renting, Not Owning

Perhaps the most important point: on a platform like this, you do not really own your site so much as rent access to it. Your content lives inside their system, on their terms. If you ever want to leave, moving everything out can be painful enough that it quietly keeps you locked in.

A town's website is public infrastructure. It should belong to the town, plainly and completely, the way the town hall does. Ownership and control should never be something you have to negotiate to get back. (We wrote about what happens when access slips away in [locked out of your own website.](#))

When CivicPlus Is the Right Call

To be fair, CivicPlus is not the wrong answer for everyone. A large city or county, with dedicated IT staff, many departments, and genuinely complex needs, can put its breadth to good use and has the budget to match. For an organization of that size, it can be a reasonable choice.

That is simply not most towns. Most need a handful of things done well, at a cost they can carry, without a city-sized platform or a city-sized contract.

What a Small Town Actually Needs

So what should a small town have instead? Something built for exactly what the town needs, and nothing it does not.

A big-platform government site

- × Built for large agencies, with scale a small town never uses
- × A long contract with renewals that climb over time
- × A box you fit into, with limited room to customize
- × Often dated and clunky for residents and staff alike
- × Support that can feel like a queue, not a neighbor
- × Your content living inside their system, hard to take with you

A site built for your town

- ✓ Just the pieces your town needs: agendas, notices, contact, services
- ✓ A clear, honest cost, with funding help where it is available
- ✓ Shaped around how your town actually works
- ✓ Fast, clean, and easy for residents and staff to use
- ✓ Local support from people who know your town
- ✓ Yours completely, the way public infrastructure should be

This is not theoretical. We helped the Town of Creston move off a patched-together setup into a complete, modern technology footing, from the website to the network and security behind it, at a cost a small town can carry. We meet the security standards insurers now expect (see [what your insurer expects](#)), and we hand the town the keys.

YOU DON'T NEED A FORMAL BID TO START

A common worry is that getting a new town site means a long, formal procurement process. For most small towns, it does not have to. You can start with a simple, honest conversation about what you actually need. (More on that in [getting a town website without a formal bid](#).)

What This Means for Your Town

If your town is happy with what it has, there is no need to change anything. But if your CivicPlus renewal is climbing, the site feels dated, or getting help feels like shouting into a queue, that is not your town doing something wrong. That is a tool built for someone much bigger than you.

Your town deserves a site that fits it: simple, fast, secure, affordable, and truly yours.

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Wondering if there is a better fit for your town? Get in touch and we will give you an honest read, whether your current setup is worth keeping, or whether your town would be better served by something built for it.

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