

# HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF BELLINGHAM

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

### Website Design and Development Services

RFP-BHA-2026-04-IT | Issued: April 20, 2026

Estimated Cost: \$25,000 to \$35,000

## 1. Proposal Timeline

All submissions must be received by email at [procurement@bellinghamhousing.org](mailto:procurement@bellinghamhousing.org) with the subject line: **Website Design Services RFP-BHA-2026-04-IT**. Questions must be submitted in writing; phone inquiries will not be accepted.

| Milestone                           | Date                                  |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| RFP Publication                     | Monday, April 20, 2026                |
| Questions Deadline                  | Friday, May 1, 2026 — 5:00 PM PST     |
| Answers Distributed                 | Wednesday, May 13, 2026 — 5:00 PM PST |
| Proposals Due                       | Wednesday, May 27, 2026 — 5:00 PM PST |
| Vendor Interviews and Presentations | June 1 – June 10.                     |
| Evaluation Complete                 | Friday, June 12, 2026                 |
| Contract Award                      | Friday, June 19, 2026                 |
| Project Kickoff                     | Wednesday, July 1, 2026               |
| Site Launch Target                  | Tuesday, December 1, 2026             |

## 2. Introduction

The Housing Authority of the City of Bellingham (BHA) is soliciting proposals from qualified web design and development firms to redesign and redevelop its public-facing website, currently located at [www.bellinghamhousing.org](http://www.bellinghamhousing.org). BHA seeks a modern, accessible, and user-centered website that better serves the agency's diverse audiences — applicants, residents, landlords, and the broader Whatcom County community.

The selected vendor will be responsible for the full project lifecycle: discovery and strategy; design, including logo and re-branding; development, testing, launch, and a minimum 12-month post-launch support period. The project should be completed within a five-month timeframe.

## 3. Background and Current Website Assessment

### 3.1 About Bellingham Housing Authority

BHA is a local government agency serving Whatcom County. Together with the Whatcom County Housing Authority (WCHA), the combined entity (BWCHA) administers Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8), Public Housing, Affordable Housing, and other programs. BHA manages 35 properties located across Bellingham, Blaine, Sumas, Ferndale, and Lynden, serving low-income families, the elderly, and people with disabilities. The office is located at 333 N. Samish Way, Bellingham, WA 98225. Lobby hours are by appointment only.

### 3.2 Key Challenges Identified on the Current Website

BHA conducted a review of its current website ([bellinghamhousing.org](http://bellinghamhousing.org)) and identified the following specific usability, technical, and branding challenges that the new website must address:

| Challenge   | Observed Finding ( <a href="http://bellinghamhousing.org">bellinghamhousing.org</a> )  |
|---|--|
| <b>Inconsistent property platform</b>                       | Public Housing properties link to the <a href="http://cloudwayssites.com">cloudwayssites.com</a> domain, while Indigo-managed properties have separate standalone websites (e.g., <a href="http://homesatbridgecreek.com">homesatbridgecreek.com</a> , <a href="http://pacificrimapartments.com">pacificrimapartments.com</a> ). Users must navigate up to three different platforms to search across BHA's 35 properties, with no unified search or map view. |
| <b>No unified property search</b>                           | BHA manages 35 properties across Bellingham, Blaine, Sumas, Ferndale, and Lynden. The current site's property directory requires users to scroll through a long list with manual filtering. There is no interactive map, radius search, or cross-portfolio availability tool.  |
| <b>Lobby by appointment only — not clearly communicated</b> | The website notes lobby hours as 'By Appointment Only' but provides no online appointment booking feature, forcing users to call. Peer housing authorities offer online scheduling.  |
| <b>Landlord section is thin</b>                             | The Landlord section offers only a 'Current Landlords' and 'Become a Landlord' page. There is no incentive calculator, payment standards table, inspection prep guide, or forms library — features found on peer WA housing authority sites.   |
| <b>No multilingual support visible</b>                      | No language selector or translation widget is visible on the current site, despite BHA serving a diverse Whatcom County population.  |
| <b>Outdated CMS / branding inconsistency</b>                | The site is built on WordPress with the theme 'BWCHA Logo' dating to 2020. The logo references 'Bellingham & Whatcom County Housing Authority (BWCHA)' while legal entity references use 'BHA' — creating brand confusion. Multiple subpages link out to external domains with different visual identities.  |

### 3.3 Peer Comparison

BHA reviewed the websites of four comparable Washington State housing authorities. This analysis informed the functional requirements outlined in Section 4. The following table illustrates where BHA's current site lags relative to regional peers, and provides a benchmark for the desired end state.

| Agency  | Unified Portal   | Property Map/Search                    | Landlord Center                              | Multi-Language            | Appt Booking         | Resident Self-Service                 |
|---|--|--|--|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>BHA (current)</b>  | Partial — external <a href="http://cloudwayssites.com">cloudwayssites.com</a> Yardi (Branded BHA Portal) | No map; list scroll only               | Minimal (2 pages)                            | None visible              | No (phone only)      | Limited (portal link only)            |
| <b>Seattle SHA (<a href="http://seattlehousing.org">seattlehousing.org</a>)</b> | Yes — SHA Portal   | Yes — map + search tool + Save My Spot | Full center with forms, FAQs, leasing guides | Yes — prominently offered | Yes — online booking | Yes — changes, inspections, resources |

|  |   |  |  |                                     |                         |   |
|--|---|--|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| <b>King County HA (kcha.org)</b>         | Yes — Customer Portal                       | Yes — map, city search, subsidy calculator | Full portal, forms, FAQs                           | Yes                                 | Contact staff online    | Yes — recert, changes, self-sufficiency     |
| <b>HASCO — Snohomish Co. (hasco.org)</b> | Yes — Applicant & Landlord portals          | Property directory with filters            | Full Landlord Center + Library + new portal (2025) | Yes — translation services          | Online forms            | Renter Center with FAQs by tenant type      |
| <b>Tacoma HA (tacomahousing.org)</b>     | Yes — Service Portal + 'I want to' selector | Yes — property listings with photos        | Landlord Services with advisory board, FAQs, forms | Yes — immigrant rights, translation | Online + Service Portal | Know Your Rights, FSS, Economic Opportunity |

BHA's goal is to achieve the functionality level demonstrated by Seattle SHA, KCHA, HASCO, and Tacoma HA, while maintaining a scale and content structure appropriate to BHA's portfolio and staffing capacity.

## 4. Scope of Services

### 4.1 Audience-Centered Website Sections

The new website must serve four primary audiences. Content and navigation architecture should make it immediately obvious where each audience should go:

- Applicants — Program eligibility, how to apply, waiting list status, application portals, briefing videos, and FAQs.
- Residents — Recertification guidance, income/household change reporting, maintenance requests, resident portal links, and community resources — organized by housing type (Public Housing, HCV, Affordable Housing).
- Landlords — Voucher program overview, how to become a landlord partner, payment standards and utility allowances, inspection preparation, landlord portal access, incentives, and a downloadable forms library.
- Doing Business with BHA — Current and upcoming RFPs, bid solicitations, procurement policies, Section 3 requirements, and vendor registration.

Additional sections required: About BHA (mission, board, staff leadership, annual reports, public records); Properties (unified searchable directory for all 35 properties — see 4.3); News & Updates; Help/FAQ; Careers.

### 4.2 Technical and Design Requirements

- Responsive design for desktop, tablet, and mobile devices.
- WCAG 2.1 Level AA accessibility compliance, with a third-party accessibility audit (e.g., WAVE) completed before launch.
- Multilingual support — minimum English and Spanish; language selector prominently displayed.
- Modern CMS with an intuitive backend enabling non-technical BHA staff to create, edit, and publish most content **without vendor assistance**.
- Role-based access control (admin, editor, author/publisher workflow).
- Appointment booking functionality for lobby appointments (replacing phone-only scheduling).

- Robust site search with auto-complete and relevant results.
- Community events calendar.
- SEO optimization — meta tags, clean URL structure, XML sitemap.
- SSL, secure forms, automated data backup and recovery, guaranteed hosting uptime (minimum 99.5%).
- Integration capability with the existing SecureCafe resident/applicant portal and landlord portal (no re-platforming of portals is required — seamless handoff/linking is expected).
- Clear 'I want to...' or task-based navigation to help users find what they need in 2 clicks or fewer.
- Design system: style guide, color system aligned with proposed re-brand, typography, reusable page templates.

### 4.3 Unified Property Directory

The new site must consolidate all 35 BHA properties into a single searchable, filterable directory that currently does not exist on the live site. Required features:

- Interactive map view with property pins (searchable by city, program type, bedroom count, and accessibility features).
- Radius-based search tool.
- Individual property detail pages with photos, unit types, eligibility, contacts, and application/waitlist status.
- Clear distinction between property types (Public Housing, Affordable Housing, Project-Based Voucher, Indigo-managed) without requiring users to navigate to separate third-party domains for basic information.

### 4.4 Project Deliverables by Phase

| Phase                           | Deliverables   |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>Discovery &amp; Strategy</b> | Sitemap; content audit; audience analysis; brand alignment review  |
| <b>Design</b>                   | Style guide and brand system, including new logo; wireframes; minimum 2 homepage concepts; responsive mockups for all audience sections. |
| <b>Development</b>              | CMS build: all pages populated; portal integrations; unified property search/map; forms; accessibility audit (WAVE)                      |
| <b>Testing &amp; QA</b>         | WCAG 2.1 AA audit; cross-browser/device testing; user acceptance testing (UAT)   |
| <b>Launch</b>                   | Go-live support; DNS transition; staff training (min. 2 staff); documentation  |
| <b>Post-Launch Support</b>      | 12-month maintenance plan; security updates; content support; performance reporting  |

## 5. Proposal Requirements

Proposals must be submitted as a single PDF via email to [procurement@bellinghamhousing.org](mailto:procurement@bellinghamhousing.org) with the subject line Website Design Services RFP-BHA-2026-04-IT by May 27, 2026 at 5:00 PM PST. Late submissions will not be considered.

Proposals must be organized in the following order:

- Cover Letter — Statement of interest; confirmation of capacity to complete project within six months of contract execution; acknowledgment of all addenda issued.

- Company Overview — Firm background; proposed team members and roles; identification of any subcontractors; portfolio links to 3+ completed sites.
- Relevant Experience & References — Three (3) completed website projects of comparable scope, including client name, URL, project date, and client contact information. Prior experience with public housing authorities or government agencies is preferred and will be noted in evaluation.
- Understanding of Needs & Proposed Solution — Demonstrated understanding of BHA's current website challenges (Section 3); clear description of the proposed solution, technology stack, and CMS platform.
- Project Plan & Timeline — Proposed phases, milestones, and timeline confirming completion within 5 months of contract execution.
- Itemized Cost Proposal — Line-item breakdown covering discovery, design, development, content migration, testing, training, hosting (first year), and 12-month post-launch maintenance.
- Hosting Plan — Proposed hosting provider, uptime guarantee, backup schedule, disaster recovery approach.

## 6. Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated by a BHA selection committee using the following weighted criteria. BHA reserves the right to request oral presentations or additional written clarification from any vendor.

| Criterion  | Points     |
|--|------------|
| Company Qualifications, Team & Staffing                              | 20         |
| Demonstrated Experience & References (public sector / HAs preferred) | 20         |
| Understanding of BHA Needs & Quality of Proposed Solution            | 25         |
| Cost — Reasonableness and Value                                      | 30         |
| Overall Proposal Quality and Organization                            | 5          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>100</b> |

Award will be made to the most advantageous proposal, considering both price and all qualitative factors. BHA reserves the right to reject all proposals.

## 7. General Conditions

### 7.1 Insurance Requirements

The selected vendor must maintain the following coverage throughout the contract term, naming BHA as an additional insured on all applicable policies:

| Coverage                     | Minimum Limit                                      |
|------------------------------|--|
| Professional Liability (E&O) | \$500,000 per occurrence                           |
| Commercial General Liability | \$1,000,000 per occurrence / \$2,000,000 aggregate |
| Workers' Compensation        | As required by Washington State law                |

### 7.2 Additional Terms

- All proposals become public records under the Washington State Public Records Act (RCW 42.56).
- Proposals are valid for 90 days after the submission deadline.
- BHA reserves the right to reject all proposals, waive informalities, or cancel this RFP at any time.
- The selected vendor must be licensed to do business in Washington State and not appear on the GSA Excluded Parties List or HUD's Limited Denial of Participation list.
- Compliance required: federal, state, and local laws; equal opportunity; nondiscrimination.

### 7.3 Contact Information

#### **Procurement Office — Housing Authority of the City of Bellingham**

Physical Address: 333 N. Samish Way, Bellingham, WA

Mailing Address: PO Box 9701 | Bellingham, WA 98227-9701

Email: [procurement@BellinghamHousing.org](mailto:procurement@BellinghamHousing.org)

Secondary Contact Email: [Chris.Longwell@BellinghamHousing.org](mailto:Chris.Longwell@BellinghamHousing.org)

Subject Line: Website Design Services RFP-BHA-2026-04-IT

Questions Deadline: May 1, 2026 at 5:00 PM PST

Answers Distributed: May 13, 2026 by 5:00 PM PST