



CITY OF BALTIMORE
BRANDON M. SCOTT, Mayor

BALTIMORE CITY OFFICE OF INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY
Leyla Layman, Interim CIO
401 E. Fayette Street, 3rd Floor
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

May 7, 2025

Isabel Mercedes Cumming, Inspector General
Office of the Inspector General
City Hall, Suite 635
100 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Re: Agency Response to OIG Case #24-0043-I: Professional Services Contract for Baltimore City Website Redesign

Dear Inspector General Cumming,

This letter serves as the official response from the Baltimore City Office of Information and Technology (BCIT) to the Office of the Inspector General's (OIG) Report of Investigation, Case #24-0043-I, dated April 16, 2025, concerning the professional services contract awarded to [REDACTED] for the Baltimore City Website Redesign Project.

The OIG found that there is a lack of policies and procedures for the solicitation of professional services contracts and recommended that these be created. Article VI, § 11(c) of the City Charter stipulates that *all professional services contracted for by the City shall be engaged in the manner prescribed by resolution of the Board of Estimates*. BCIT fully adhered to this provision by following the procedures outlined in the Board of Estimates' 2019 Procurement Resolution, which governs professional service procurement, and by ensuring that the services in question met the criteria for professional service and were properly designated as professional services under the City's De Facto Professional Services List¹. Under the City's procurement framework, the selection of vendors for professional services is at the discretion of the requesting agency and is not subject to the competitive public bid requirements of standard procurement practices.

¹ This refers to the professions and services that were authorized by the Board of Estimates on 7/17/2019 as de facto professional services relating to non-architectural or engineering services.

While BCIT does not have the authority to implement overarching policies and procedures related to the professional services process citywide, BCIT is continually working to improve our internal procurement processes. Prior to initiating this purchase in Fall 2022, BCIT established internal guidelines for the purpose of documenting the procedures for professional services agreements, and to ensure that BCIT is efficient, effective, and timely in its requests for such procurements. Since that time the following improvements were made to our professional services procurement process:

1. Modified internal guidelines and governance around the contract process for professional services to incorporate a standardized rubric scoring template;
2. Developed internal checklists and clear workflows to ensure thorough documentation throughout the proposal evaluation and contract award process; and
3. Instituted cross-functional planning meetings between subject matter experts (SMEs), project managers, and the contracts team to align scope of work development with programmatic goals, thereby minimizing ambiguity for prospective proposers.

Moving forward as we procure services through the professional services process, BCIT will:

1. Solicit vendor feedback of both those who responded and those who chose not to in an effort to improve vendor engagement, transparency, and future proposal quality;
2. Host pre-proposal conferences in advance of the proposal due date to allow the opportunity for firms to ask questions and gain clarity on the scope of work and expectations of the project; and
3. Incorporate a “Lessons Learned” process to continuously improve based on feedback from both internal teams and vendors.

Clarification on Contract Value and Scope

The report asserts excessive spending associated with the professional services contract awarded to [REDACTED]. It is important to understand the context surrounding the project scope and the factors that contributed to the contract’s final value. The original contract awarded to [REDACTED] in January 2023 was based on a scope for a comprehensive website redesign, with an initial Board of Estimates approved value of \$1,078,847.40. The scope of work focused on user research, content strategy, UX/UI design, and the foundational planning needed to transition the City from the older Drupal 7 platform.

Following the start of the contract, it became apparent, through consultation with both internal stakeholders and the contracted firm, that additional technical development services, including the Drupal 10 development, code reviews, content migration, and implementation, were necessary to fully realize the goals of the website redesign. These critical elements fell within the scope of website redesign and called for scope expansion to later be incorporated through two formally executed contract amendments.

The first amendment, totaling \$887,843.95, was executed to expand the scope to include full buildout, external feedback, and site implementation. The second amendment, totaling \$250,000,

addressed unforeseen complexities in the web environment. Both amendments followed appropriate City contract modification processes and were approved by the Board of Estimates.

While the cumulative value of the contract reached approximately \$2.2 million, this value reflects the expanded scope of work, and associated labor hours required to support the City's complex digital transformation needs. The cost was not the result of uncontrolled spending, but rather a structured response to project demands that became clearer as implementation progressed.

Furthermore, during the investigation, the OIG report quotes a BCIT director affirming that the "project's success was an enhanced user and 'not hitting a budget or hitting a schedule'." The report contrasts this with a statement that BCIT personnel "reported that the website could have already launched, but that appearance was prioritized by BCIT management." The goals of the project were to realize an enhanced user experience including achieving ADA compliance and reducing the number of clicks to reach desired services or information. Deploying the Drupal 10 website at that time would not have achieved those goals.

BCIT acknowledges the need for improved planning and more explicit scoping in future digital infrastructure initiatives and IT professional services. As a result, the agency has been working to enhance its internal processes for managing phased technology projects, ensuring stronger alignment between initial expectations and final deliverables.

In selecting [REDACTED] BCIT acted in the best interest of Baltimore City residents and stakeholders, with a focus on long-term value, digital inclusion, and user-centered design. The vendor's local presence, M/WBE status, and track record in delivering quality digital services further supported the City's commitment to quality, equity, and community investment.

We appreciate the OIG's work in promoting transparency and accountability in City procurement processes and welcome the opportunity to provide clarification regarding the findings presented in the report.

Sincerely,

Leyla Layman

Leyla Layman
Interim CIO

C: Brandon M. Scott, Mayor
Ebony M. Thompson, City Solicitor
Faith Leach, Chief Administrative Officer
Shamiah Kerney, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer