

SPOTLIGHT

DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY

Manitou Springs works toward compliance with HB21-1110

By **Rachel Woolworth**, CML municipal research analyst

For mid-sized and small municipalities like the City of Manitou Springs without a standalone accessibility department, compliance with House Bill 21-1110, Colorado Laws for Persons with Disabilities, is a heavy lift.

“We are a relatively small but mighty staff. I think we are doing what we can,” Alex Trefry, Manitou Springs’ former public information officer, said of the city’s work to meet the law’s technology accessibility standards.

Passed by the state legislature in 2021, HB21-1110 requires governments across Colorado to provide proper technology accommodations for individuals living with disabilities. The

bill’s provisions, such as providing text descriptions of images and transcriptions of video content, aim to create a level playing field where everyone can fully participate in and benefit from government services and programs.

If municipalities do not meet the technology accessibility standards outlined by the Colorado Governor’s Office of Information Technology by July 1, 2024, they could face a court order requiring compliance, monetary damages, or a fine of \$3,5000 if a person in the disability community is limited in their access. A bill passed in the 2024 legislative session, HB24-1454, provides a defense to claims

made prior to July 2025 if the public entity proves it has made good faith efforts toward compliance.

Though Manitou Springs formally started working on a digital transition plan in June 2023, technology accessibility work had already been informally underway for years before. This allowed the municipality to tailor its transition plan to align with state mandates, rather than building it from the ground up.

Manitou Springs kicked off these efforts by hiring a consultant to conduct an accessibility assessment of the city’s web platforms, including payment forms, PDFs, digital newsletters, and



public meeting agendas, to name a few. The assessment identified issues on vendor and internal platforms, as well as how to rectify them.

The city responded to external problems by adding technology accessibility guidelines to procurement processes for any vendor that may generate digital content on behalf of the municipality. Vendors managing preexisting web content, such as CivicPlus, were asked to make retroactive software changes.

To address internal problems, Manitou Springs required 20 employees to participate in a 13-step training on web accessibility led by the city’s consultant. The training, which staff com-

pleted in March, taught city employees how to properly generate compliant documents on Adobe Acrobat and Microsoft Word, how to audit preexisting content, and more.

In April, Manitou Springs City Council adopted its digital accessibility transition plan — a requirement of HB21-1110. The plan sets a remediation timeline for high, medium, and low-priority digital assets. The city aims to bring high-priority content into compliance by the end of this year.

The plan also directs staff to hire a full-time digital accessibility coordinator to oversee the implementation of the transition plan, maintenance of

digital content, and responses to digital accessibility complaints.

“We have a plan in place, we have a process in place for feedback and complaints, and soon we will have a person in place to oversee the effort,” said Mitchell Carter, Manitou Springs’ public information officer, of the city’s movement towards compliance.

Colorado Municipal League members can access a library of digital accessibility transition plans completed by various municipalities across the state on CML’s website. The library serves as a resource for municipal members at varying stages of their digital accessibility journey.