CASE STUDY FROM HAVEN SMITH & COMPANY

Six recent city documents were pictures of paper.

A Bay Area city posts notices, staff reports, and forms every week. We checked its recent PDFs to see which ones a resident who uses a screen reader could actually read.

CLIENT	TYPE	SCOPE	RESULT
A Bay Area city	Public document review	14 PDFs posted in 2025 and 2026	8 of 14 had no tags

Context and goals

City documents are how residents learn about meetings, permits, and services. Each one should read the same way for everyone.

What success looks like

- Every file has real text, tags, and a reading order a screen reader can follow.
- Scanned documents are converted to text and checked by hand before they are posted.

What we measured

We checked 14 PDFs the city posted in 2025 and 2026 for tags, real text, language, title, and headings.

How many of the 14 files passed each check

Check	Result
Had real text	8 of 14
Had a title	8 of 14
Tagged	6 of 14
Named its language	5 of 14
Had headings	1 of 14

Six of the files were scanned pictures of paper, so a screen reader finds no words at all.

A sample of the files we checked

Document	Pages	Tagged	Real text	Language
Agenda report, December 2025	8	No	No, a scan	No
Emergency operations plan, 2025	5	No	No, a scan	No
Salary schedules, 2026	4	No	No, a scan	No
Annual financial report, 2025	310	Yes	Yes	No
Community newsletter, summer 2026	5	Yes	Yes	Yes
Recruitment flyer, fall 2026	1	Yes	Yes	Yes

What we found

- The good news: six files were tagged, so some of the city's templates are already on the right track.
- 8 of the 14 had no accessibility tags at all.
- 6 of those 8 were scanned pictures of paper, and a screen reader finds no text in them.

One file, marked up

An eight-page staff report for a council meeting, posted as a scan.

1. The whole page is a picture of paper. There is no text to select, search, or read aloud.
2. There are no tags, so there are no headings, no reading order, and no language.
3. Tables are part of the picture too, so their numbers can't be read, searched, or copied.

After: the tags we add

- `<Document lang="en-US">`
- `<H1> Agenda report`
- `<H2> Recommendation`
- `<Table> Headers announced`
- `<P> Real text, checked by hand`

Hear the difference

A resident who uses a screen reader opens the staff report before a council meeting.

Before: what a screen reader says

1. “Agenda report, PDF.”
2. *Silence. The page is a picture, so there is nothing to read.*

After: what a screen reader says

1. “Heading level 1, Agenda report.”
2. “Heading level 2, Recommendation.”
3. “Table, with each column header read aloud.”

The path to good

- Convert each scan to real text, check it by hand, then tag it with headings and reading order.
- Ask departments to post the original Word file whenever they can, instead of a scan, because it is faster to fix and easier to read.
- Start with a $750 pilot on one packet, then a retainer for new files.

Follow-up

This was a review of public files, not a paid engagement, and the city’s name is kept private.

Want to see it on your files?

We test and fix documents, websites, and software, led by a DHS Certified Trusted Tester. Start with a free accessibility check: we check your homepage, review 10 public documents, and fix one for free.

Get your free check at havensmith.company.

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