



Recommendations for Presentation Template Redesign

The City of Carlsbad has a mature, evolved, and varied set of designs. The City appears to have invested more time into its visual branding than most municipalities, and in fact, its efforts rival and surpass those of some Fortune 1000 organizations. This campaign has clearly been responsible for the creation of well-crafted slides; it is also responsible for some design violations during actual use. In short, the City's design specifications and actual slide-creation tendencies are often at odds. This is not an alarming fact — in our experience, just about every organization in the world suffers from this.

The City of Carlsbad is using version 2007 of PowerPoint, but it is not taking full advantage of that program's more robust global formatting capabilities. Our suspicion is that templates were created in version 2003 and migrated forward or created by someone who was still thinking in v03 paradigms.

The result of this is a set of slides that could benefit from better global controls, which in turn would obviate the need for the amount of slide-by-slide formatting in practice today.

Presentation skills development

Message crafting

Presentation design

Advanced PowerPoint technique

Executive coaching

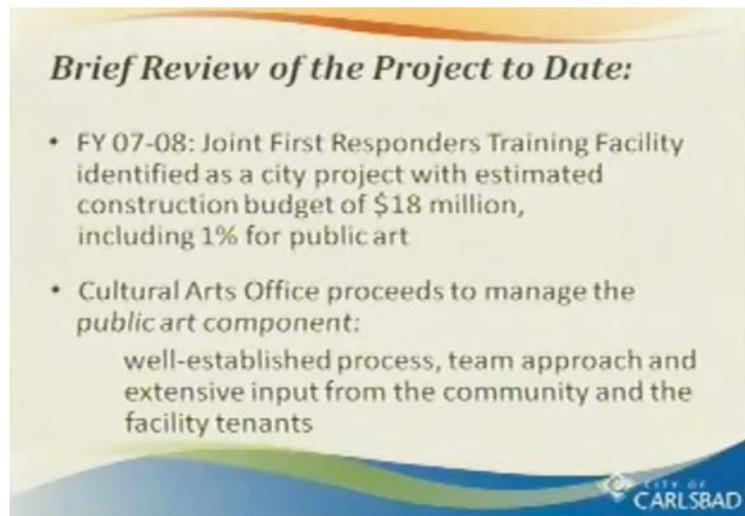
One-on-one skills training

Organization-wide workshops

Text Usage vs. “The Wave”

At the core of the conflict is the relationship between content on the slide and the wave that is at the top and bottom of slides. According to The City of Carlsbad’s PowerPoint Style Guide, presenters are to “err on the side of fewer words,” and “use key words only.” This is an honorable objective and it speaks to the heart of a well-crafted slide. Unfortunately, it is also one of the more challenging platitudes to apply in actual practice.

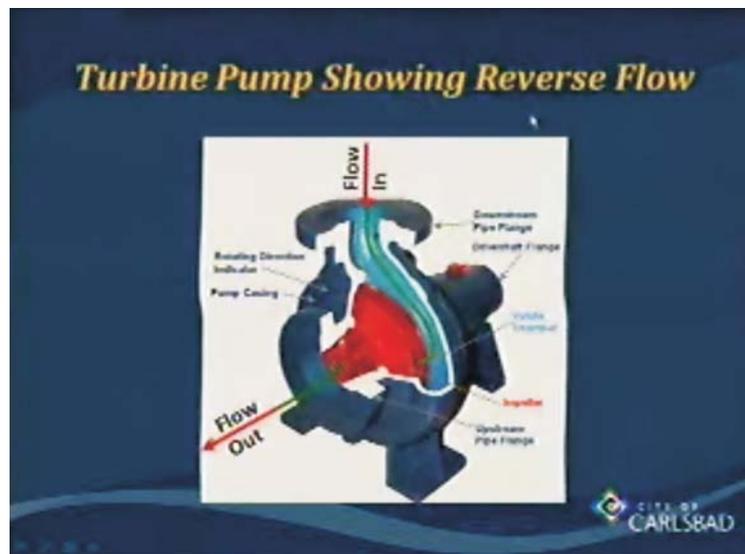
When this lofty goal is achieved, City templates serve the department well and the wave components create nice balance. When not, however, the waves become a distraction and contribute to busy-ness, as seen here. The slide at right is one of several examples in which there is too much text to justify the consumption of so much top and bottom margin. I know that not all of your slides employ the double-wave (top and bottom) as shown here; my comments also apply to designs that include only the bottom wave: just too much space to consume for such text-heavy content.



Handling Large Images

Equally at issue is the question of how to handle large images. I would be encouraging your design team to make a choice: either run images full-slide, covering up the branding entirely, or treat the wave as sacrosanct. But when images bump into the wave, as shown at right, it looks like a mistake.

I wouldn’t want to give the impression that I discourage the use of large images; I don’t! They are much more impactful than small ones. And I understand the demands of continuous branding for television purposes. But just how continuous does it have to be?



What would be the implications of the occasional full-slide image covering up the wave entirely? I would encourage the City to ponder that question.

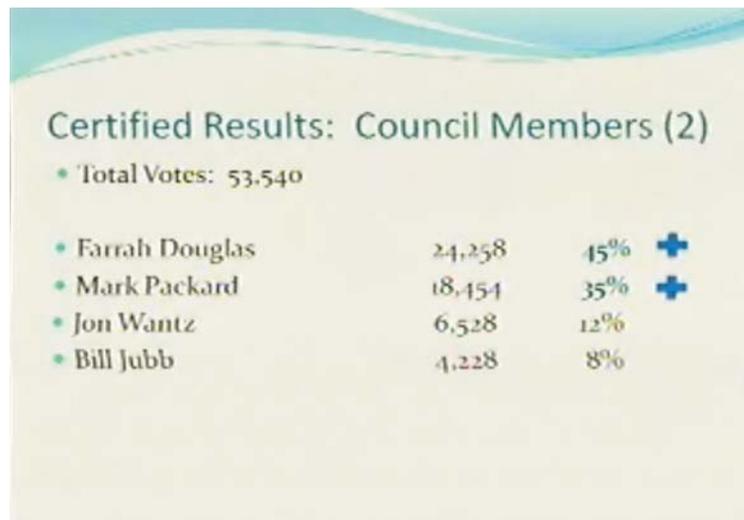
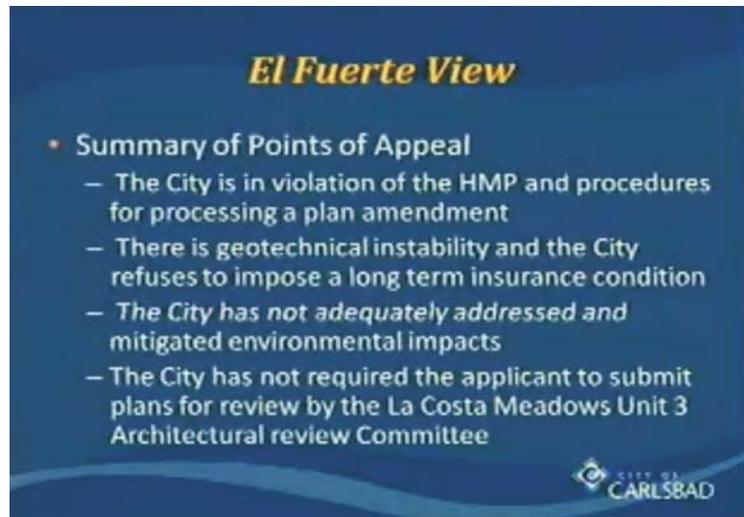
Bullets of One

By definition, a bullet implies a sequence of ideas. If you have only one bullet, then it probably should be a subtitle instead. At right are two of several examples I found of lines of type that have bullet characters in front of them, even though they not really bullets.

Version 2007 can accommodate this, thanks to the flexibility of its layouts. the City’s template should have a layout that includes a dedicated placeholder for a subtitle below the main title. Version 2003 did not offer that so any template that was migrated forward or was created by someone not familiar with these new capabilities would not address this to potential.

To generalize a bit, the City has a tendency to use bullets when it shouldn’t. The lower-right image is one such example. The four points being made on this slide would have done just fine without the bullet character. Absent the hanging indent, they look like a wedged-in afterthought. And they look like a mistake.

Once again, Version 2007 can assist in insuring against this with clearly identified layouts for when text should have bullets and when it should not.



Existing Design Motifs

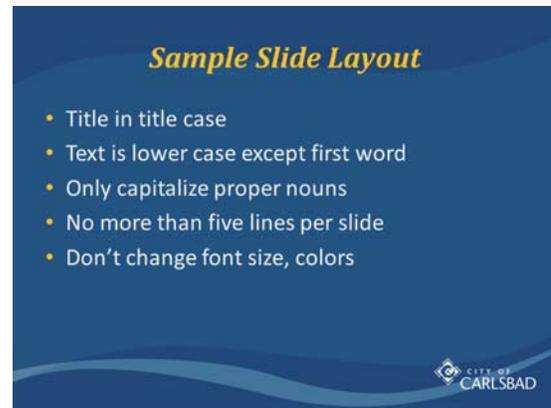
I am in receipt of seven distinct slide designs being actively used or considered by the City of Carlsbad, all shown on these two facing pages.

My bias is almost always toward elements that don't overlap in such a way as to invite scrutiny. While layered elements is a perfectly legitimate design technique, there is a fine line between them looking like the product of artful discretion and a mistake. In my view, Designs 1 and 7 do not quite meet that criterion and I would recommend their elimination from use.

Of the remaining five, No. 4 finds itself as the odd slide out, as the only one not employing imagery in the lower-right opening created by the divergence of the waves, and for using waves along the top and bottom. For these offenses, I would have to banish it to slide purgatory, as well.

This leaves us with four designs—two with text reversed out of navy, and two with dark text on light backgrounds. I believe the City could create great work by concentrating on these two opposing designs. I would recommend the following:

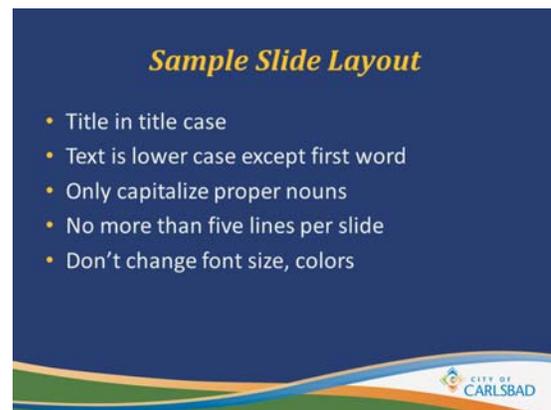
- 1 Gather a small number of images that would be suitable for placement in that opening.
- 2 Create individual slide masters that use these replaceable images. Duplicate this for the light-on-dark and the dark-on-light motifs.
- 3 Determine one color for the light background motif, not three, and lose the vertical bars in No. 5.
- 4 Reconsider the use of a title face distinct from main content and the practice of centering them. I suspect we can bring more unity to the slide designs if titles are left-aligned with main content and set in the same face.
- 5 For any particular presentation project, the content creator should choose one design specification: light-on-dark or dark-on-light, and then the intersection image. It's possible that the City already insists on this level of consistency.



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6 Take up the questions of logo usage. Must it be on every single slide? Would it suffice to use the diamond-shaped “C” emblem by itself? Can it be placed as one line of type? In all cases, I am encouraging decisions that would result in less space being consumed at the bottom of the slide. I believe you do everyone a service—content creator, presenter, audience members—when you shore up the footer, thereby creating more visual breathing room.

7 Consider softening the stance that every slide must be branded. If this is an iron-clad constraint imposed by higher authorities or the requirements of television, so be it. However, if it is a product of inertia and auto-piloting—we do it that way because we’ve always done it that way—I would like to bring some scrutiny to that question.

Summary

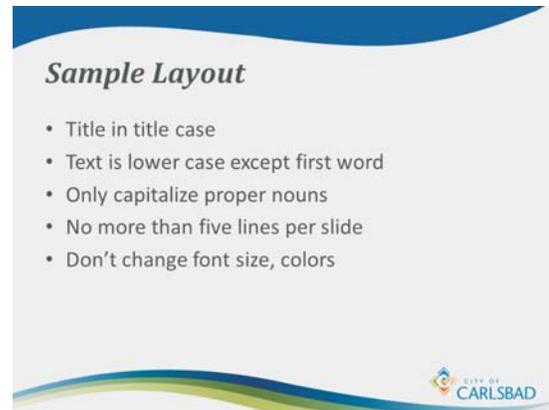
The City of Carlsbad has the luxury of a well-conceived visual branding scheme already in place and it benefits greatly from a style guide that is clear and direct.

The areas in which it suffers is in loss of consistency with text components and vagueness around the handling of images. Both of these can be addressed by better utilization of the tools offered within PowerPoint 2007.

While this review includes commentary on the design elements themselves, even if none of them is heeded, the City’s templates can be made to perform much better by leveraging tools incorporated into slide masters and layouts.

Quote for Services

Creating smarter templates, incorporating more modern functionality, participating in design review, overseeing execution of all elements:
\$x,000 - \$x,500.



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