City of Seattle

Site Redesign - A Case Study

by Anna Hart

Background

The Client

The City of Seattle website provides the user a digital experience of the city of Seattle, Washington. The site is used for finding information regarding local government, elected officials, and news updates, as well as paying parking tickets and utilities, applying for permits, and learning about what the city of Seattle has to offer.

The Problem

The main issues with the current website are a lack of visual hierarchy, an overload of information that clutters the site, outdated visual design that dates the site, and poor prioritization and organization of content. The current site confuses and overwhelms the user, making their time spent on the site stressful. There is also an absence of a cohesive visual brand that fully represents Seattle and its vibrant personality.
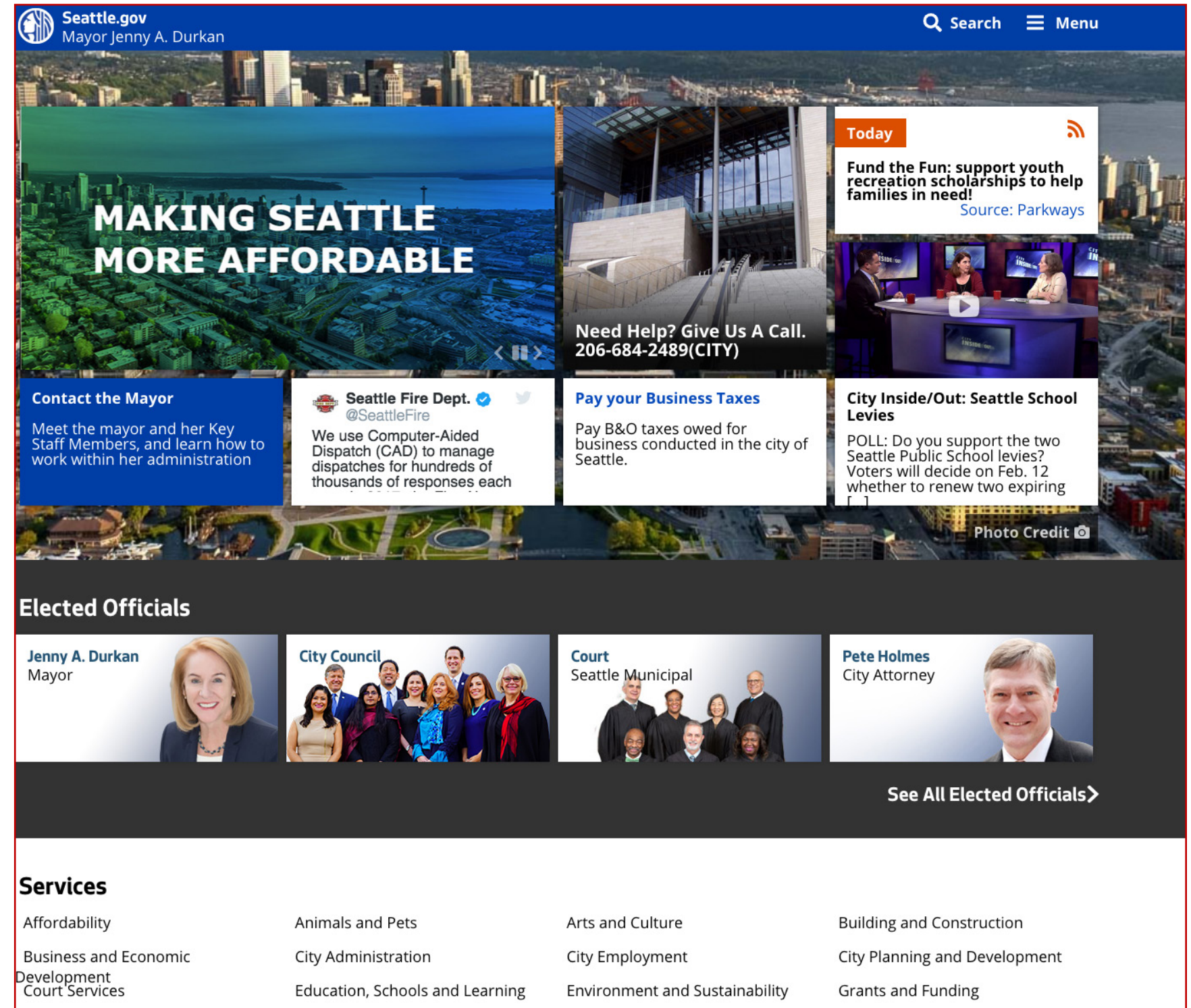
Client Goals

Increase community engagement

Decrease bounce rate

Increase tourism

Increase citizen engagement with elected officials

User Goals

Learn information about the city

Pay utilities and parking tickets as well as other monotonous tasks

Find fun things to do and see in Seattle

Learn about and contact elected officials

Brand Goals

Popularize events held in the city

Show users we care about their experience with Seattle on and off the site

Better communicate the visual aesthetic of Seattle in order to fully represent the city

Approach

The first step to approaching the problem was identifying the goals of the client, user, and brand. From there, I was able to identify if the goals were or were not being met.

Strategy

Upon identifying client, user, and brand goals, I was able to draft a strategy statement for the redesign plan of attack.

Statement

The main goals for the City of Seattle website are to provide concise informational content to the site visitors about the city of Seattle, get visitors in contact with local officials and become familiar with the local government, give visitors access to paying their utility bills as well as parking tickets, and deliver a visual brand that encourages tourism.

The Seattle website needs a redesign because it currently is not meeting its main goals fully and as efficiently as it could be. We need to decrease the bounce rate of the home page, increase user participation with local government and city events, and have the site become quicker and easier to navigate as a whole. The site also does not visually represent Seattle, as it pushes a brand that is all business, not a fun, creative, outdoorsy place. The site redesign needs to revamp its visual aesthetic to better match that of Seattle's and show that this site, like the city, is modern, beautiful, and interesting.

Process
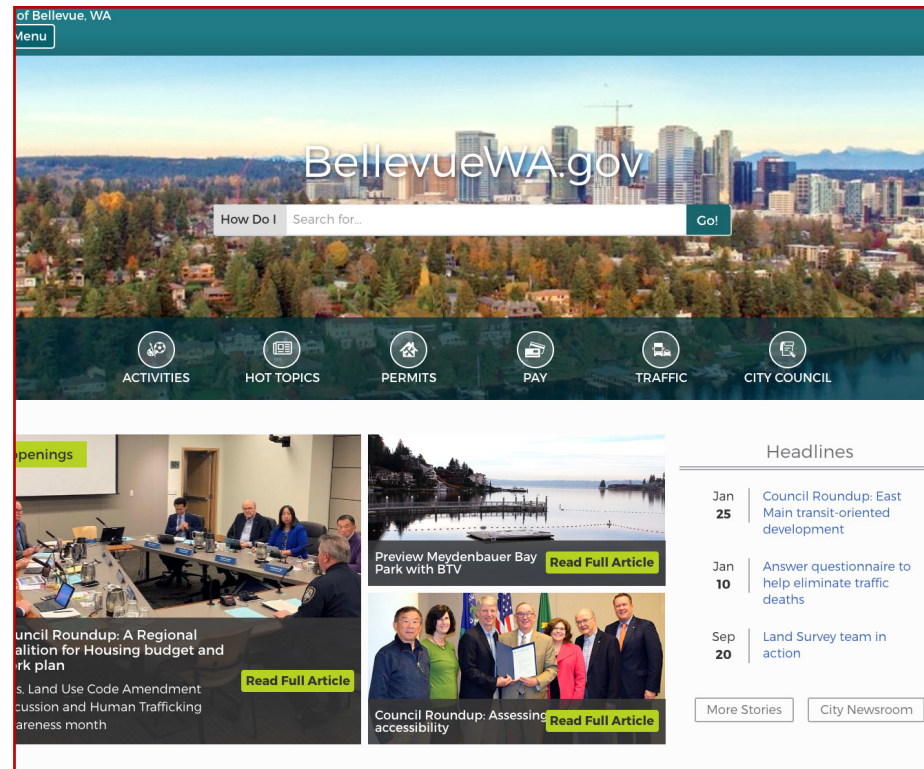
Bellevue, WA

Neighboring city to Seattle. Initial content at the top of the page with a search bar makes for easily inding what you're looking for. Lots of information displayed without too much clutter. Slightly dated as far as visual aestheticsgo, not as dated as Seattle's. Easy to navigate due to icons.
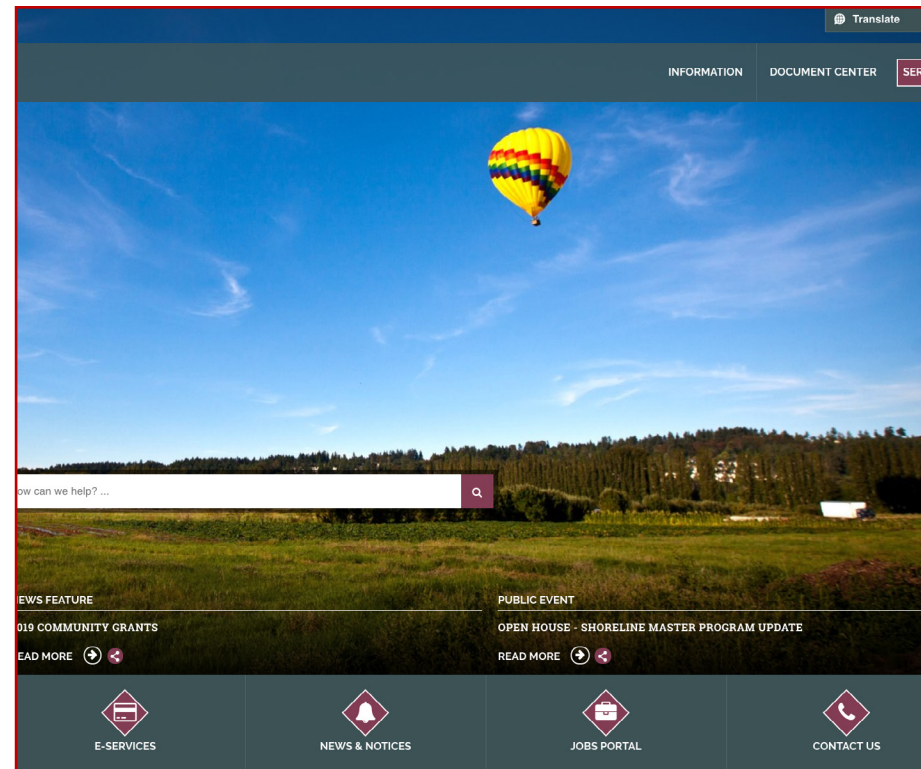
Woodinville, WA

Neighboring city to Seattle. This site isn't that bad compared to the others. The large image paired with icons gives a modern feel. This is what differentiates it from the other sites. Good type hierarchy within the icon's pages. Easy to navigate, clean, organized.
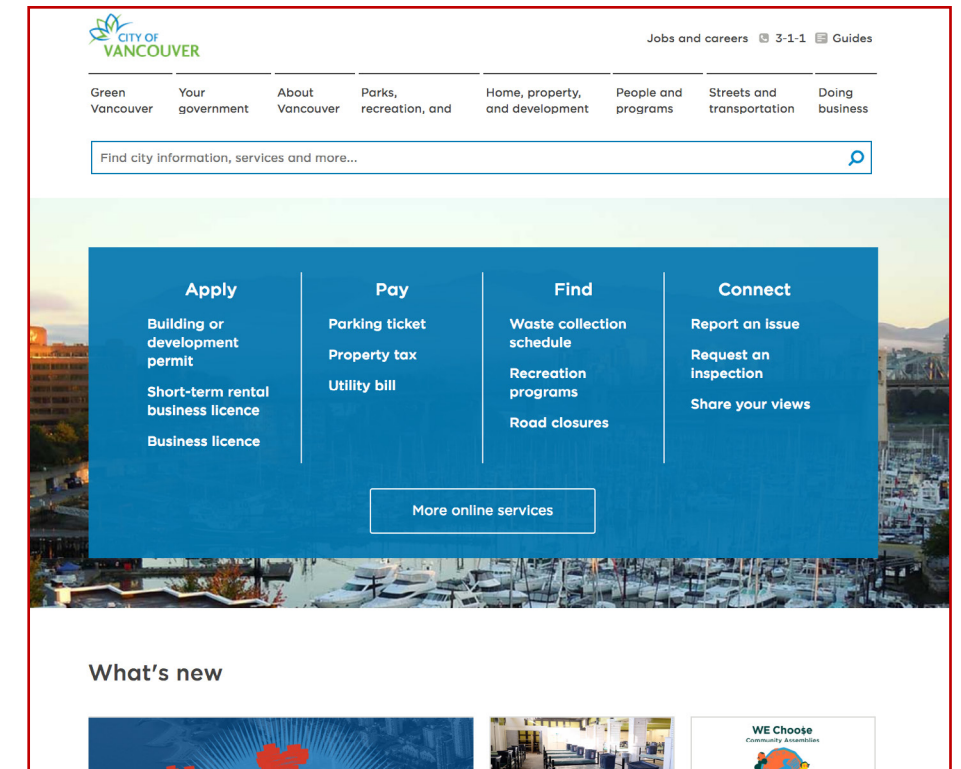
Vancouver, BC
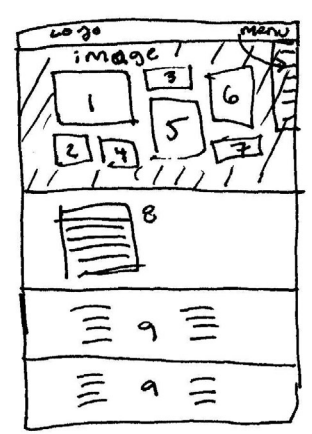
Another major city with a vibe similar to Seattle. Clean and minimal site. Proper spacing between sections. Intuitive to use with actions being the first thing you see upon opening site. Clear distinction between sections. Needs more differentiation and type hierarchy.

Research // Competition

I researched into several other sites that were similar to that of Seattle's, in order to identify competition and see where the standard for government websites was set.

CONTENT OUTLINE: City of Seattle - Tourism page   Anna Hart

① Pike Place Market
- links out to pikeplace.org

② Pioneer Square
- links out to diff site

③ SAM
- links to SAM

④ Visit Seattle Twitter
- newest tweets from @visitseattle

⑤ Space Needle
- links to diff site

⑥ Visit Seattle
- links to actual seattle tourism

⑦ Parks + Rec
- Newest updates

⑧ Weird body copy
- shitty type, lazy writeup, makes for small page
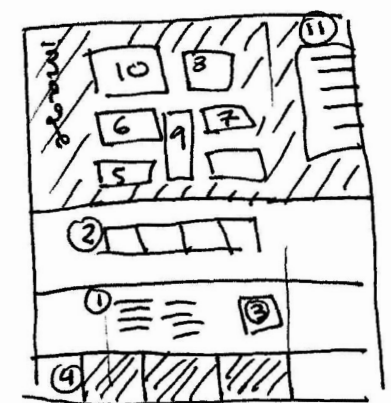
⑨ Two Footers
- same as on the homepage

Issues

○ Not doing tourism sites justice
○ basically just links to separate tourism site. Should list basics w/ a "learn more" that links to site.
○ Links need to open new tabs not in same tab
○ Take stuff off that's already on homepage. Too cluttered.
○ Type is over dominated + not spaced well.

CONTENT OUTLINE: City of Seattle - Homepage   Anna Hart

① ○ Services
- a footer that could be simplified

② ○ Elected officials
- features: mayor, city council, etc.
- photos of people

③ ○ Top requests
- 5 most searched things

④ ○ Footer
- broken into 3 sections as Help, Navi, & City Data

⑤ ○ Social Media
- shows newest tweets from Seattle Electric

⑥ ○ "Council Connection"
- newest updates w/ city council

⑦ ○ Contact the Mayor
- redundant as City council/mayor is right beneath it

⑧ ○ Customer Service/ Call 4 help
- weird big button

⑨ ○ City stream Newest segments
- videos about stuff in Seattle

⑩ ○ Rotating Links
- traffic, affordable living, homelessness, city council districts

⑪ ○ Menu:
- services + info
- elected officials
- Departments
- visiting Seattle
- News. Seattle. Gov
- Event Calendar

Issues

○ redundancy
○ dump of all info on home page
○ crowded
○ hierarchy doesn't make sense, isn't user friendly
○ links don't open to a new tab, just open on same page (annoying)

Research // Content Outline

I then identified the content that was on the Home page and Tourism page of the City of Seattle website in order to familiarize myself with the content the site was working with as well as identifying potential usability issues.

Bio

Mark works as an audio engineer in Seattle. He is a Husband and father of two young children, lives in a 3 bedroom house in the Ballard neighborhood of Seattle. He recieved an undergrad degree from a 4 year university. He has a 45 minute commute to work by car in downtown Seattle. However, he likes to bike to work a couple days a week. Mark is a pescatarian and shops mostly organic.

Goal

Mark wants to save up enough money to support his two children through college. He also wants to pay off his mortgage, take at least one vacation every 2-3 years, and spend time with his family on weekends. Ultimately, he would like to retire somewhat early so he and his wife could travel for a bit.

Demands of Service

Mark expects the Seattle website to be easy to use, quick to navigate, and aesthetically reflecting the personality of Seattle. He wants to easily pay utility bills and parking tickets, his two main reasons for visiting the site. He wants a site that makes these monotonous tasks that he dreads to be quick and painless, and take little time out from his busy schedule.

Potential Pain Points

Potential pain points for Mark are the clutteredness of the site. He would get frustrated with the amount of information on the home page. This overwhelms him and takes up more time than he would like to spend navigating the site. Sometimes, he opens the site and closes it just because he is overwhelmed and doesn't want to spend the time trying to find what he needs. He thinks the website is disorganized, and makes the city of Seattle look all business, not as creative and tech-focused as it is.

Mark, 36, Male
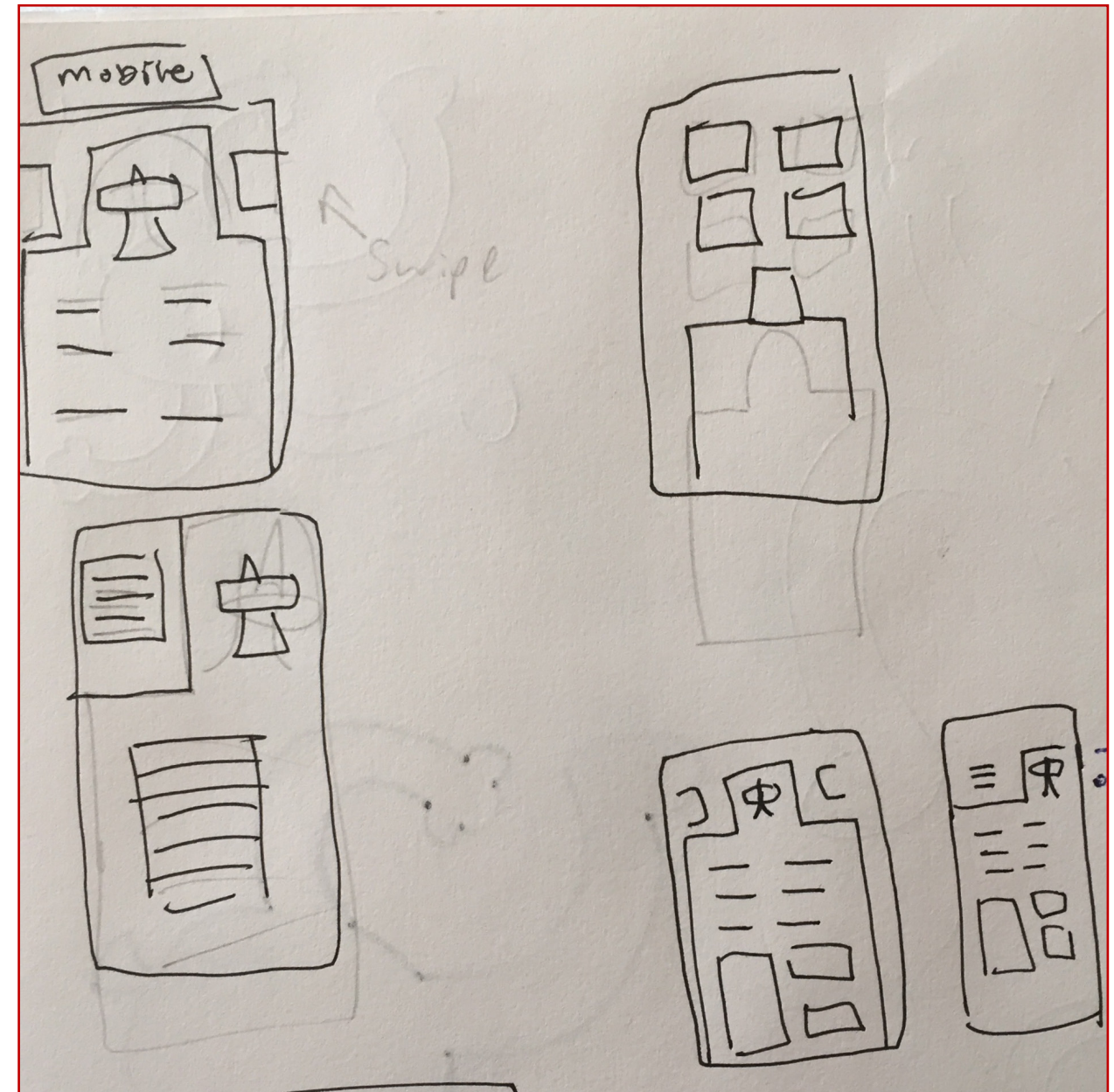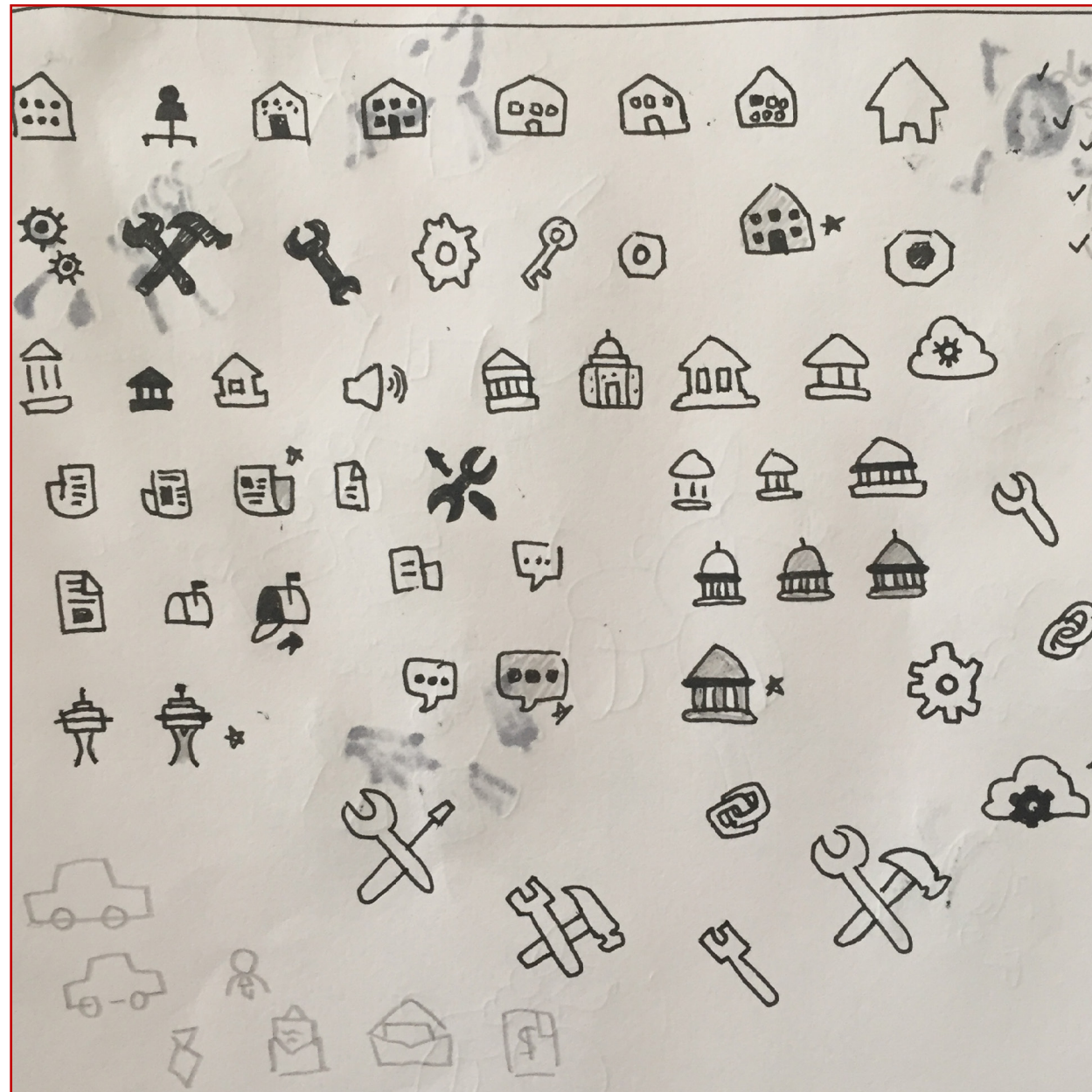
Research // Target Audience

Then, a User Persona was created in order to further identify the target audience and empathize with the user. This is one person who is an average of many people using the site.
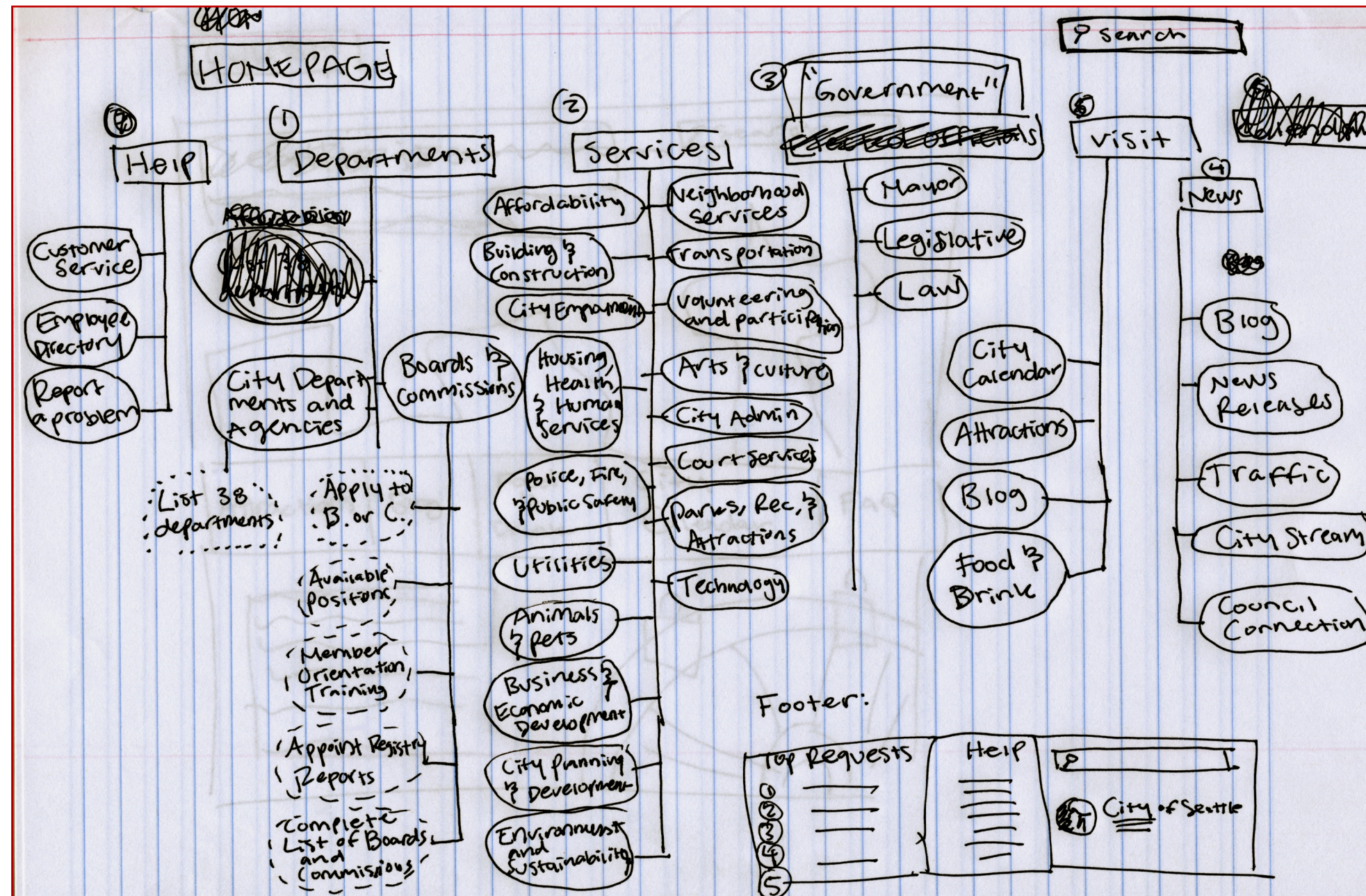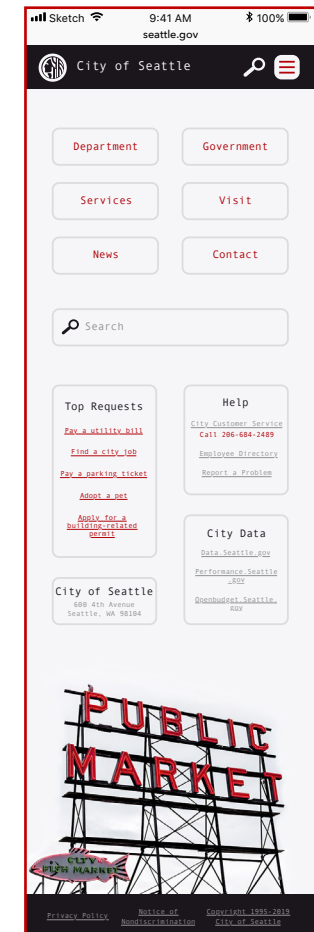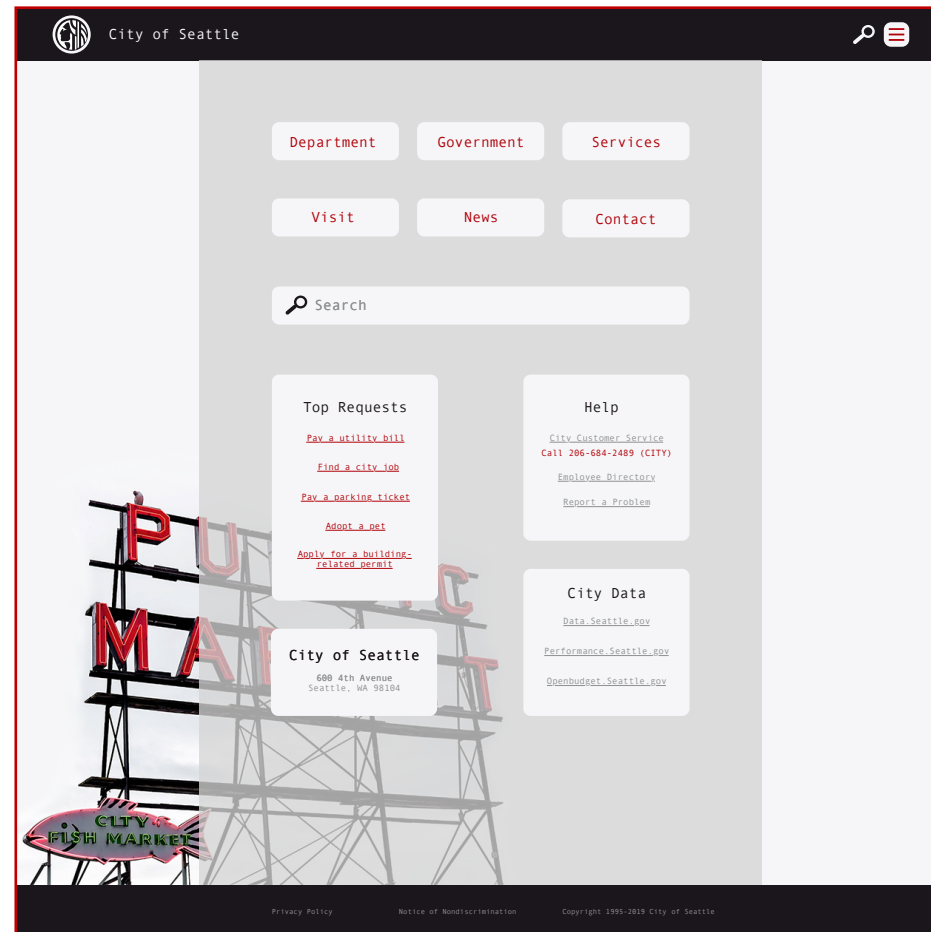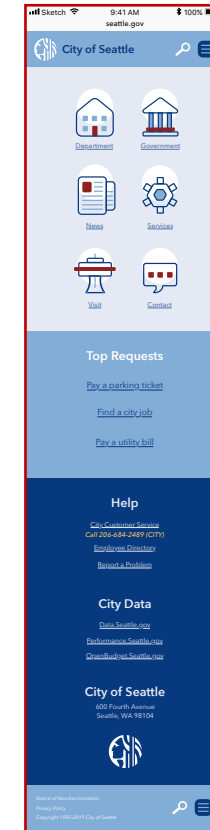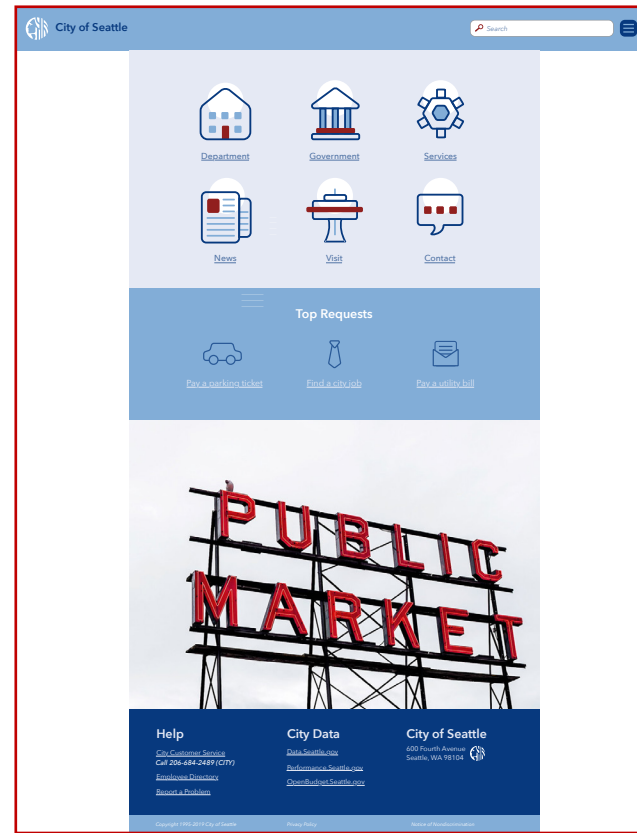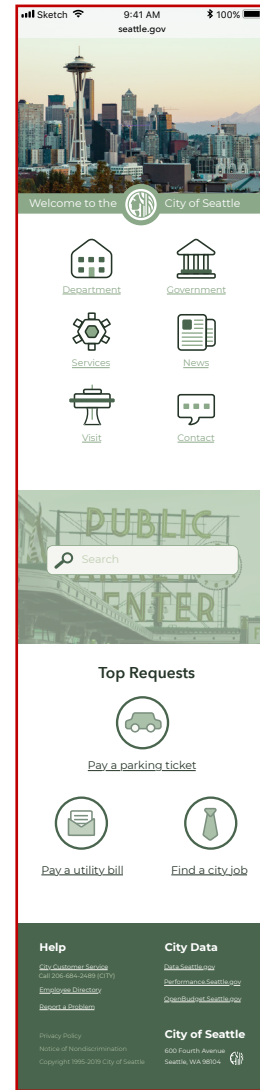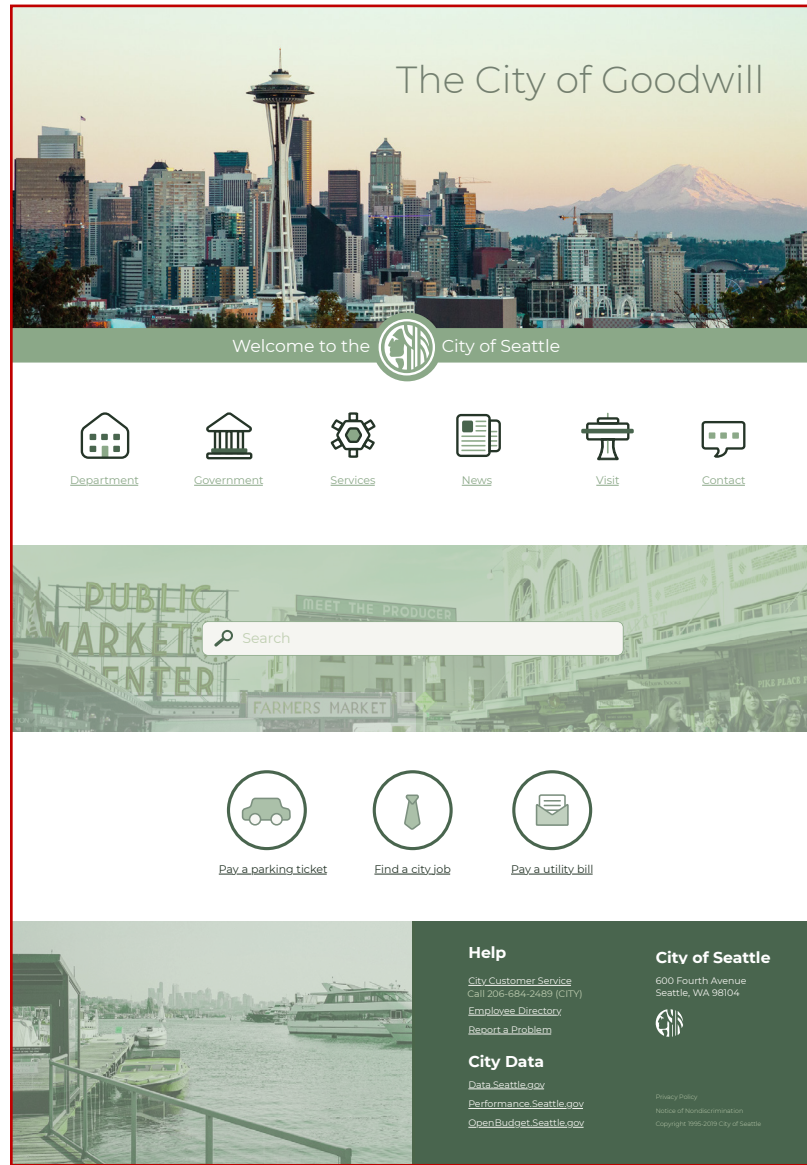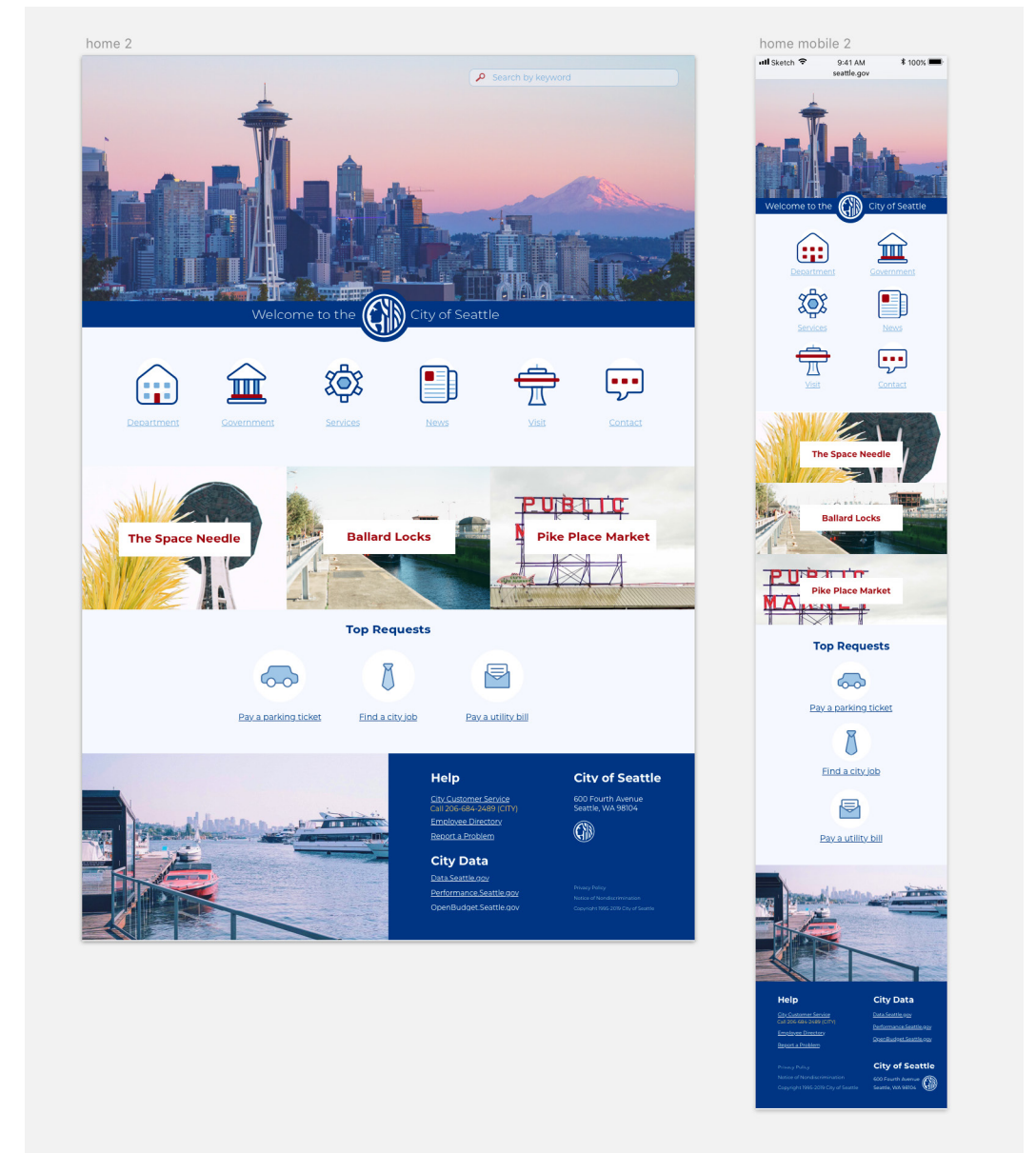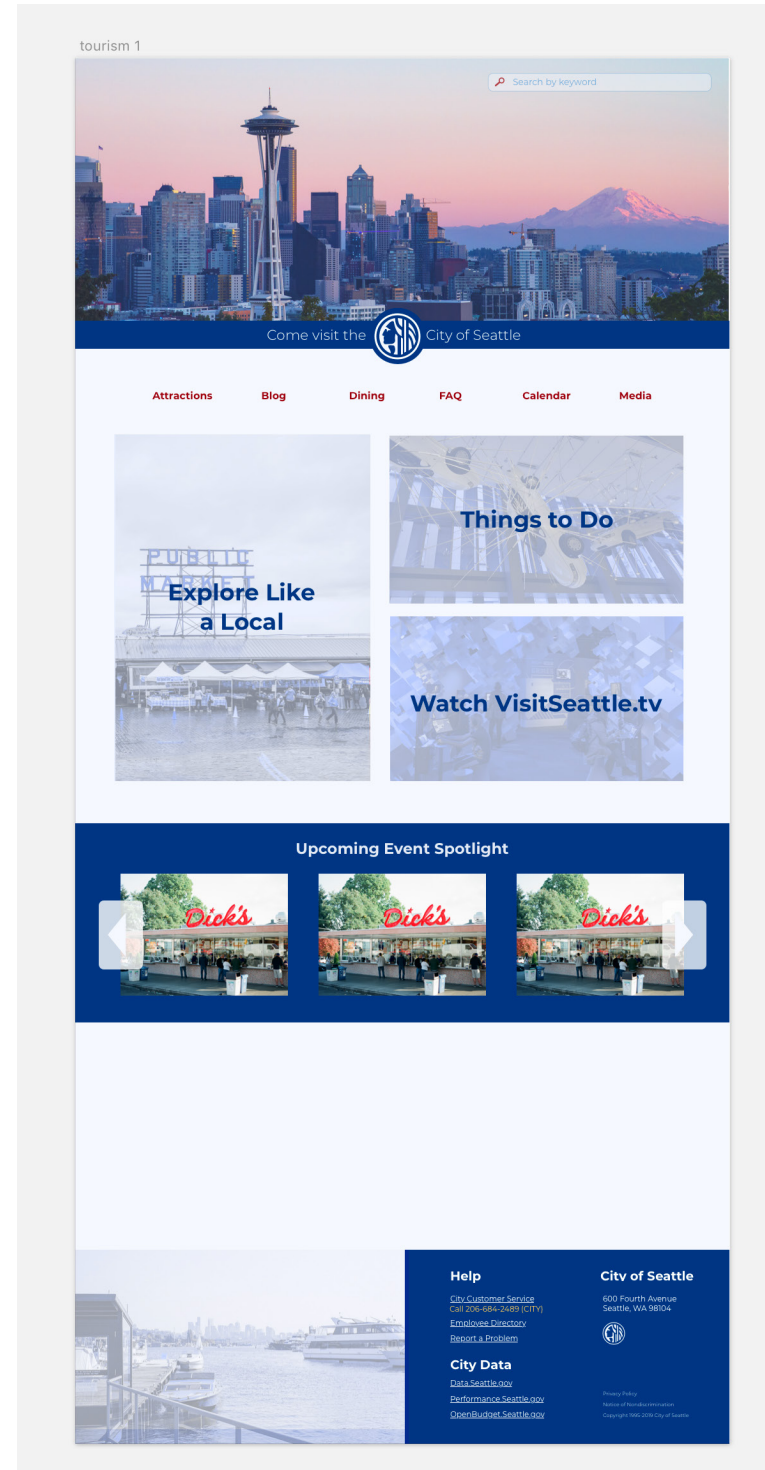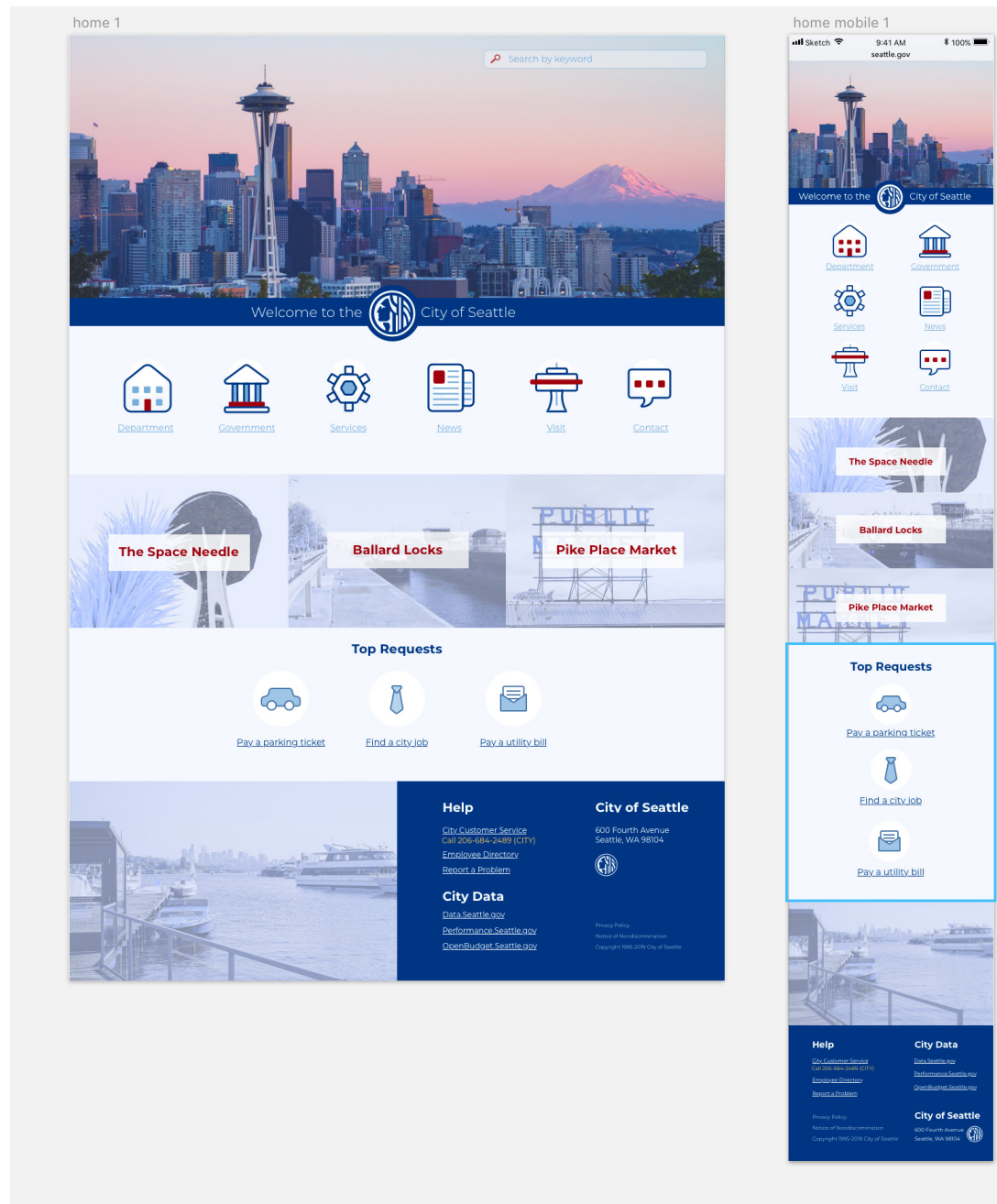
Conceptualizing // Site Map
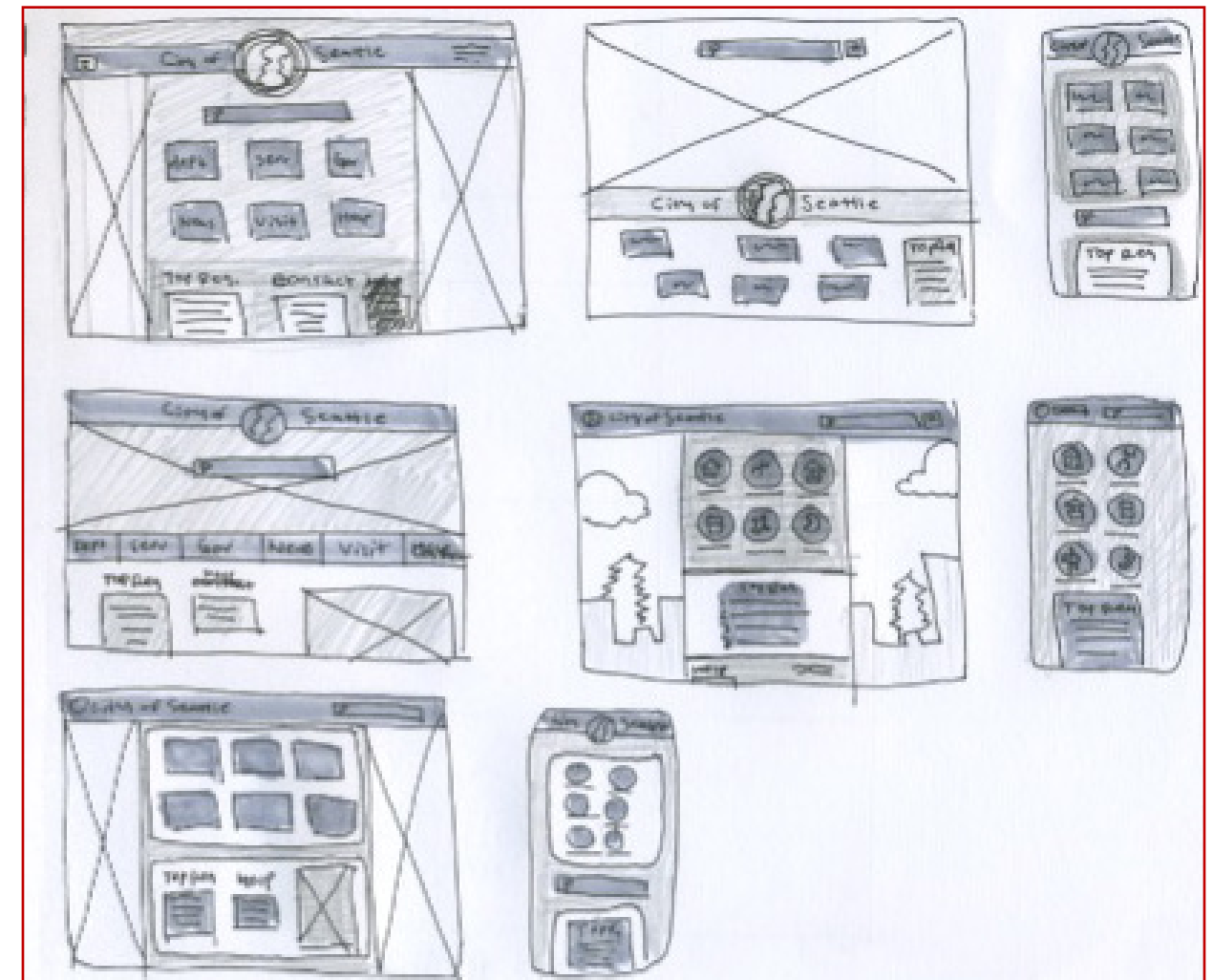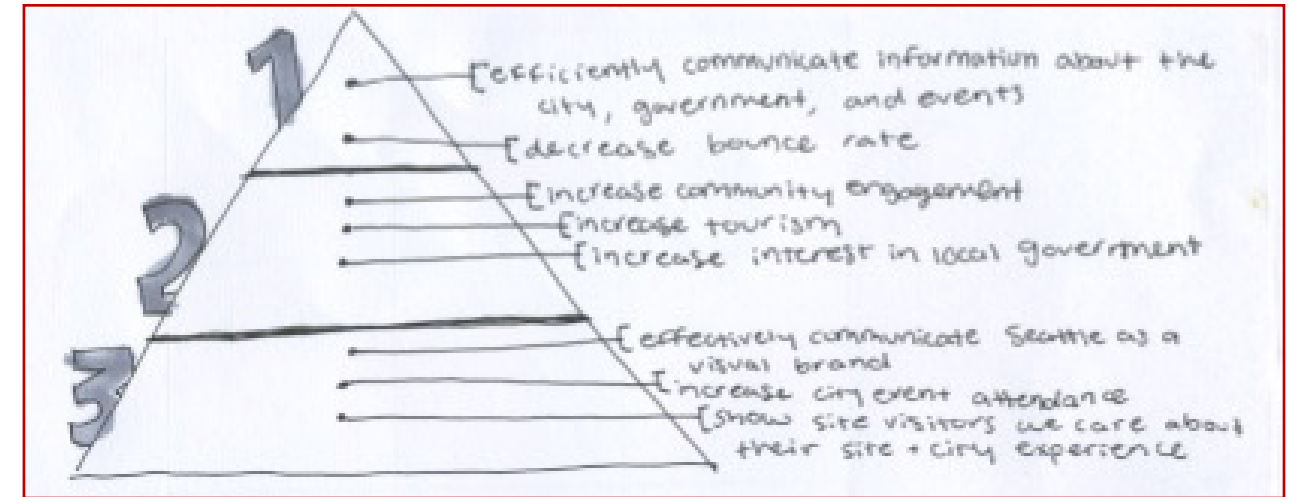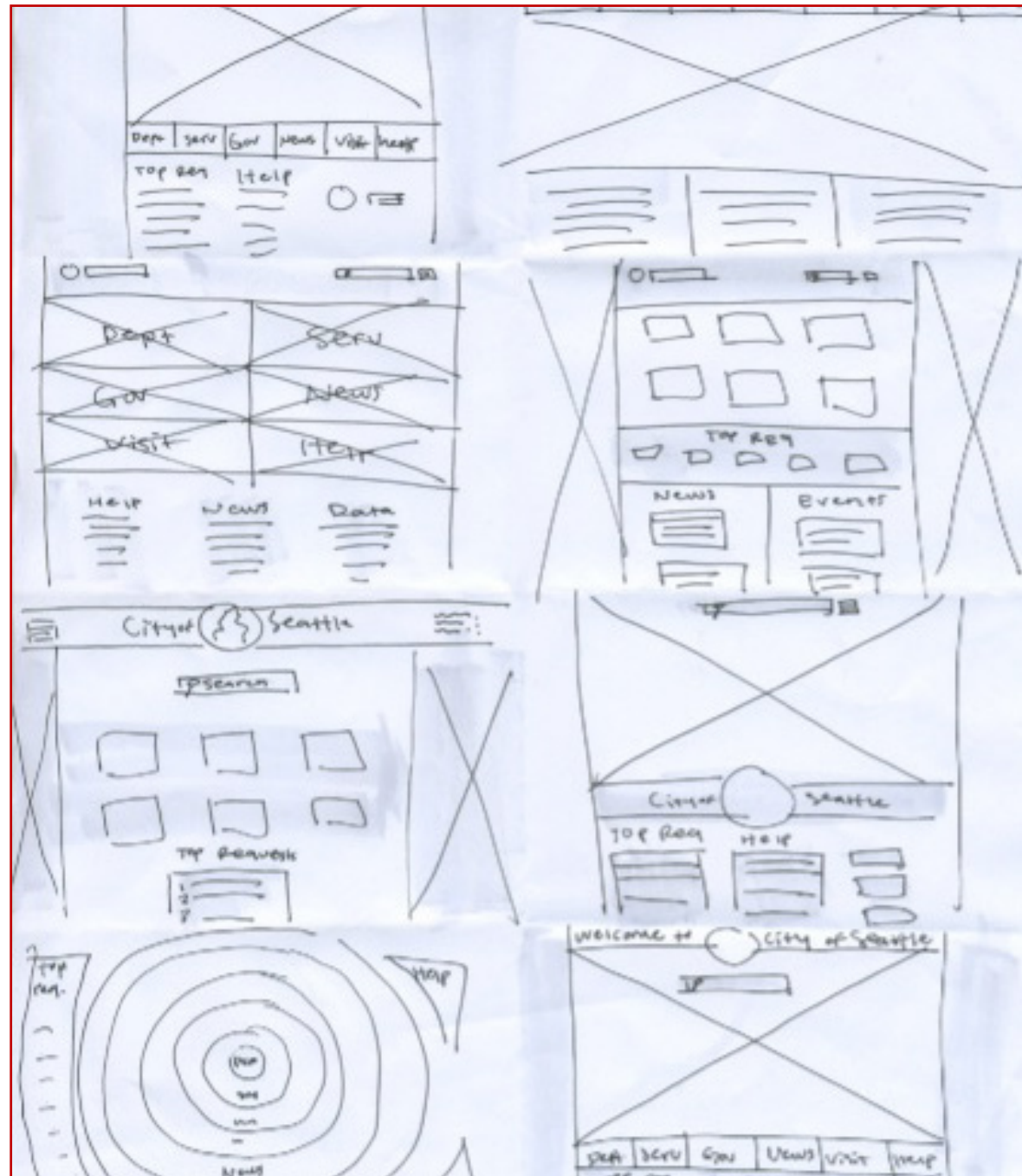
Conceptualizing // Sketches

# Conceptualizing // Sketches

Initial Concepts

First Exploration

The first exploration I started developing was sufficient, but wasn't fully meeting the brand goals. The site didn't deliver a sleek, modern, and creative feeling that Seattle embodies. This first exploration seemed too serious and very contained. I decided to start over in order to meet the brand goals in entirety.
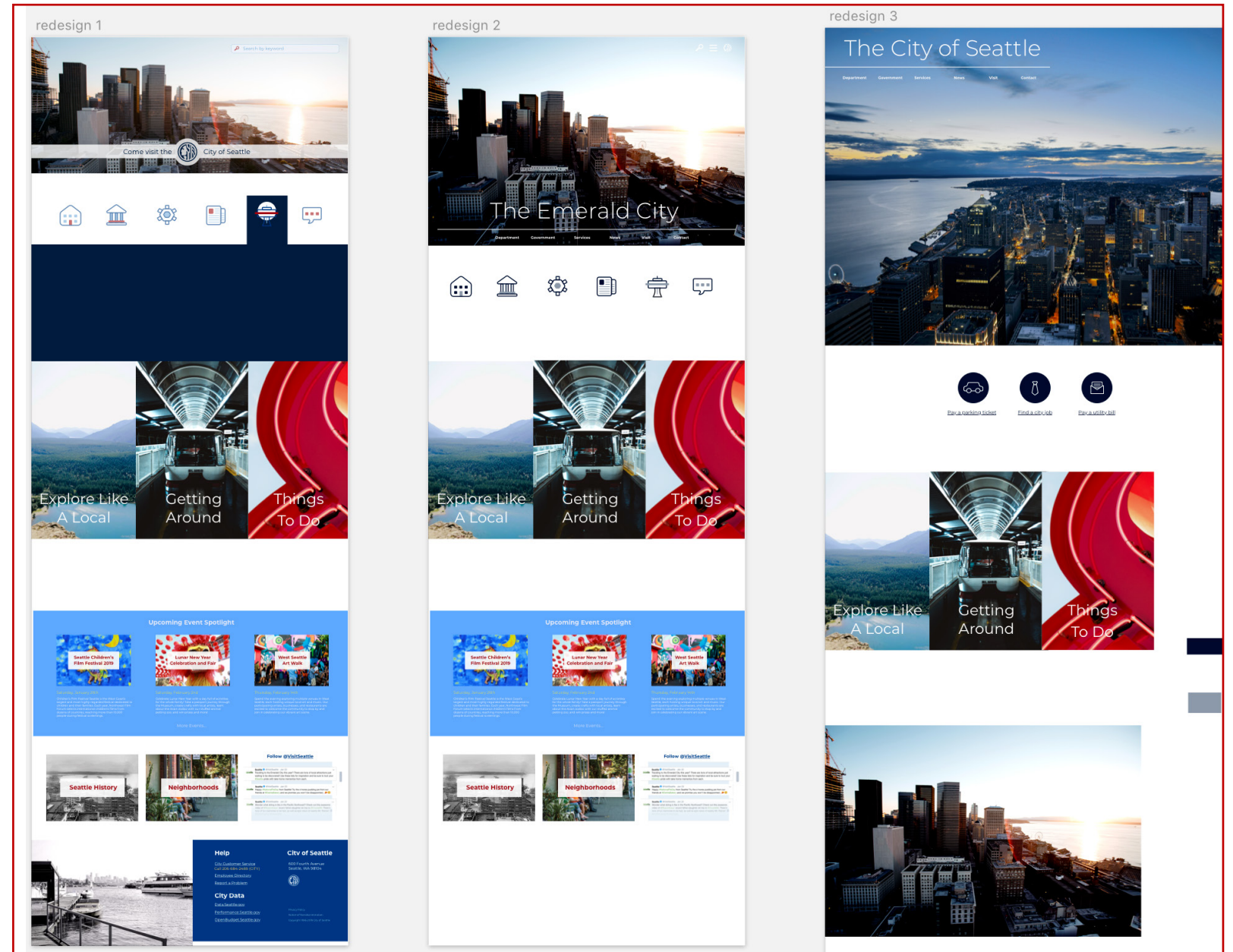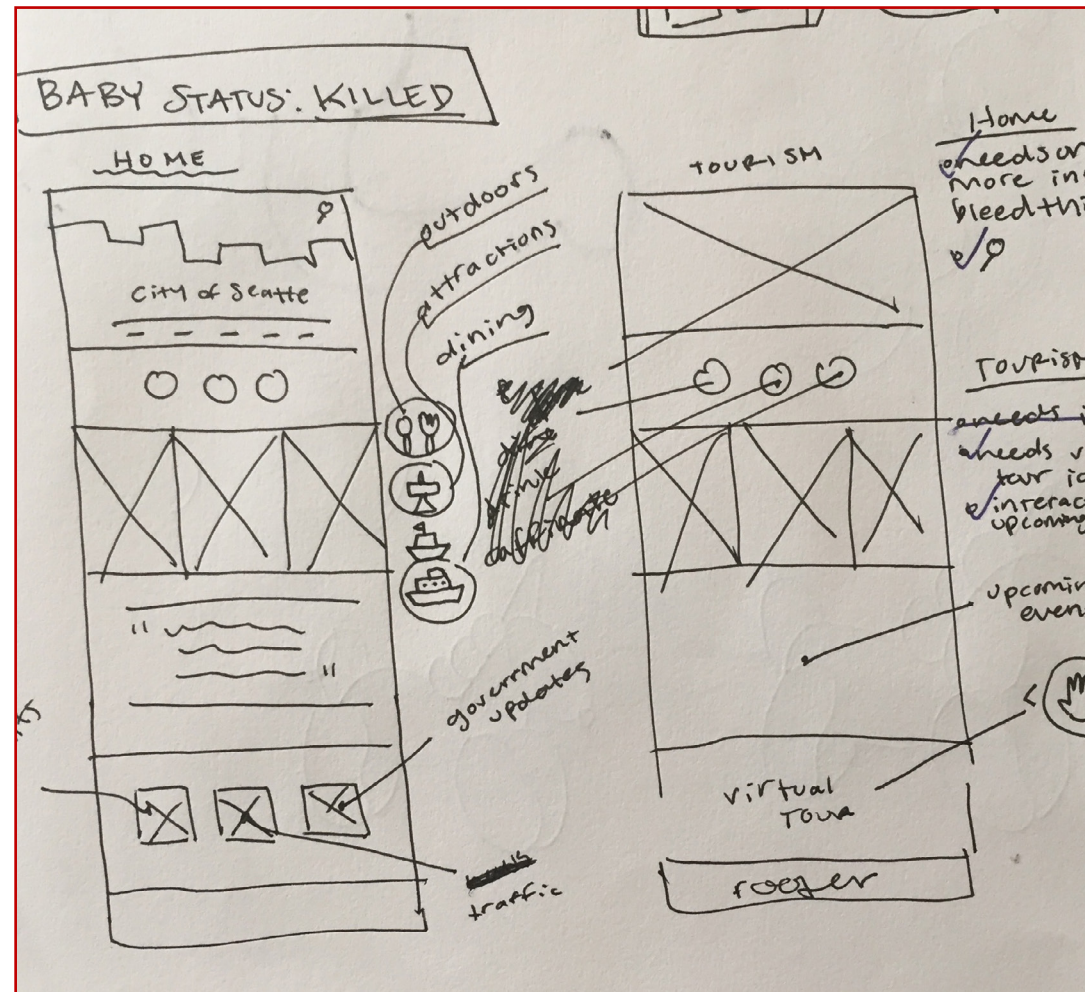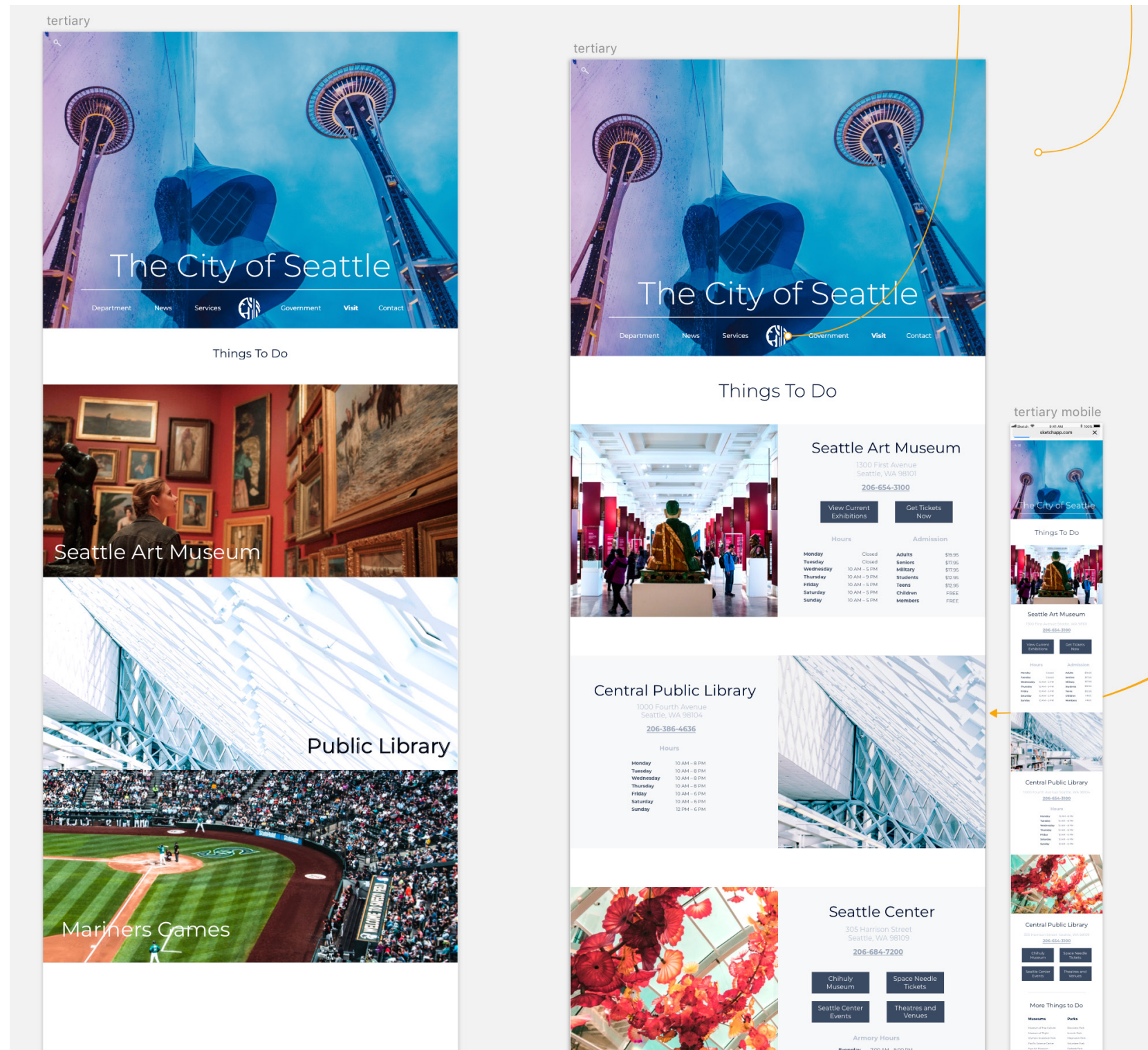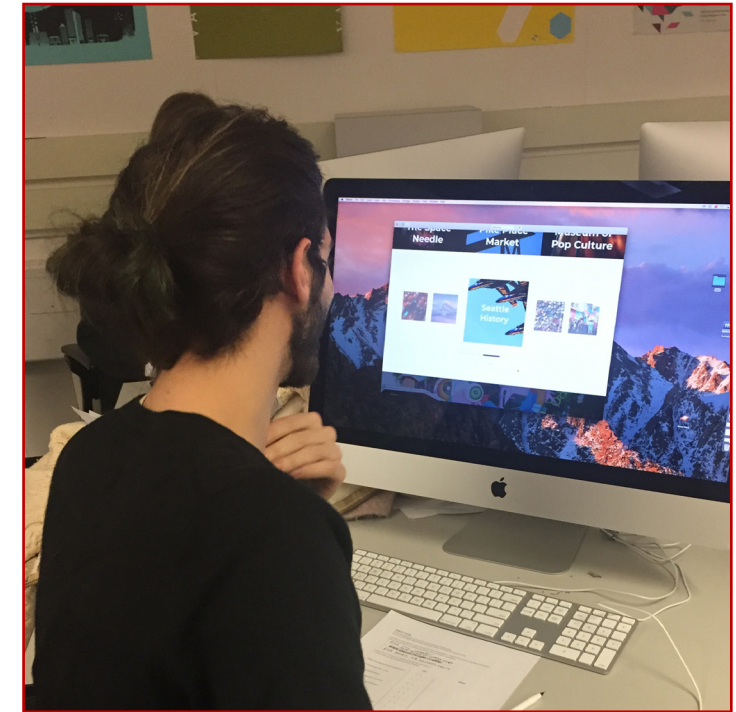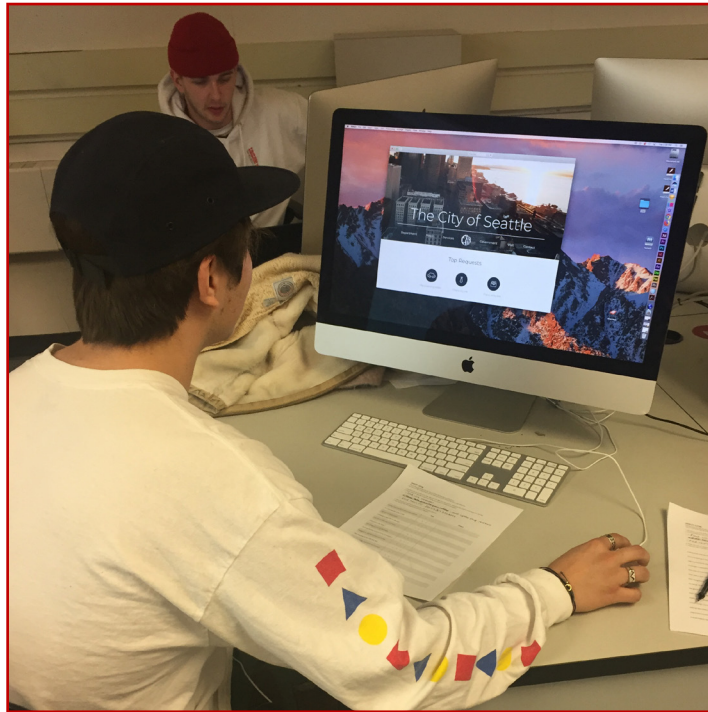
Second Exploration

I experimented more with type, included more modern and abstract imagery, reduced the color palette, and added higher contrast of the visual design elements.
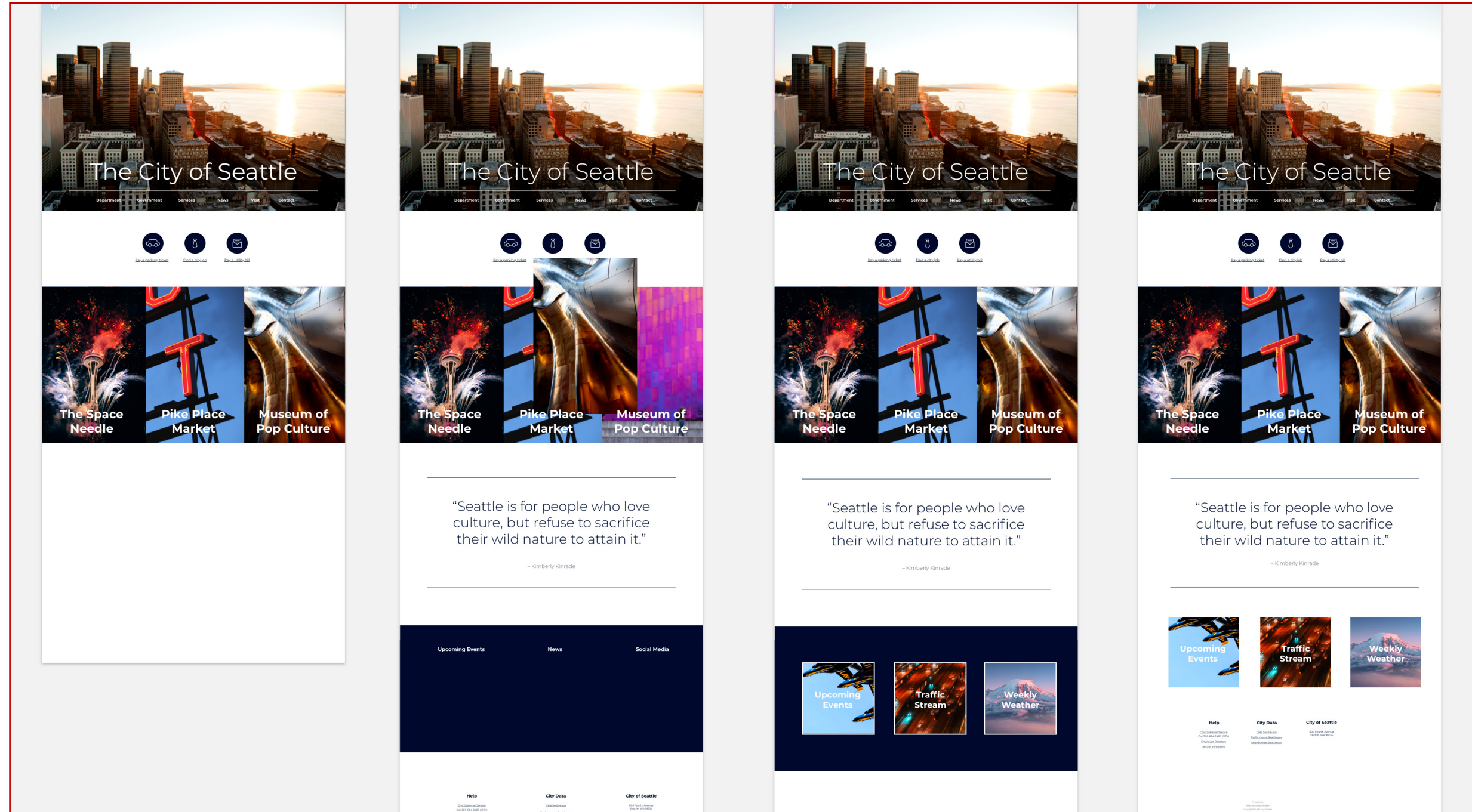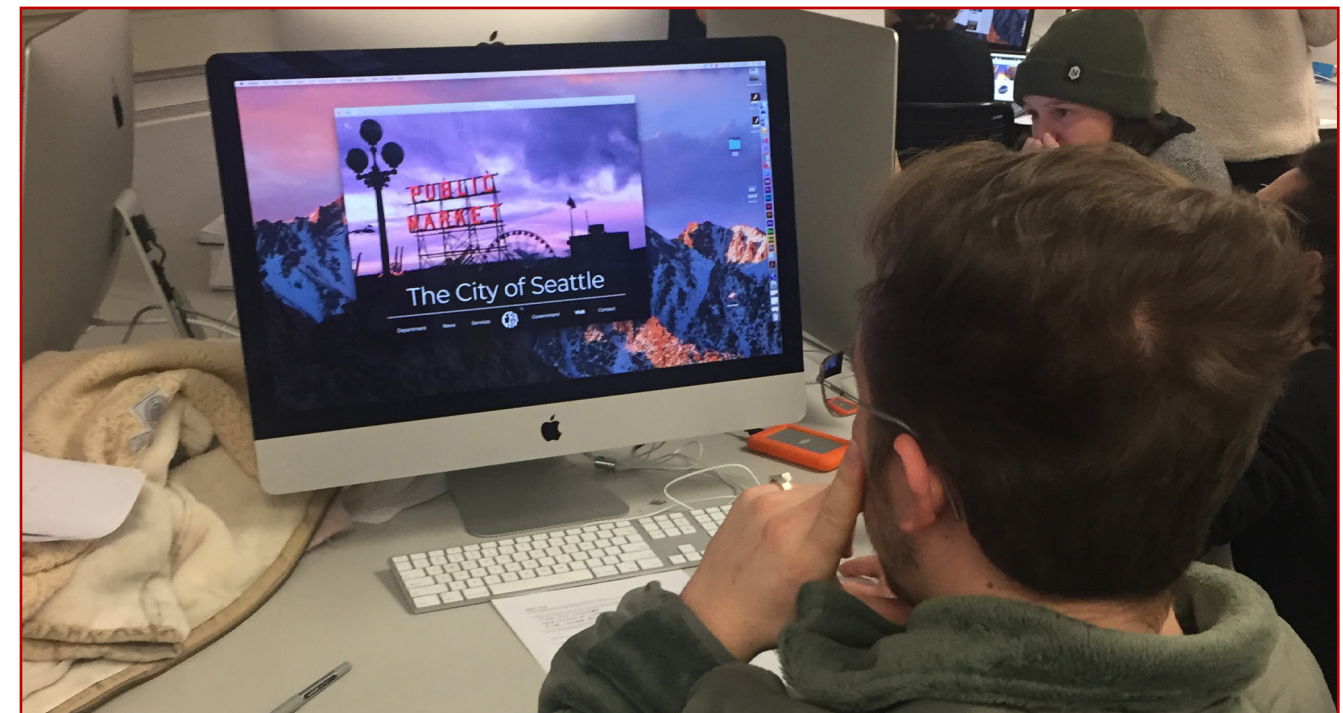
Second Exploration

Second Exploration

Usability Testing

When conducting usability testing, there was mild confusion amongst users about determining whether they were still on the home page after clicking or if they had moved on to a new page. Users also mentioned the breathability of the site and the ease they felt when navigating the site. A couple users had mentioned that the City Calendar was buried too deep into the homepage and required more precedence than it was originally given.

Outcome
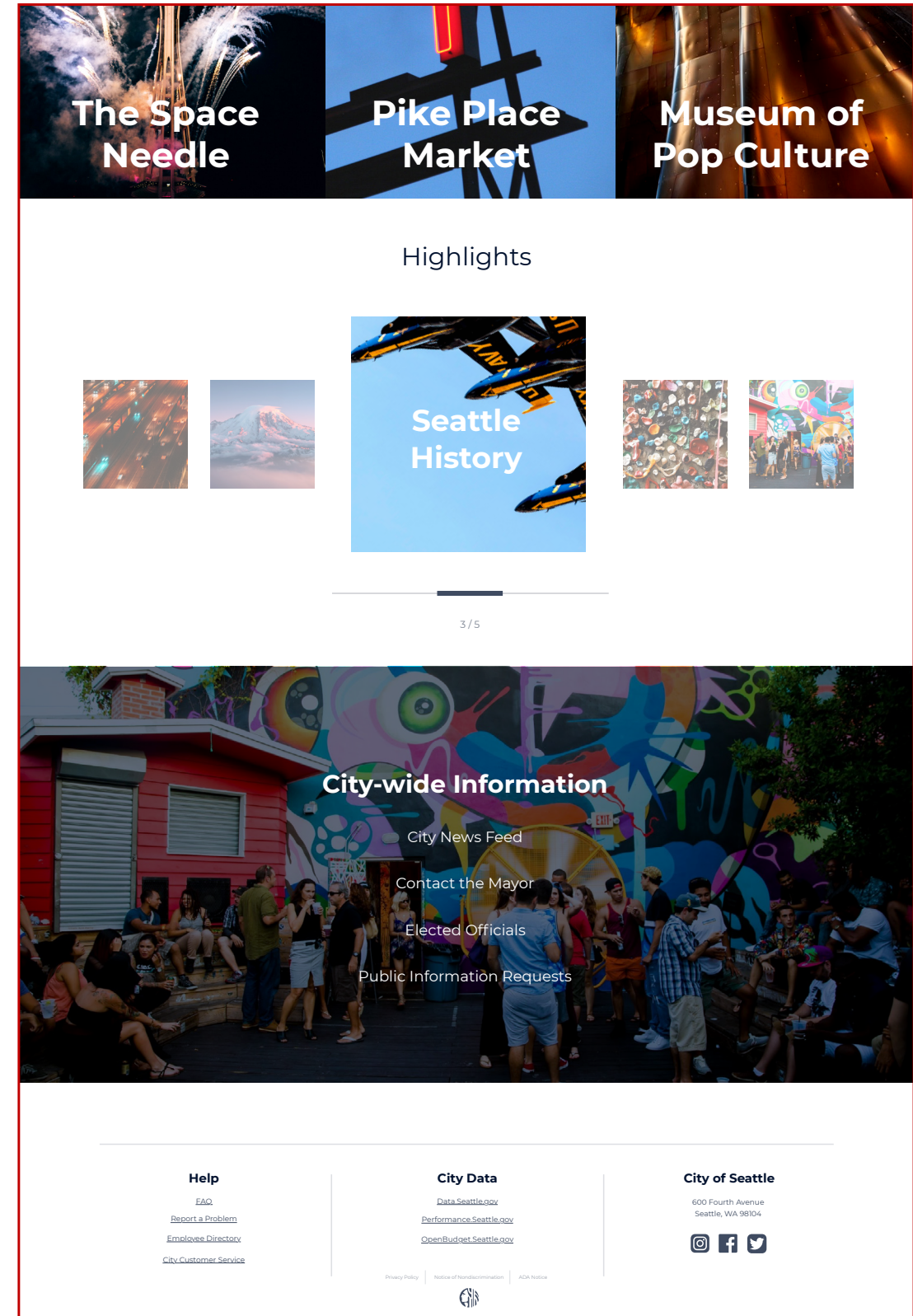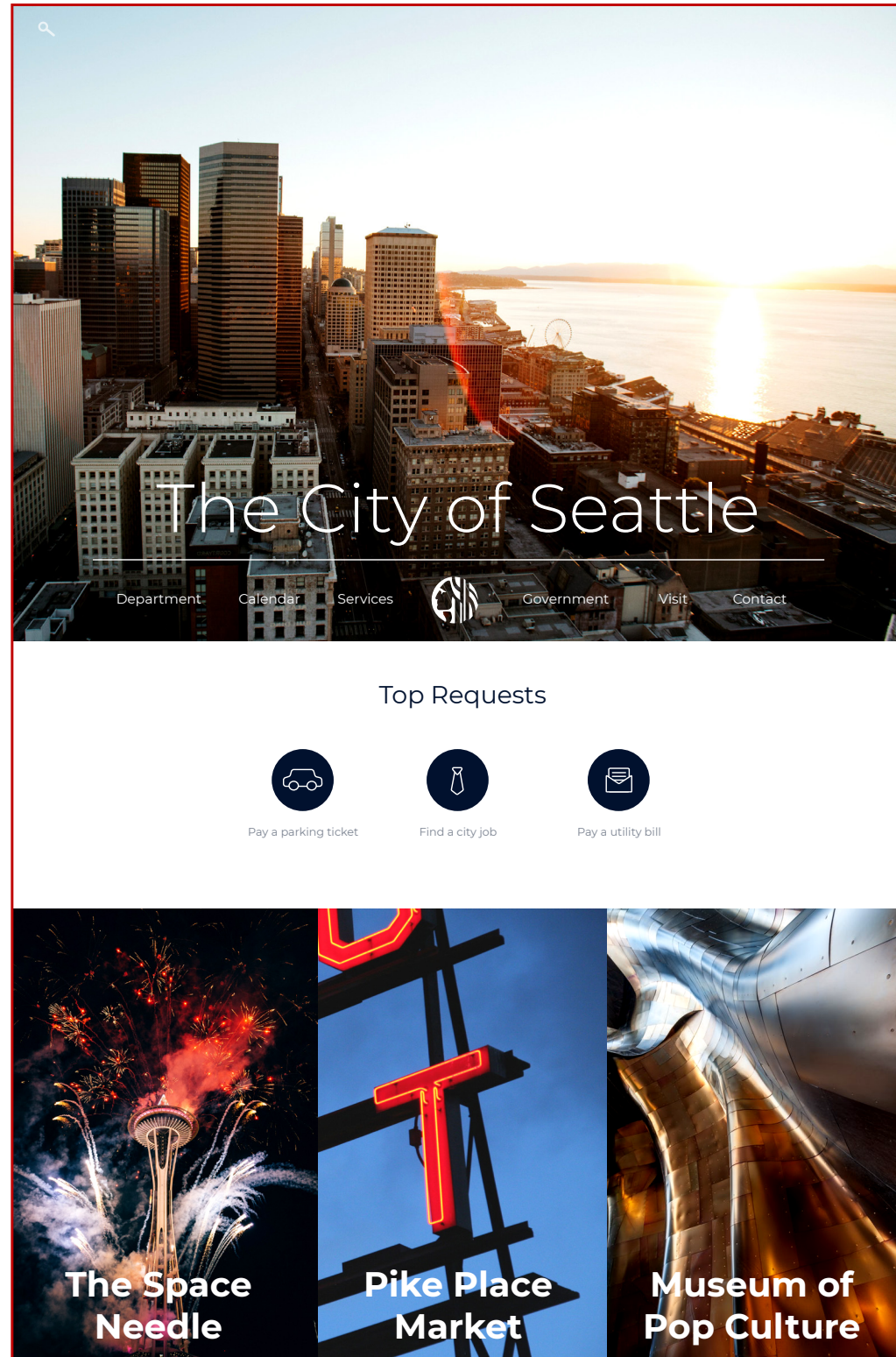
Final Result // Home Desktop
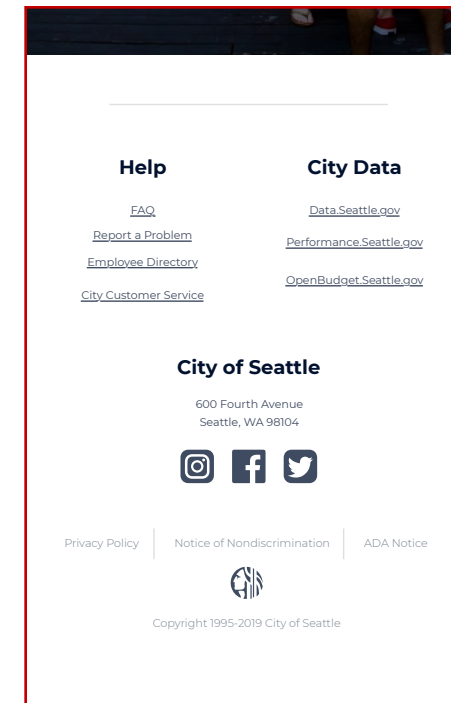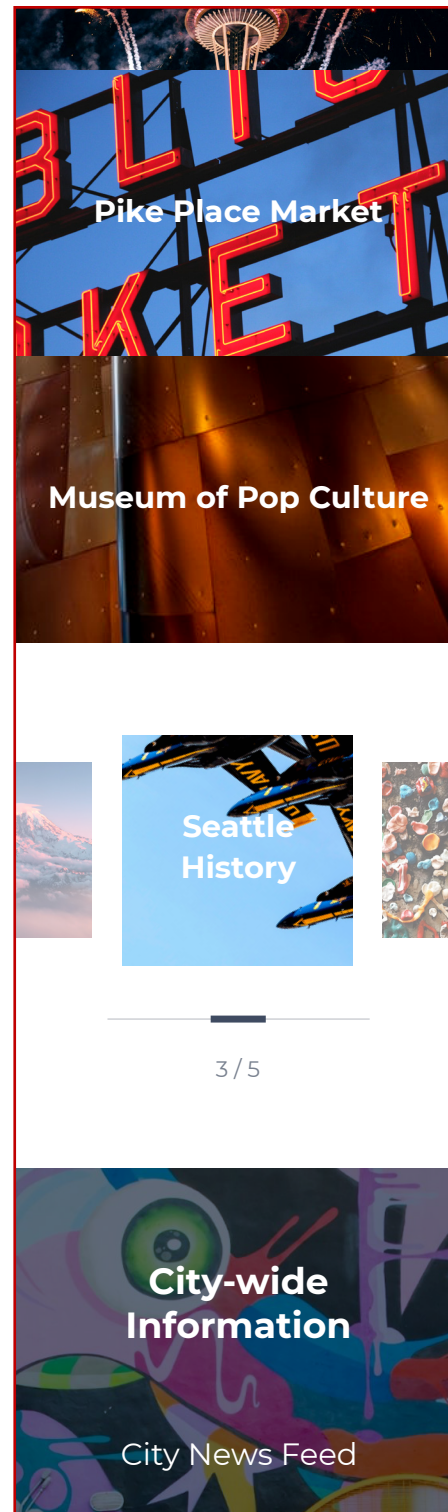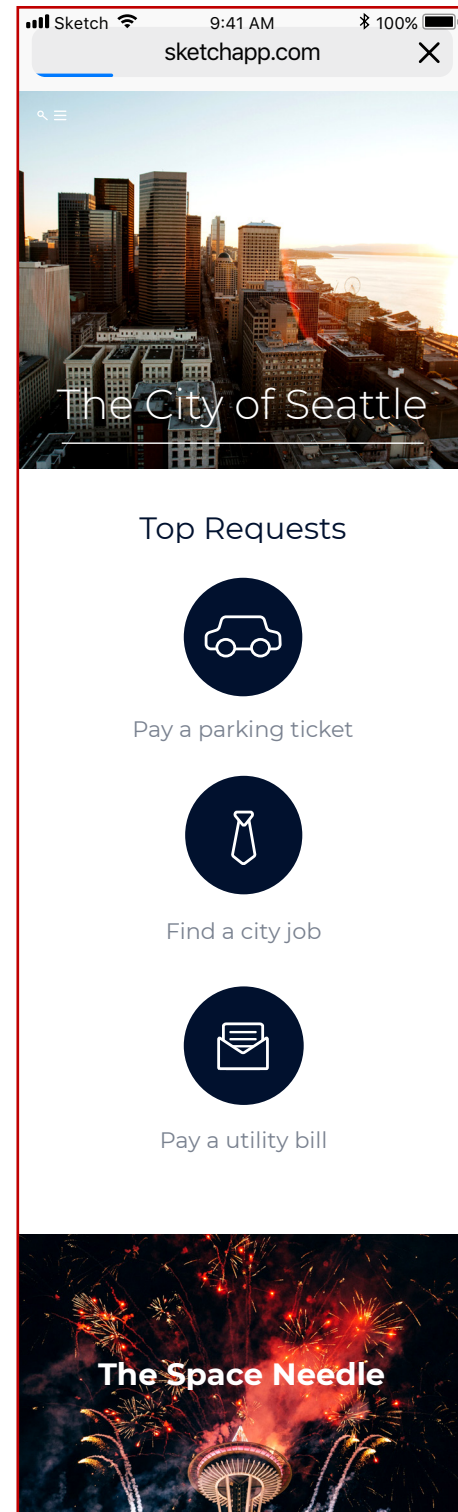
Final Result // Home Mobile

The City of Seattle

Department   Calendar   Services   Government   **Visit**   Contact

"Seattle is for people who love culture, but refuse to sacrifice their wild nature to attain it."

– Kimberly Kinrade

Explore Our Parks

Getting Around

Things To Do

Coffee Corner

Seattle Coffee Works

$$ 4.5 / 5

Unpretentious coffeehouse with an espresso bar & a slow bar for comparing single-origin beans.

6 AM – 7 PM

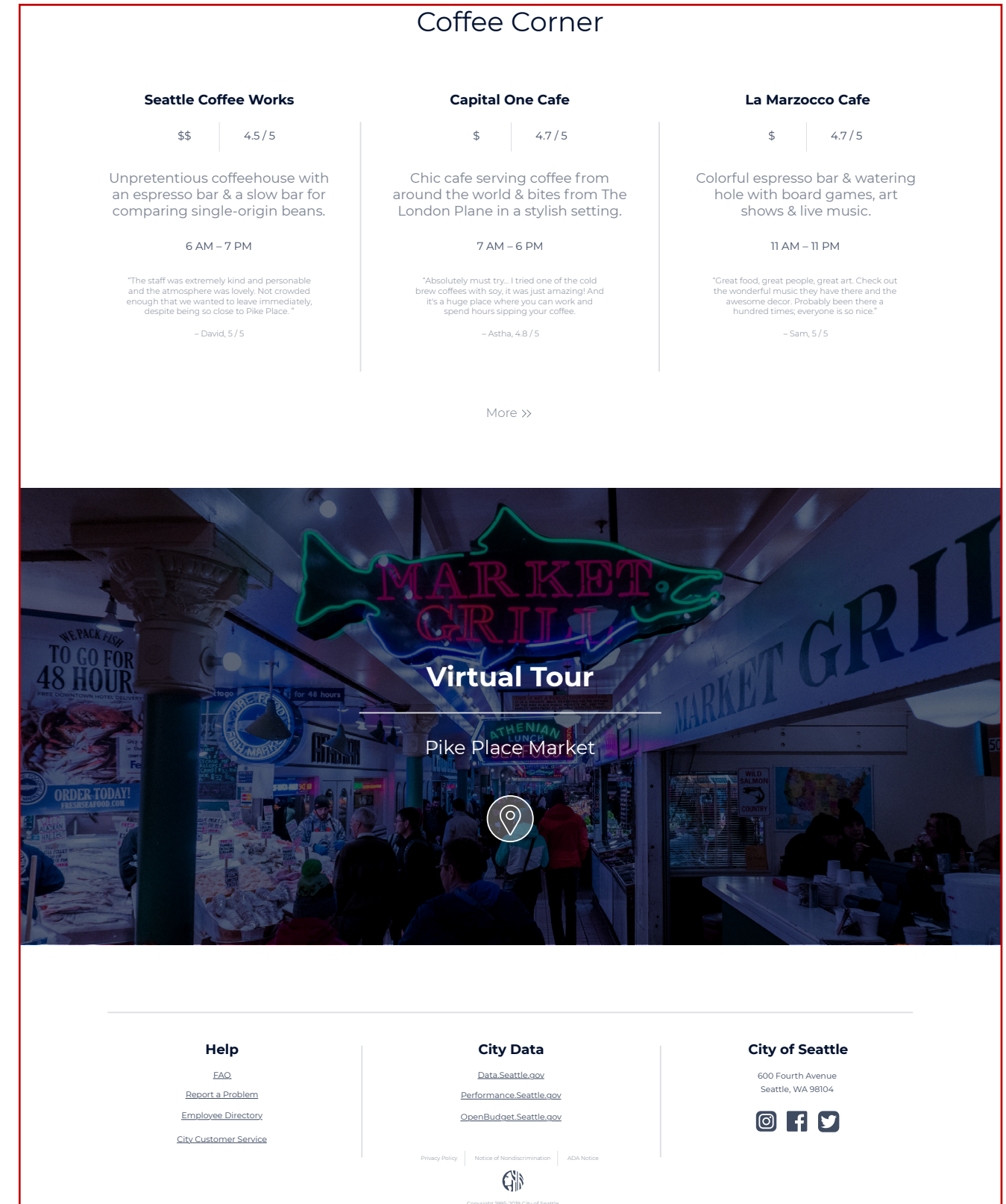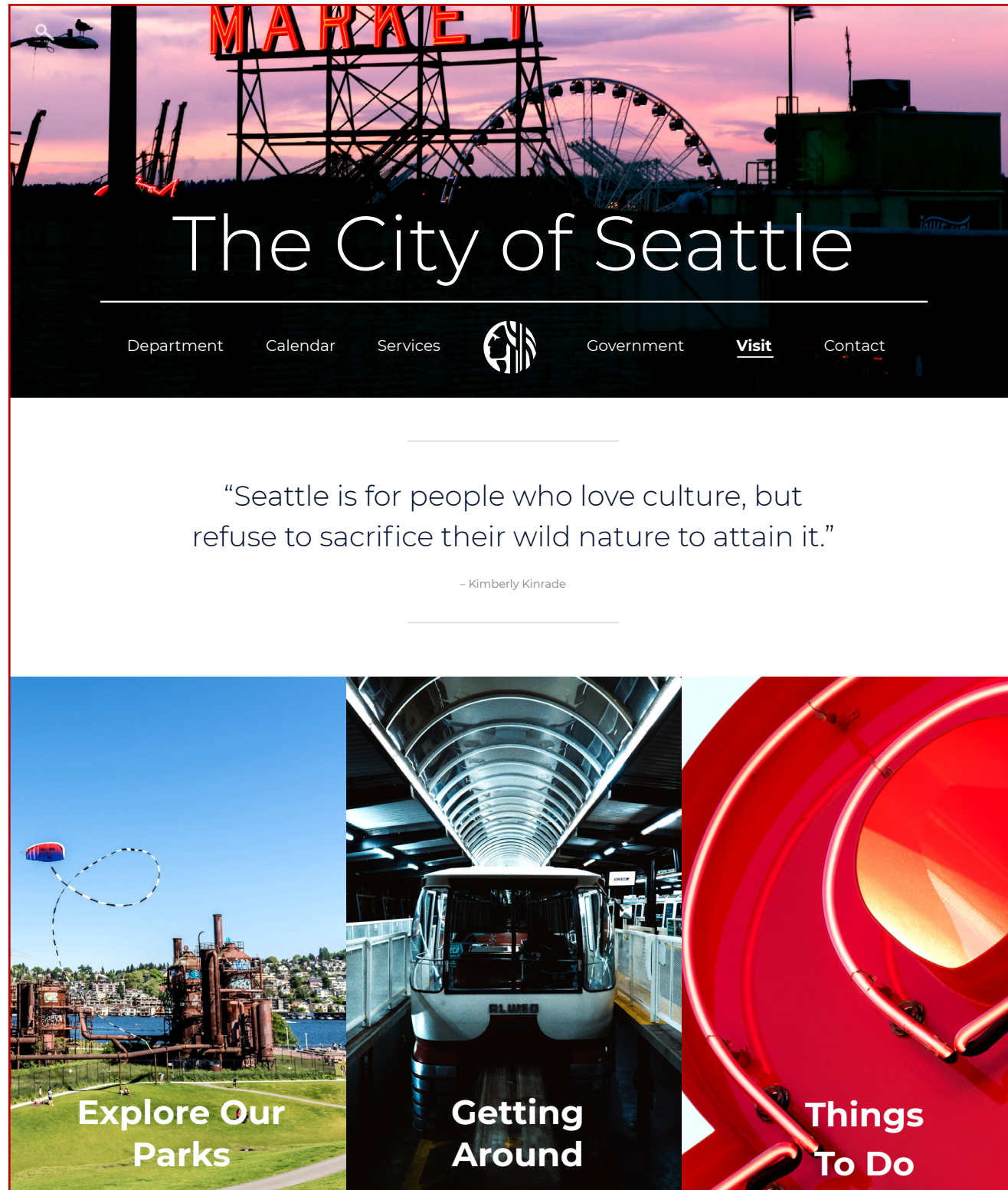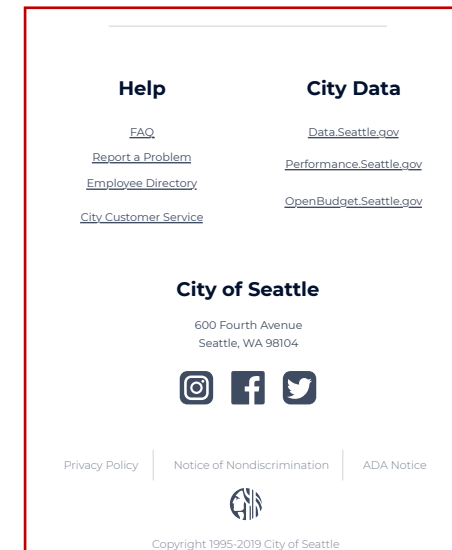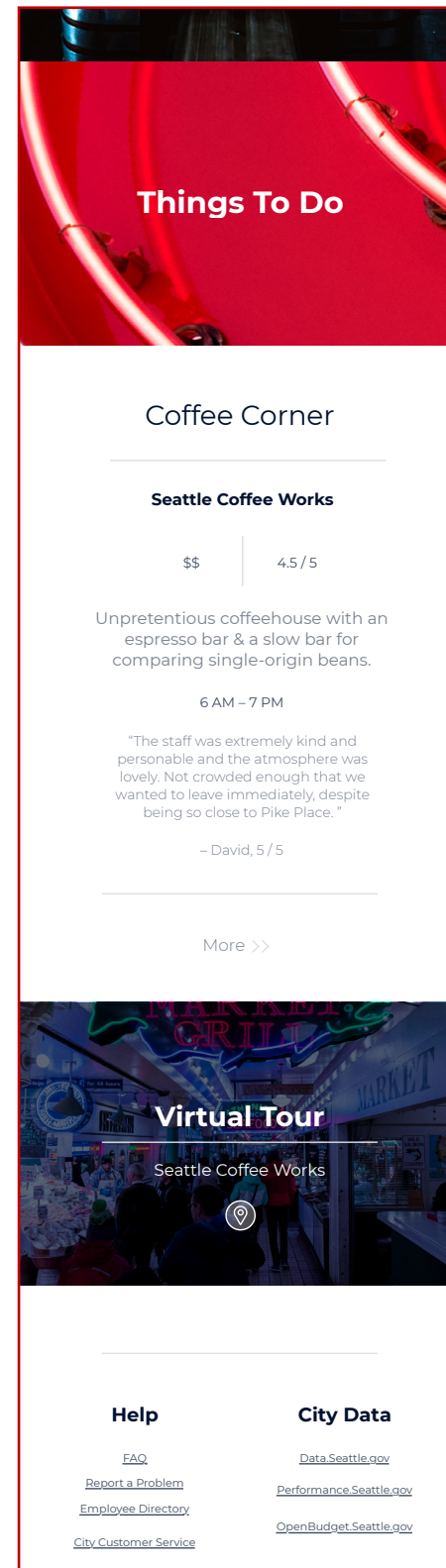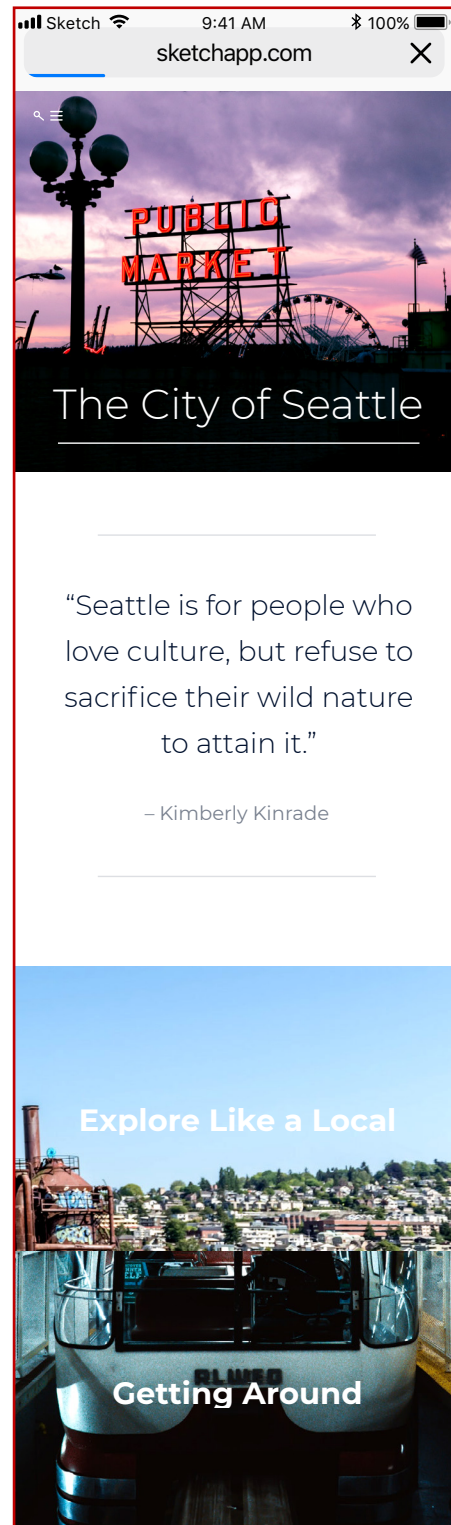"The staff was extremely kind and personable and the atmosphere was lovely. Not crowded enough that we wanted to leave immediately, despite being so close to Pike Place. "

– David, 5 / 5

Capital One Cafe

$ 4.7 / 5

Chic cafe serving coffee from around the world & bites from The London Plane in a stylish setting.

7 AM – 6 PM

"Absolutely must try... I tried one of the cold brew coffees with soy, it was just amazing! And it's a huge place where you can work and spend hours sipping your coffee."

– Astha, 4.8 / 5

La Marzocco Cafe

$ 4.7 / 5

Colorful espresso bar & watering hole with board games, art shows & live music.

11 AM – 11 PM

"Great food, great people, great art. Check out the wonderful music they have there and the awesome decor. Probably been there a hundred times, everyone is so nice."

– Sam, 5 / 5

More ››

Virtual Tour

Pike Place Market

Help
FAQ
Report a Problem
Employee Directory
City Customer Service

City Data
Data.Seattle.gov
Performance.Seattle.gov
OpenBudget.Seattle.gov

City of Seattle
600 Fourth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98104

Privacy Policy   Notice of Nondiscrimination   ADA Notice
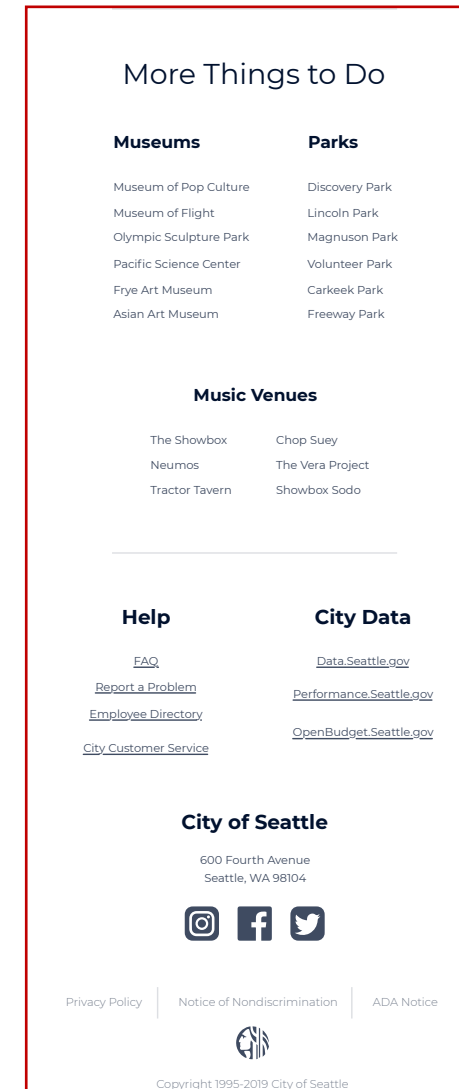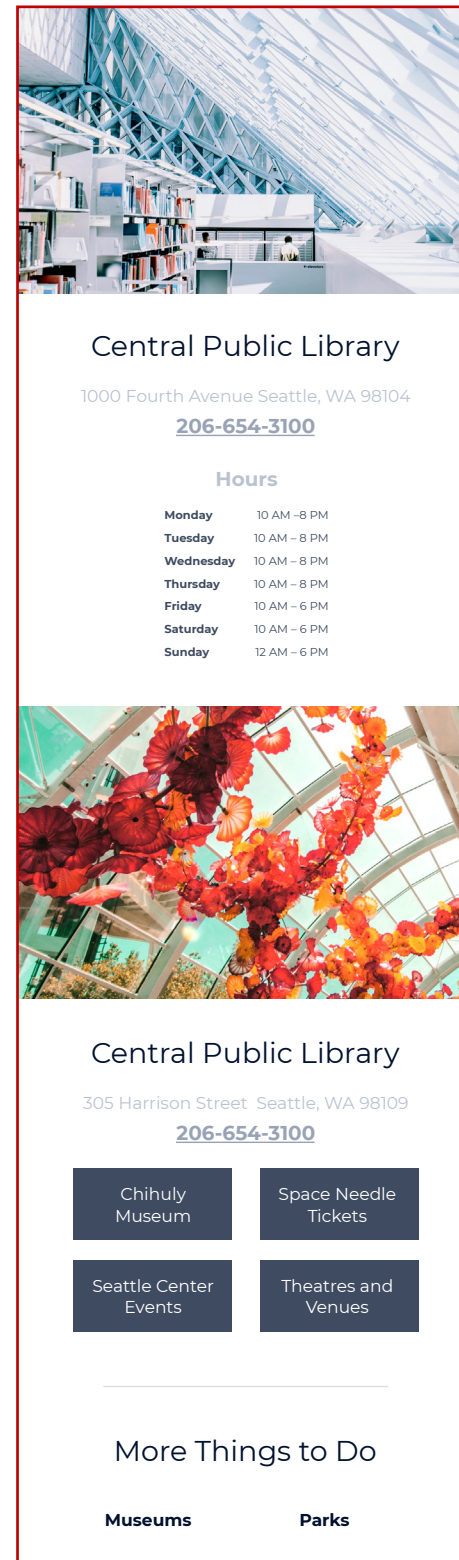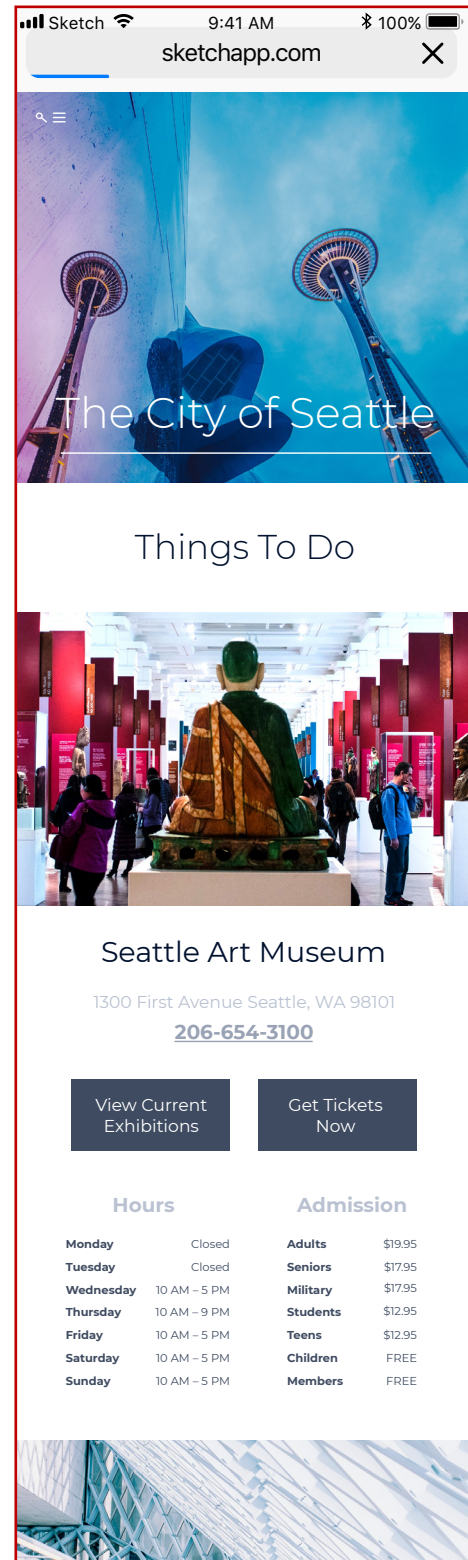
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Final Result // Tourism Desktop

Final Result // Tourism Mobile
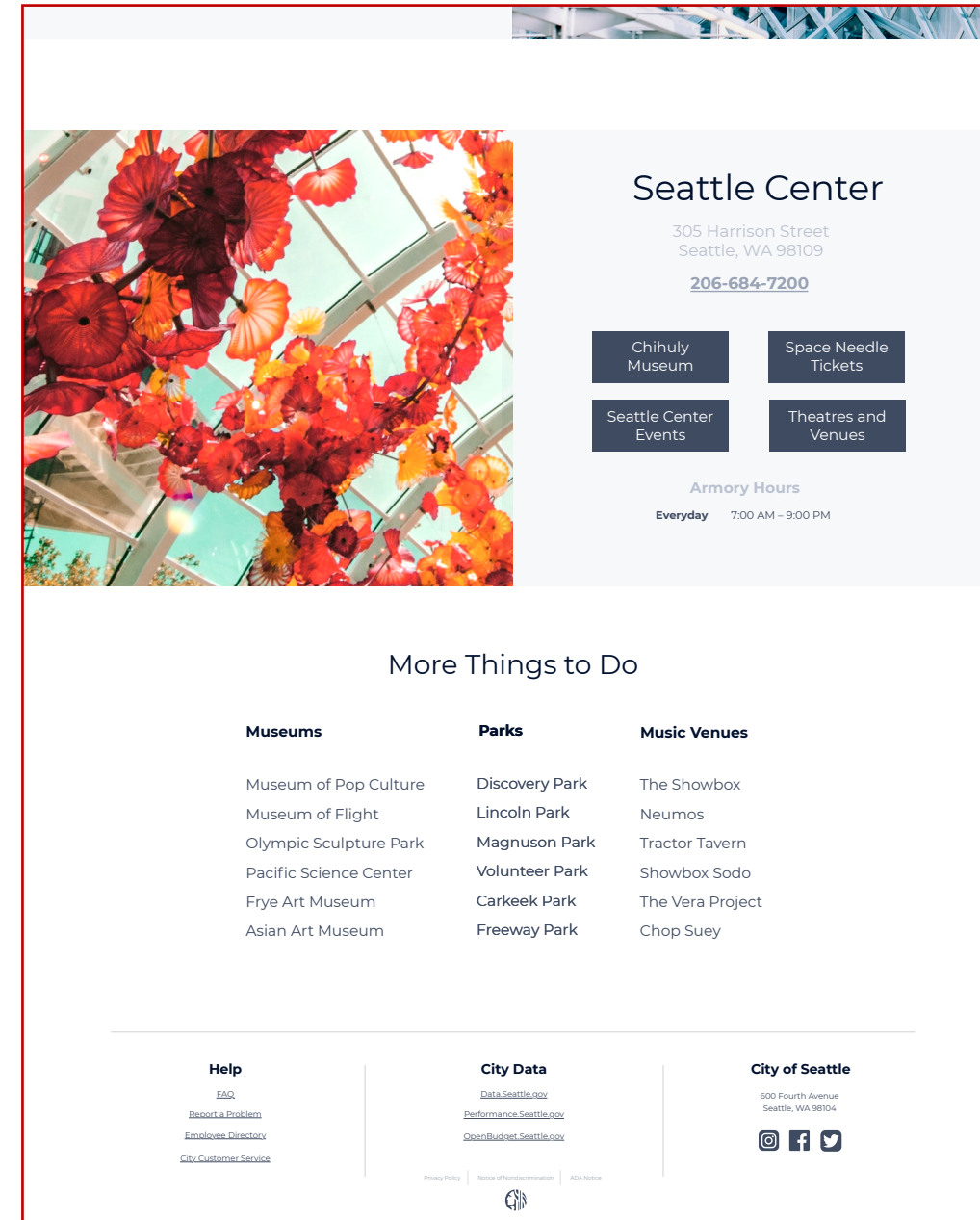
Final Result // Tertiary Desktop

Final Result // Tertiary Mobile

Challenges

One of the biggest challenges with this project was having to completely redesign the City of Seattle as a visual brand on top of condensing, organizing, and prioritizing the massive amount of information that is on the initial home page. I had underestimated how much time it would take to reorganize the structural content of the site. Another main challenge was redesigning this site using a static program like Sketch, when web design is interactive and hardly ever static. This produced a set of complications when explaining certain site features to users that I wasn't able to reproduce in Sketch.

Reflections

Throughout this project, I really honed my organization and prioritization skills with the sheer volume of content information I had to work with. I also discovered I have a knack for condensing and organizing web content that is intuitive and appropriately fits the needs of the user. This skill will prove valuable in the future as I move forward with web design.

Thank You!