

## Usability Evaluation Report

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### **Usability Test Comparing Current and Redesigned Property Tax Assistance Pages within the Texas State Comptroller for Public Accounts Website**

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Dates of Test: March-April 2013  
Location of Test: IX Lab at The University of Texas at Austin

Prepared for: Texas Comptroller's Office  
Phone: (888) 334-4112  
Email: [comptroller.help@cpa.state.tx.us](mailto:comptroller.help@cpa.state.tx.us)

Prepared by: Robert Newell, School of Information, The University of Texas at Austin  
Phone: (512) 471-3821  
Email: [robertvnewell@gmail.com](mailto:robertvnewell@gmail.com)

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## 2 Executive Summary

The project's investigator conducted usability tests of two versions of the Texas Comptroller for Public Accounts website's property tax assistance pages. All tests were conducted in the IX Lab at the University of Texas at Austin School of Information from March 26<sup>th</sup> to April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The purpose of the tests was to compare user performance and ratings of the current live property tax pages with those of redesigned pages due to launch later this year. In addition, insights from both tests could inform further work as development of the redesign continues.

Essentially, the project sought to answer three questions:

1. Are the redesigned pages easier and more efficient to use than those currently on the website?
2. Do the redesigned pages provide a more positive user experience than the current pages?
3. What insights from how users engage with both versions can be used to further improve the redesign?

The project tested five participants on the current site and a separate group of five on the redesign. Each participant performed a series of eight tasks. The tasks and protocol remained identical across both tests.

### *Summary of Findings*

Overall, redesign impressions and performance in comparison to the current site varied greatly across a variety of elements.

- Participants rated some general aspects of the redesign such as ease of navigation and the balance of graphics and text significantly higher than those of the current site. However, participants found the more explicit language on the current site slightly more understandable and useful.
- Task performance ratings such as task completion rates and noncritical errors significantly favored the current site over the redesign. The sites were remarkably even for overall mean time on task. However, participants on the current site completed five of the eight tasks quicker than those testing the redesign.
- The redesign improved usability over the current site in a few key areas. The careful balance of text, graphics, and space on the redesign's homepage made finding certain information much easier than on the homepage of the current site. Also, reserving the left side bar for a few select links made for quicker and clearer access to its featured content.

- Findings also show recurring patterns across both site tests. Most notable is the reluctance of many participants to engage with paragraph-style content. Their screen behavior and comments suggested their preference for collapsible headings, more content in bullet points, and form or resource links pulled from the text and grouped together as featured content in a separate area of the page.

### *Contextualizing the Findings*

Before considering the findings in detail, it is very important to note that, while every effort was made to keep conditions constant across both tests, the two versions of the website pages were simply not on equal footing. The current site's pages contained fully functioning links, and most importantly, its final look and feel. The redesigned pages had not been fully developed. Paths to successfully complete tasks on the new pages sometimes led back to the current site, or to pages that had not been built out yet. In addition, the intended styling (i.e. the look and feel of the site) had yet to be applied. These conditions *significantly* affected participant's impressions of the redesign and their task performance. In many instances, quite usable design choices were not fairly assessed since they lacked their final touches. It is with this in mind that the comparative findings should be considered.

## **3 Methodology**

The scope of this project allowed a test pool of ten participants. Five participants were tested on the current site, while five were tested on the redesigned pages. Each participant performed eight tasks, with the tasks and protocol remaining identical across both tests. The current site was tested from March 26<sup>th</sup> to March 30<sup>th</sup>, while the redesigned pages were tested April 2<sup>nd</sup> to April 6<sup>th</sup>. Each individual session lasted between 40 minutes and one hour.

### **3.1 Testing Environment**

Test sessions were recorded using Morae, which captures both screen and audio activity. Participants accessed the current site through an unrestricted network and the redesign through a secure VPN connection. Participants interacted with both sites via the Mozilla Firefox browser on a desktop PC running the Windows 7 operating system. The following table describes the computing environment in the IX Lab.

<b>Location</b>	IX Lab of the School Information at UT
<b>Computer platforms:</b>	Dell Model OptiPlex 780 with Intel (R) Core(TM) 2 Duo CPU E8400 @ 3.00GHz
<b>Operating system:</b>	Microsoft Windows 7
<b>Internet connection speed:</b>	100.0Mbps
<b>Screen resolution:</b>	1280 by 1024 pixels
<b>Browser options:</b>	Mozilla Firefox 3.6.6 MS Internet Explorer 8.0.7600.16385
<b>Video recording software</b>	MoraeRecorder 3.2.1
<b>Audio recording software</b>	MoraeRecorder 3.2.1
<b>Web cam</b>	Logitech QuickCam Orbit/Sphere MP

### 3.2 Participants

Three participants were recruited by the Comptroller's office through a survey on its website. The investigator recruited the remaining seven participants. All participants were considered representative users of the site, as they indicated they were owners of residential property or that they were likely to own property within the next year.

Demographic data proved quite similar across tests. Age was the most notable difference, as two current site participants were 56 or older (all redesign participants were younger than 56) and three redesign participants were between 26 and 40 (only two current site participants were 40 or younger).

Both groups consisted of four female participants and one male. Four current site participants paid property tax at the time of the test, while only three testing the redesign indicated currently paying these taxes.

Table 1 shows select participant demographic data (For complete pre-test survey data, see Appendix A).

**Table 1: Select demographic data from the pre-test survey**

<b>Participant Demographics</b>		
<b>Categories</b>	<b>Current Site</b>	<b>Redesign</b>
<b>Age</b>		
26-40	2	3
41-55	1	2
56 or older	2	
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	4	4
Male	1	1
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
White	5	4
Hispanic/Latino		1
<b>Education</b>		
Bachelor's	4	3
Master's	1	1
Other		1
<b>Pay property tax?</b>		
Yes	4	3
<b>Been to the website before?</b>		
Yes	2	3

### **3.3 Procedure**

Before the test, participants completed a questionnaire requesting demographic information and familiarity with the Texas Comptroller website (Appendix A).

The facilitator asked participants to perform select tasks on either the current or

redesigned website. Test participants were instructed to think aloud, and their thoughts were recorded by Morae usability testing software. Time on Task was also recorded. The lead investigator served as the facilitator and was the only person in the room with the participant during the test. No observers were ever present.

After each task, satisfaction with the use of the website was assessed by two questions (see Appendix B for overall satisfaction ratings). The first question asked for a rating on a 5-point Likert scale, while the second asked for a brief text-based evaluation.

After the final task and post-task questionnaire, participants took a post-test questionnaire which asks for more general assessments of their experience with the website (See Appendix C for full results).

## **4 Usability Tasks**

The study incorporated the following eight tasks to represent common information-seeking behaviors on the website:

**Task 1:** Locate the application for Residential Homestead Exemption

**Task 2:** Locate the contact information for the participant's local tax assessor-collector

**Task 3:** Protest a property value

**Task 4:** Locate the phone number and physical address for the Fort Worth field office

**Task 5:** Look up an important property tax deadline

**Task 6:** Find general information about appraising timberland

**Task 7:** Find out one's County Appraisal District

**Task 8:** Determine the property tax rate in one's county

(For a task list with navigation paths and destination URL's for both sites, see Appendix D. For a list of the task scenarios the participants read before each task, see Appendix E.)

## **5 Findings**

### **5.1 Overall Design**

This section highlights select participant ratings and comments about each version's overall design. The graphs below (Fig.'s 1 and 2) compare survey ratings for general ease of use and visual design.

**Figure 1: Post-test survey ratings comparing general ease of use**

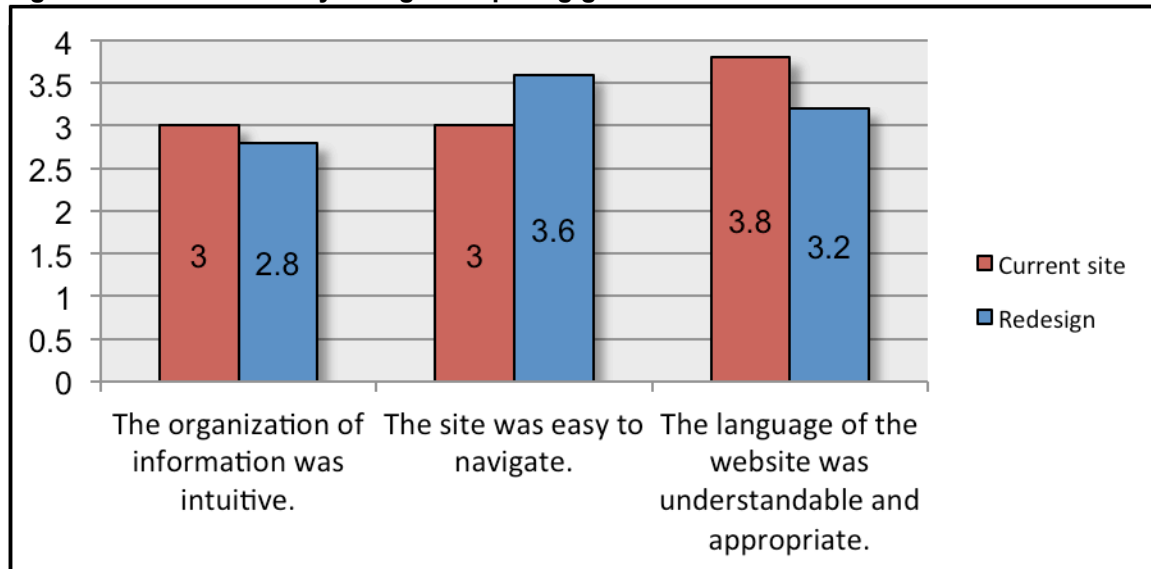


Fig.1 compares survey ratings related to general ease of use. While participants rated both versions similarly with regard to intuitive organization of information, the new pages were considered significantly easier to navigate.



**Figure 2: Notable post-test survey ratings**

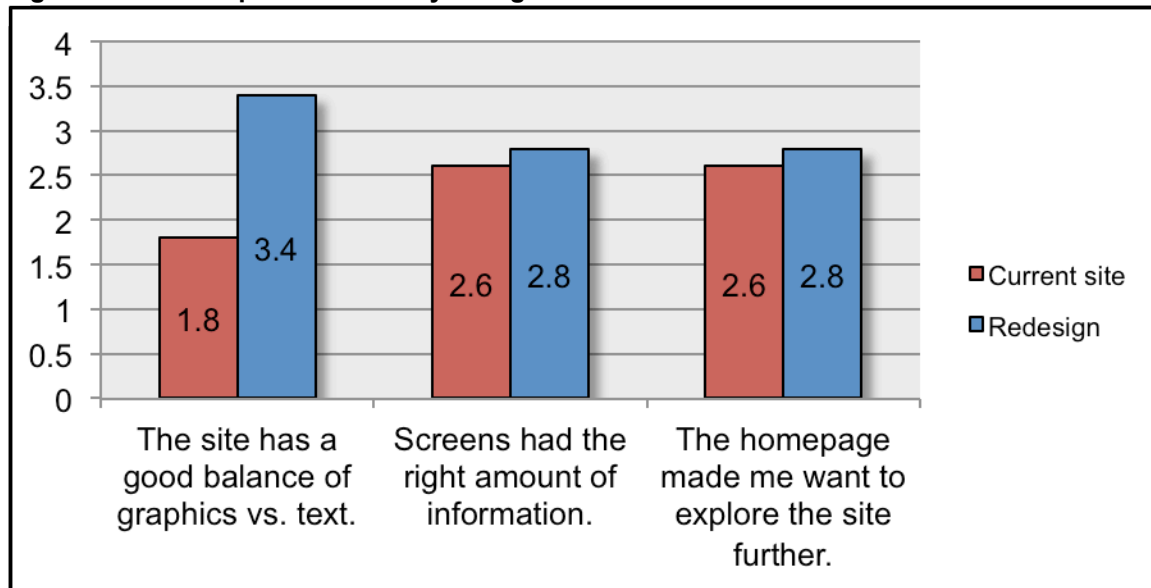


Fig. 2 shows that participants rated the new pages significantly higher for balancing graphics and text, scoring almost twice as high as the older version. The redesign also rated slightly higher on “Screens had the right amount of information” and “The homepage made me want to explore the site further.”

#### *Comments about the current site*

Many of the participants initially noted feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information on the site—either as links on the home page or as text on most pages:

“There was a lot of text on the page, too much so on most pages.” (PC4)

“ . . . there is simply too much information which takes the user some time to become accustomed to the site . . . ” (PC2)

“If I needed to use the site on a regular basis, the homepage wouldn’t scare me off, but the amount of text does make the site seem intimidating.” (PC1)

Yet some also acknowledged the tradeoff between information density and quick accessibility with comments like these:

“There’s way too much text on the page. But it looks like you can find out basic information right away about property taxes.” (PC4)

### *Comments about the redesign*

Many participants testing the redesign immediately felt the design's balance of text, image, and whitespace made the new pages accessible and easy to use:

"The design is clean and uncluttered." (PR3)

"I can just see by looking at it [that it's] easy to get through." (PR5)

Some even saw it as an improvement over government websites they were familiar with:

"I'm struck by how much space there is. A lot of government websites are usually crammed with text." (PR5)

"It looks slicker than the usual government website that usually doesn't have the rolling graphics and images." (PR2)

Overall, the redesigned pages provide an improvement over the current site with regard to perceived ease of use, density of information, and likelihood of exploring the site further. These aspects of the new pages will only improve as the designers continue to develop the look and feel of the site.

## **5.2 Task Performance**

### *Task Completion Rates*

All participants tested on the current site successfully completed Tasks 3,5,6 and 7. Current site participants had the most difficulty with Task 8, *Determine the property tax rate in one's county*, which only one of five successfully completed. Mean completion rate for the current site was 82.5%.

All participants who tested the redesign successfully completed Tasks 1 and 3. Only one of five redesign participants successfully completed Task 6, *Find general information about appraising timberland*, and Task 8, *Determine the tax rate in one's county*. None of the participants were able to find the contact information for the Ft. Worth Field Office (Task 4). Mean completion rate for the redesign was 57.50%

Table 2 shows overall task completion rates per task for both tests.

**Table 2: Task completion rates**  
**Completion rates < 50% are shown in red.**

<b>Completion Rates Per Task</b>		
<b>Task</b>	<b>Current Site</b>	<b>Redesign</b>
Task 1: Homestead Exemption	80.00%	100.00%
Task 2: Tax Assessor-Collector	80.00%	60.00%
Task 3: Protest a Property Value	100.00%	100.00%
Task 4: Ft. Worth Field Office	80.00%	0.00%
Task 5: Property Tax Deadline	100.00%	80.00%
Task 6: Appraising Timberland	100.00%	20.00%
Task 7: Contact Appraisal District	100.00%	80.00%
Task 8: Tax Rate by County	20.00%	20.00%
<b>Overall Completion Rate</b>	<b>82.50%</b>	<b>57.50%</b>

*Noncritical Errors*

Table 3 shows the mean rate of noncritical errors per task and overall. Participants testing the current site made slightly fewer errors while completing the test than participants accessing the redesign (mean of 1.0 vs. 1.4). Current site participants committed no errors on Task 7. Task 8, *County Property Tax Rate*, gave current site participants considerable trouble, with a mean of 3.6 errors per participant.

Participants testing the new pages committed very few errors on Task 3, *Protest a Property Value* (mean of .8) and Task 7, *Contact Appraisal District* (mean of .8). Participants committed the most errors attempting Task 4, *Ft. Worth Field Office* and Task 6, *Appraising Timberland* (both means of 2.2).

**Table 3: Mean noncritical errors**  
**Noncritical error rates >2 minutes are shown in red.**

<b>Mean Noncritical Errors Per Task</b>		
<b>Task</b>	<b>Current Site</b>	<b>Redesign</b>
Task 1: Homestead Exemption	1.6	1.2
Task 2: Tax Assessor-Collector	1.0	2.0
Task 3: Protest a Property Value	0.2	0.8
Task 4: Ft. Worth Field Office	0.6	2.2
Task 5: Property Tax Deadline	0.2	1.0
Task 6: Appraising Timberland	0.6	2.2
Task 7: Contact Appraisal District	0.0	0.4
Task 8: Tax Rate by County	3.6	1.6
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.4</b>

*Time on Task*

The most striking finding with regard to time on task (Table 4) is that the overall means for both sites were virtually identical (107.83 seconds vs. 107.66 seconds). Participants testing the current site took on average 161.37 seconds to locate the Residence Homestead Exemption form (Task 1) and 109.02 seconds to find general information about appraising timberland (Task 6). The current site group found the contact information for their tax assessor-collector (Task 2) fairly quickly at 40.95 seconds, and had the greatest difficulty locating the correct information to determine their county’s current tax rate (Task 8), spending on average 242.35 seconds (just over four minutes) on the task. (Task 8 yielded a number of failed attempts, but these participants’ times were still factored into the mean.)

The redesign yielded the shortest average completion time for any one task—participants found their appraisal district (Task 7) in an average time of 21.47 seconds. However, they took more than two minutes to find the Residence Homestead Exemption form (Task 1), the address for the Ft. Worth field office (Task 4), general information about appraising timberland (Task 6), and their county’s current tax rate (Task 8), respectively.

For Task 8, time on task holds less value than completion rate, as only one participant from each group was able to find the requested information.

**Table 4: Mean time on task**

Task times >2 minutes are shown in red. Times from failed task attempts are included.

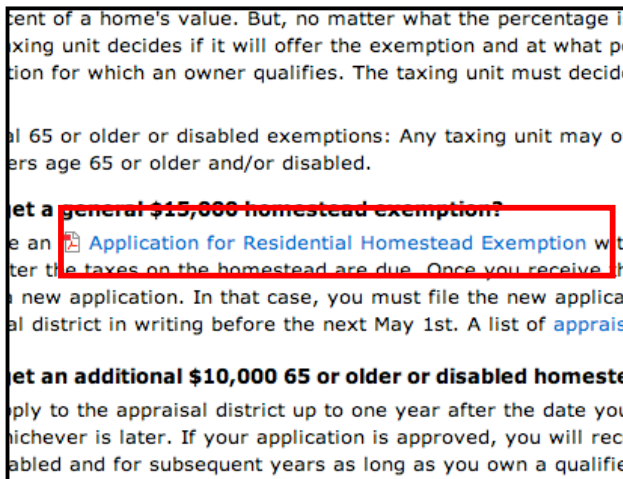
Mean Time on Task		
Task	Current Site	Redesign
Task 1: Homestead Exemption	161.37	133.69
Task 2: Tax Assessor-Collector	40.95	104.73
Task 3: Protest a Property Value	50.03	61.14
Task 4: Ft. Worth Field Office	89.48	167.20
Task 5: Property Tax Deadline	85.12	116.64
Task 6: Appraising Timberland	109.02	131.56
Task 7: Contact Appraisal District	84.34	21.47
Task 8: Tax Rate by County	242.35	124.83
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>107.83</b>	<b>107.66</b>

### 5.3 Qualitative Results and Analysis

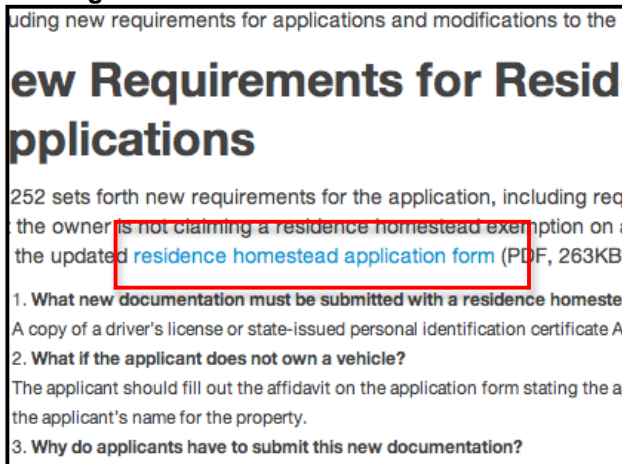
*Task 1: Locate the application for Residential Homestead Exemption*

Participants found the Residential Homestead Exemption form quicker, and with fewer errors, on the redesigned pages than on the current site. However, behavior on both sites suggests task performance could still be improved. Both the current site and the redesign include the form on several pages as an inconspicuous link amidst a large amount of text. (see Fig.'s 3 and 4.)

**Figure 3: Homestead Exemption link on the current site**



**Figure 4: Homestead Exemption link on redesign**



Many participants found the correct page quickly, but then did not carefully scan it, missing the link at least once.

On the current site, one participant hesitated to scan the page, noting the following:

“There’s too much text, I’m not going to read all of it.” (PC4)

She spotted the link eventually, but the delay added to her time on task. The lone participant who failed the task also reached the correct page, but did not notice the link before clicking away.

On the redesign, two participants reached one of the pages with the Homestead link, only to look elsewhere. One participant reached one of the pages with the link twice (the 2011 Changes to the Homestead Exemption page) only to miss the form both times. She eventually caught it on the Exemptions FAQ page.

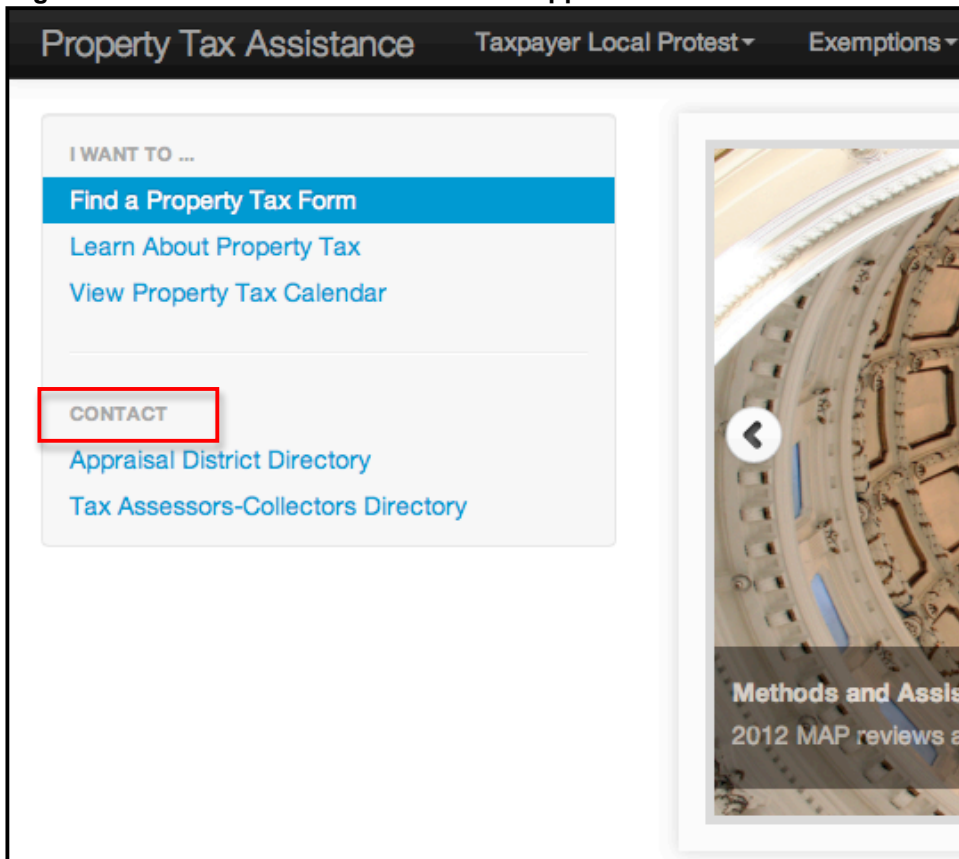
On both sites, several participants demonstrated a reluctance to read through the text on the page and did not notice the link within the text while scanning.

*Task 2: Locate the contact information for the participant's local tax assessor-collector*

Placed high in the left sidebar under "Contact" on the redesign home page, the local tax assessor-collector directory link seems ideally positioned. However, only three of the five participants tested found it. Average time on task was also notably long at around 105 seconds. The two who failed to complete the task clicked first on the Contact Property Tax Assistance Division (PTAD) link at the bottom of the page, sending them in the wrong direction. Another hovered over the PTAD link before scrolling back up and eventually noticing the correct link. Why, if the link is so well placed, were participants so reluctant to catch it?

The answer likely lies in the lack of intentional CSS styling on the redesigned pages (see Fig. 5).

Figure 5: Left side bar with minimal CSS applied to the content



Without the CSS intended to formalize the look and feel of the site, terms such as “Contact” that would normally be prominent, lacked emphasis. As a result, many participants missed the Tax Assessors-Collectors Directory link either on first pass or throughout their attempt at the task. It would be unfair to conclude then that poor performance on Task 2 is due to a continuing usability issue. Once CSS is applied it seems likely that finding the user’s local tax collector-assessor collector will become much easier.

*Task 4: Locate the phone number and physical address for the Fort Worth field office*

No one testing the redesign successfully completed this task. Four of five participants found success on the current site. The decrease in performance is likely due to the fact that the current site includes an explicit link, “Field Offices,” under the heading “Contacts” on the Texas Taxes page (Fig. 6).



**Figure 6: Field offices link on current site  
(Texas Taxes)**



On the new pages, users reach the field offices page through the Contact PTAD link on the home page rather than an explicit field offices link (Fig. 7).

**Figure 7: PTAD on the redesign homepage  
(path to field office info)**

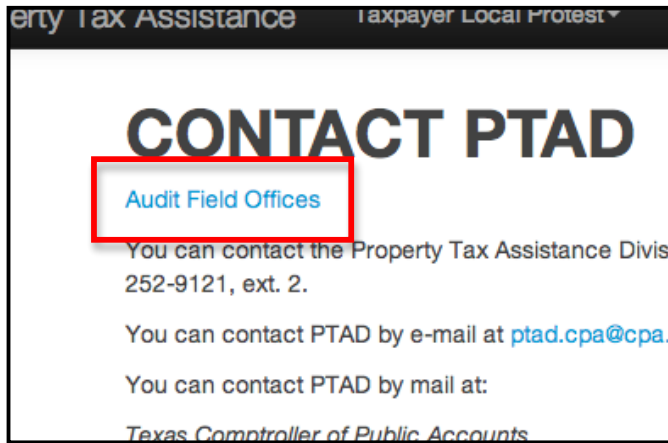


None of the participants understood the how field offices and PTAD were related. Three participants eventually clicked on this link, but none seemed sure that field office information would follow. One of these three chose the link only after two other incorrect choices. Once the participants arrived at the page, either they did not notice the field offices link (Fig. 8), or they did not understand that the link, "Audit Field Offices," would actually take them to the requested information. In fact, one participant saw the link and noted the following:

"I'm not looking for an audit though I'm looking for info on property taxes" (PR5).

As a result, none of the three participants clicked on the link to complete the task.

**Figure 8: Field offices link on Contact PTAD**



Evidence suggests, then, that the lack of an explicit “Field Offices” link on the homepage, lack of emphasis in the styling of the link on the following page (the recurring CSS issue) and an unexpected word choice (“Audit”), kept all participants testing the redesign from completing the task.

*Task 6: Find general information about appraising timberland*

Only one of five participants successfully completed this task on the redesign, while all participants found the information on the current site. The notable difference between the two sites is that the new pages separate general information about agricultural appraisal and timberland appraisal (Fig. 9), while the current site presents this information on the same page and the information is accessed through the same link (Fig. 10).

Figure 9: Agricultural and Timberland Appraisal link on current site's homepage



Figure 10: Agricultural Appraisal link on redesigned homepage



“Timberland” is not included in the link title or anywhere else on the home page of the redesign. As a result, all participants hesitated—and most tried other options—before eventually clicking on the “Agricultural Appraisal” link. Some participants explicitly stated the link title did not align with the task phrasing of “wooded rural property”:

“I wouldn’t consider it Agricultural. It’s rural, but . . .” (PR2)

“I don’t think it’s agricultural, because that’s different from wooded land.”  
(PR3)

In addition, because the redesign separates information on timberland appraisal from agricultural appraisal, the destination page to complete the task has changed to its closest approximation, the *Manual for the Appraisal of Timberland* PDF, accessed through the following path:

Appraisal Methods>Appraisal Manuals>Manual for the Appraisal of Timberland (Fig. 11)

**Figure 11: Timberland appraisal information is accessed through Appraisal Methods on the new homepage**



Without “Timberland” present on the home page, and without the general agricultural and timberland appraisal information page that exists on the current site, it is easy to see why participants testing the redesign had more difficulty completing Task 6.

*Task 8: Determine the property tax rate in one’s county*

Even though the completion rate was low for Task 8 (on each site, only one out of five found success) a closer look at the results shows the new pages do provide improved access to county property tax rates.

One can see this more clearly by considering the task in two parts. For the first part—finding the correct link on the home page—three participants testing the redesign found the “Tax Rates” link fairly quickly and with no errors. In contrast, only one participant scrolled all the way to the bottom of the current site’s home page to find and click on “Tax Rates and Levies by County.” In addition, the

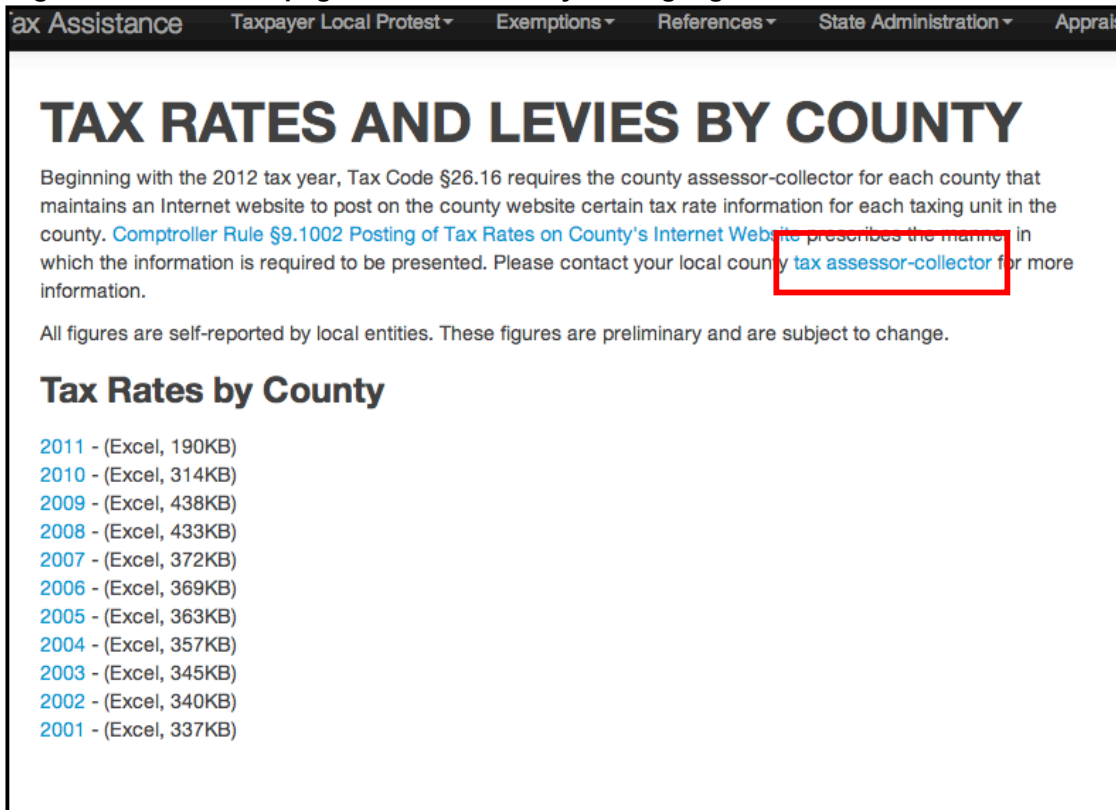
remaining current site participants spent a great deal of time—each over two minutes—scanning and scrolling through the home page, unable to find the link located at the bottom of the page.

The redesign participants had more difficulty completing the second part of the task as presented in the task scenario:

“ . . . . Please use the website to determine where you need to look online, or who you need to contact, to find out *the 2013 property tax rate for Williamson County.*”

The Tax Rates and Levies by County page on both sites provides links to a series of Excel spreadsheets showing tax rates up to 2011. However, to find the 2013 rate (hypothetically), users must read the text at the top of the page, which directs users to their local tax assessor-collector through a link to the directory (Fig. 12).

**Figure 12: Tax Rates page with the directory link highlighted**



Two of the three participants testing the redesign did not carefully read the text at the top of the page directing them to their tax assessor-collector. One participant clicked away and returned twice yet still did not give the text a careful read. Both of these participants eventually (and unsuccessfully) concluded the task by downloading the Excel file with the 2011 tax rates.

This evidence shows that, while the redesign improved access to the Tax Rates page by providing a more findable link, the way the content is presented on the page made successfully completing the task difficult.

## **6 Recommendations**

From the performance data, participant ratings, and above analysis, I suggest the following recommendations as the Comptroller's Office continues to develop the new site. The list of recommendations appears first, followed by more extended descriptions and illustrations. A list of the affected tasks and a priority rating accompanies each detailed recommendation.

### **6.1 Summary of Recommendations**

- 1. Include a link to the Residence Homestead Exemption form on the Residence Homesteads page*
- 2. On all pages with form and resource links inserted into text, include a list of these links in a right side bar under the heading, "Related Forms," or "Forms and Resources"*
- 3. When possible, reduce and organize text using bullet points rather than full paragraphs*
- 4. Make questions on FAQ pages collapsible*
- 5. Provide an "Audit Field Offices" link under the Property Tax Assistance Division link on the home page, and organize both under "Contact"*
- 6. Change the "Agricultural Appraisal" link to "Agricultural and Timberland Appraisal" and restore the content from the Agricultural and Timberland Appraisal page of the current site*
- 7. Make the tax assessor-collector directory link more findable by creating "2012-Present" and "Before 2012" headings, and adding brief, instructional text*
- 8. Run the test again when the look and feel of the pages is complete*

### **6.2 Recommendations in Detail**

- 1. Include a link to the Residence Homestead Exemption form on the Residence Homesteads page*

Task 1, Medium Priority

Most participants testing the new site had no trouble locating the Residence Homesteads page. However, many hesitated before clicking through, and their decisions were distributed across all three current choices. Many users landing on this page will likely be seeking the form. Provide a link to the form in the current

list items (see Fig.'s 13 and 14).

Figure 13: List items on the Residence Homesteads page currently in the redesign

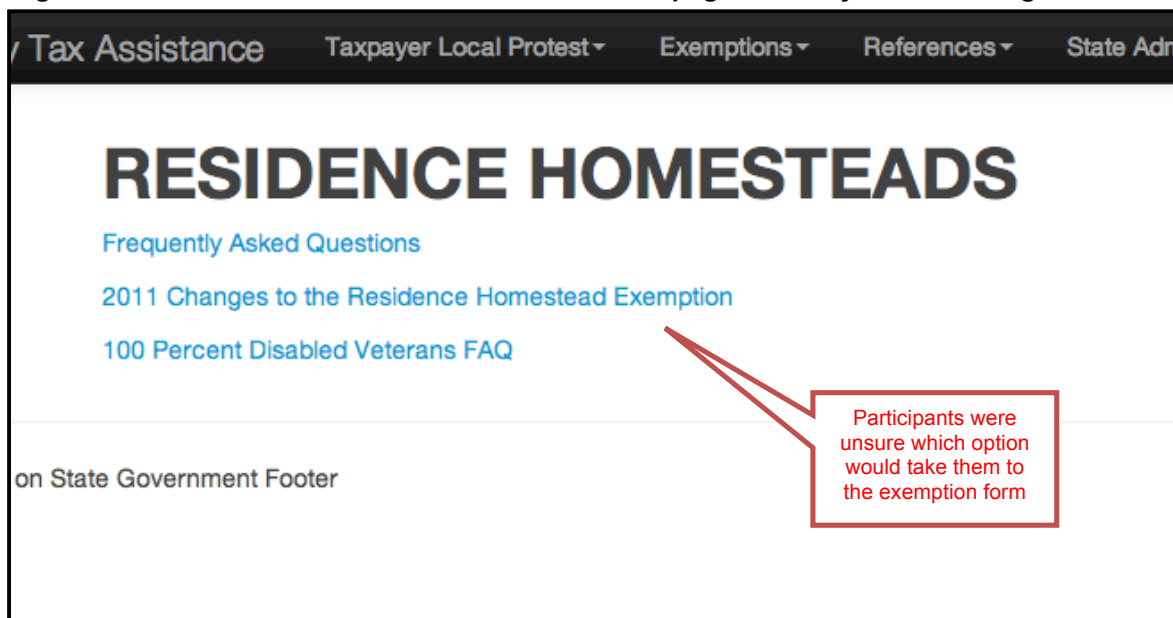
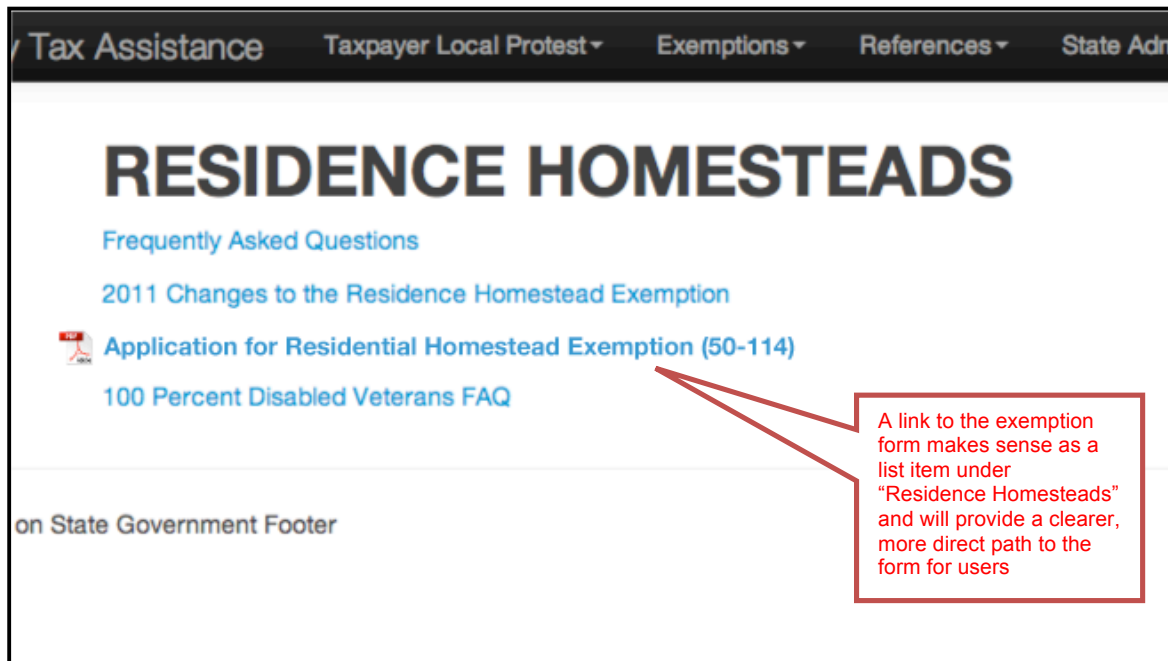


Figure 14: Suggested change to the Residence Homesteads page



2. On all pages with form and resource links inserted into text, include a list of these links in a right side bar under the heading, "Related Forms," or "Forms and Resources"

All tasks, High Priority

Many participants missed links to destination pages that were inserted into text with only a blue font for emphasis. Since a lot of the site's pages are unavoidably text heavy, include the forms discussed in the text in a right side bar with the heading, "Related Forms." (see Fig.'s 15 and 16)

Figure 15: Exemptions page currently in the redesign

ax Assistance Taxpayer Local Protest Exemptions References State Administration Appraisal Assessment/Collection

## EXEMPTIONS

### Do I, as a homeowner, get a tax break on my taxes?

You may apply for homestead exemptions on your principal residence. Homestead exemptions remove part of your home's value from taxation, so they lower your taxes.

For example, your home is appraised at \$100,000, and you qualify for a \$15,000 exemption (this is the amount mandated for school districts), you will pay school taxes on the home as if it was worth only \$85,000. Taxing units have the option to offer a separate exemption of up to 20 percent of the total value.

### Do all homes qualify for homestead exemptions?

No, only a homeowner's principal residence qualifies. To qualify, a home must meet the definition of a residence homestead: The home's owner must be an individual (for example: not a corporation or other business entity) and use the home as his or her principal residence on January 1 of the tax year. If you are age 65 or older, or disabled, the January 1 ownership and residency are not required for the age 65 or disabled homestead exemption.

### What is a homestead?

A homestead can be a separate structure, condominium or a manufactured home located on owned or leased land, as long as the individual living in the home owns it. A homestead can include up to 20 acres, if the land is owned by the homeowner and used for a purpose related to the residential use of the homestead.

### What homestead exemptions are available?

There are several types of exemptions you may receive.

- School taxes: All residence homestead owners may receive a \$15,000 homestead exemption from their home's value for school taxes.
- County taxes: If a county collects a special tax for farm-to-market roads or flood control, a residence homestead owner may receive a \$3,000 exemption for this tax. If the county grants an optional exemption for homeowners age 65 or older or disabled, the owners will receive only the local-option exemption.
- Age 65 or older and disabled exemptions: Individuals 65 and older and/or disabled residence homestead owners may

Property Tax Quick Search  
Can't Find what you're looking for? Search here.  
Search Bar goes here

Include in this space links to forms and resources referenced on the page



Figure 16: Suggested Exemptions page with related form and resource links in sidebar

**EXEMPTIONS**

## Do I, as a homeowner, get a tax break from property taxes?

You may apply for homestead exemptions on your principal residence. Homestead exemptions remove part of your home's value from taxation, so they lower your taxes.

For example, your home is appraised at \$100,000, and you qualify for a \$15,000 exemption (this is the amount mandated for school districts), you will pay school taxes on the home as if it was worth only \$85,000. Taxing units have the option to offer a separate exemption of up to 20 percent of the total value.

## Do all homes qualify for homestead exemptions?

No, only a homeowner's principal residence qualifies. To qualify, a home must meet the definition of a residence homestead: The home's owner must be an individual (for example: not a corporation or other business entity) and use the home as his or her principal residence on January 1 of the tax year. If you are age 65 or older, or disabled, the January 1 ownership and residency are not required for the age 65 or disabled homestead exemption.

## What is a homestead?

A homestead can be a separate structure, condominium or a manufactured home located on owned or leased land, as long as the individual living in the home owns it. A homestead can include up to 20 acres, if the land is owned by the homeowner and used for a purpose related to the residential use of the homestead.

## What homestead exemptions are available?

There are several types of exemptions you may receive.

- School taxes: All residence homestead owners may receive a \$15,000 homestead exemption from their home's value for school taxes.
- County taxes: If a county collects a special tax for farm-to-market roads or flood control, a residence homestead owner may receive a \$3,000 exemption for this tax. If the county grants an optional exemption for homeowners age 65 or older or disabled, the owners will receive only the local-option exemption.
- Age 65 or older and disabled exemptions: Individuals 65 and older and/or disabled residence homestead owners may

**Property Tax Quick Search**  
Can't Find what you're looking for? Search here.  
Search Bar goes here

**Forms**

- Application for Residential Homestead Exemption (50-114)
- Application for Disabled Veteran's or Survivor's Exemptions
- Lessee's Affidavit of Primarily Non Income Producing Vehicle Use
- Lessor's Application for Personal Use Lease Automobile Exemptions

**Resources**

- Appraisal District Directory
- 100 Percent Disabled Veterans FAQ

**3. When possible, reduce and organize text using bullet points rather than full paragraphs**

All tasks, High Priority

Throughout testing, several participants commented on the difficulty scanning the large amounts of text on certain pages. Bullet points in place of lengthy paragraphs would help distinguish important points and help users find the needed information quicker.

**4. Make questions on FAQ pages collapsible**

All tasks, Medium Priority

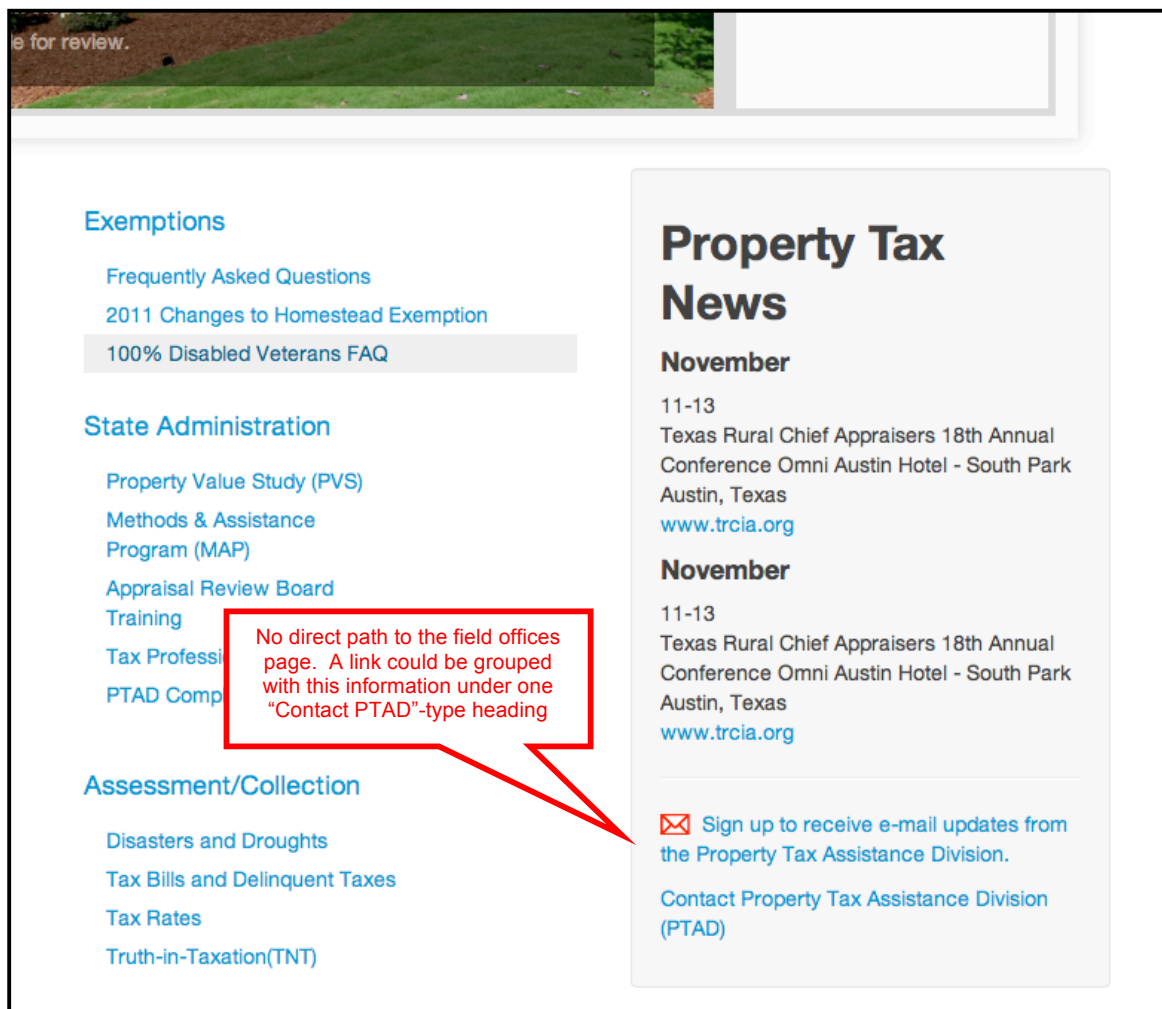
One way to reduce text on a page is to make questions collapsible so the answers are hidden until the questions are selected. This will allow users to get an overview of what the questions cover and find the relevant question(s) more quickly.

**5. Provide a "Field Offices" or "Audit Field Offices" link under the Property Tax Assistance Division link on the home page, and organize both under a "Contact" heading**

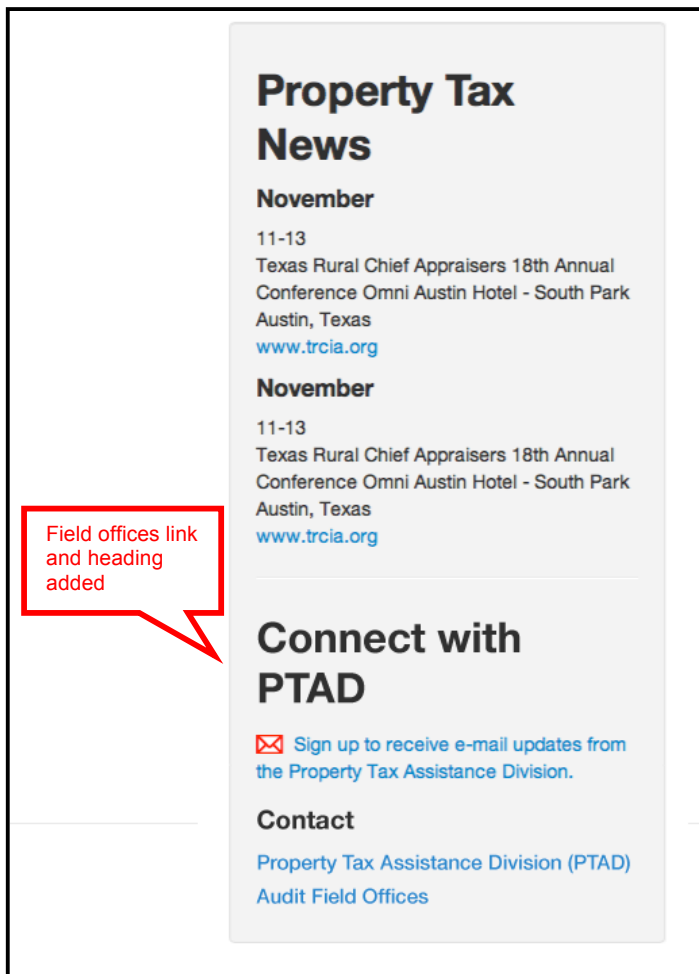
Task 4, High Priority

Even though audit field offices fall under the umbrella of PTAD, it would be helpful to provide the contact information on the home page for anyone specifically seeking this information (per the scenario for Task 4) (see Fig.'s 17 and 18). This task is rated as "high priority" because it yielded a 0% completion rate. However, it is a carryover from the 2007 and 2008 tests. If this is not considered as common or relevant today, then the recommendation should assume lower priority.

Figure 17: PTAD contact information at the bottom of the redesign's current home page



**Figure 18: Suggested change to home page adding a field offices link**



*6. Change the “Agricultural Appraisal” link to “Agricultural and Timberland Appraisal” and restore the content from the Agricultural and Timberland Appraisal page of the current site*

Task 6, High Priority

A notable difference across tests was the high success rate on the current site for Task 6 and the low success rate on the new pages. The difference is likely due to the lack of a clear path to information about timberland appraisal. Users do not intuitively know to choose “Appraisal Methods” and then “Appraisal Manuals” to reach the information provided in the timberland appraisal manual. In addition, the page linked from “Agricultural Appraisal” no longer contains the general information about agricultural, timberland, and other special appraisals.

I recommend changing “Agricultural Appraisal” on the home page back to “Agricultural and Timberland Appraisal” and restoring the content found on this page of the current site. This information would seem helpful to a user who owns rural land and would like to understand the appraisal options, yet it is not aggregated on a single page in the redesign as it is with the current site.

(Alternatively, the link and page could be retitled, “Appraisal of Rural Land,” which would encompass all special appraisals described in the content, including land used for agricultural, timberland, recreational, or wildlife management purposes.)

7. Make the tax assessor-collector directory link more findable by creating “2012-Present” and “Before 2012” headings, and adding brief, instructional text

Task 8, High Priority

Finding a tax rate proved quite frustrating for those tested on the current site. With just a few content changes, the redesign could dramatically improve user experience with this task. On the Tax Rates page, emphasize how obtaining tax rate information depends on year with two headings: “2012-Present” and “Before 2012” (replacing “Tax Rates by County”). The top paragraph would fall under “2012-Present” and be preceded by brief highlighted instruction to contact the appropriate tax assessor-collector. The list of Excel spreadsheets would fall under “Before 2012” (see Fig.’s 19 and 20)

Figure 19: Tax Rates page currently in the redesign

The screenshot shows the 'TAX RATES AND LEVIES BY COUNTY' page. At the top is a navigation bar with links: Property Tax Assistance, Taxpayer Local Protest, Exemptions, References, State Administration, Appraisal, and Assessment/Collection. The main heading is 'TAX RATES AND LEVIES BY COUNTY'. Below it is a paragraph explaining that starting in 2012, Tax Code §26.16 requires county assessor-collectors to post tax rate information on their websites, with a link to 'Comptroller Rule §9.1002 Posting of Tax Rates on County's Internet Website'. A second paragraph states that all figures are self-reported by local entities. Below this is the section 'Tax Rates by County' with a list of links for each year from 2011 to 2001, each followed by '(Excel, [file size])'. A third section is 'Special District Tax Rates', which includes a paragraph about unverified data for special purpose districts and links for 2011. Two red callout boxes with arrows point to specific elements: one points to the paragraph about self-reported figures with the text 'Tax rate instruction and link lost in text', and the other points to the 'Tax Rates by County' heading with the text 'Headings could be used to separate older from more recent tax rates'.

Property Tax Assistance Taxpayer Local Protest Exemptions References State Administration Appraisal Assessment/Collection

## TAX RATES AND LEVIES BY COUNTY

Beginning with the 2012 tax year, Tax Code §26.16 requires the county assessor-collector for each county that maintains an Internet website to post on the county website certain tax rate information for each taxing unit in the county. [Comptroller Rule §9.1002 Posting of Tax Rates on County's Internet Website](#) prescribes the manner in which the information is required to be presented. Please contact your local county [tax assessor-collector](#) for more information.

All figures are self-reported by local entities. These figures are preliminary and are subject to change.

### Tax Rates by County

- [2011 - \(Excel, 190KB\)](#)
- [2010 - \(Excel, 314KB\)](#)
- [2009 - \(Excel, 438KB\)](#)
- [2008 - \(Excel, 433KB\)](#)
- [2007 - \(Excel, 372KB\)](#)
- [2006 - \(Excel, 369KB\)](#)
- [2005 - \(Excel, 363KB\)](#)
- [2004 - \(Excel, 357KB\)](#)
- [2003 - \(Excel, 345KB\)](#)
- [2002 - \(Excel, 340KB\)](#)
- [2001 - \(Excel, 337KB\)](#)

### Special District Tax Rates

Starting in tax year 2011, rate and levy information for special purpose districts will be unverified data provided by appraisal districts and will be reported separately from other taxing entities.

[2011 - \(Excel, 180KB\)](#)

An \* by the taxing unit name indicates that the appraisal district did not respond to the survey conducted by the Property Tax Assistance Division.

An \*\* by the taxing unit name indicates that the taxing unit is a community college district that may collect a tax in some school districts under Education Code Chapter 130. This allows for a different tax rate for branch campuses in those school districts.

Tax rate instruction and link lost in text

Headings could be used to separate older from more recent tax rates

Figure 20: Suggested changes to Tax Rates page

Property Tax Assistance Taxpayer Local Protest Exemptions References State Administration Appraisal Assessment/Collectio

## TAX RATES AND LEVIES BY COUNTY

### 2012 - Present

For your current tax rate, or any rates dating back to 2012, contact your local county [tax assessor-collector](#).

Beginning with the 2012 tax year, Tax Code §26.16 requires the county assessor-collector for each county that maintains an Internet website to post on the county website certain tax rate information for each taxing unit in the county. [Comptroller Rule §9.1002 Posting of Tax Rates on County's Internet Website](#) prescribes the manner in which the information is required to be presented. Please contact your local county [tax assessor-collector](#) for more information.

All figures are self-reported by local entities. These figures are preliminary and are subject to change.

### Before 2012

- [2011 - \(Excel, 190KB\)](#)
- [2010 - \(Excel, 314KB\)](#)
- [2009 - \(Excel, 438KB\)](#)
- [2008 - \(Excel, 433KB\)](#)
- [2007 - \(Excel, 372KB\)](#)
- [2006 - \(Excel, 369KB\)](#)
- [2005 - \(Excel, 363KB\)](#)
- [2004 - \(Excel, 357KB\)](#)
- [2003 - \(Excel, 345KB\)](#)
- [2002 - \(Excel, 340KB\)](#)
- [2001 - \(Excel, 337KB\)](#)

### Special District Tax Rates

Starting in tax year 2011, rate and levy information for special purpose districts will be unverified data provided by appraisal districts and will be reported separately from other taxing entities.

[2011 - \(Excel, 180KB\)](#)

An \* by the taxing unit name indicates that the appraisal district did not respond to the survey conducted by the Property Tax Assistance Division.

An \*\* by the taxing unit name indicates that the taxing unit is a community college district that may collect a tax in some school districts under Education Code Chapter 130. This allows for a different tax rate for branch campuses in those school districts.

**8. Run the test again when the look and feel of the pages is complete**

All tasks, **Highest Priority**

As may be evident, all of these results must be qualified with the fact that the test simply was not an apples-to-apples comparison. The current site was a complete, working site, while the new pages are still in development. The look and feel of the new site may seem inconsequential to a usability test, but CSS—background colors as well as font size, color and emphasis—directly affects findability, and its

lack of refinement negatively impacted all performance metrics and ratings for the redesign. Even details like the lack of a state seal and paths that lead back to the current site affected overall impressions.

I recommend running the same test again once the look and feel of the new pages has been fully established. Even with no other changes, I am confident the agency's stakeholders will get a much more valid picture of the progress the project's designers and developers have made toward improving user experience on the Texas Comptroller for Public Accounts website.

## Appendix A: Pre-Test Survey and Results

<b>Current Site</b>							
What is your age?							
	18-25	26-40	41-55	56 or older			
PC1			X				
PC2				X			
PC3				X			
PC4		X					
PC5		X					
What is your gender?							
PC1	female						
PC2	female						
PC3	female						
PC4	female						
PC5	male						
What is your native language?							
	English	Another language					
PC1	X						
PC2	X						
PC3	X						
PC4	X						
PC5	X						
How would you classify yourself?							
	American Indian or Alaskan Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic/Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Would rather not say
PC1						X	
PC2						X	
PC3						X	
PC4						X	
PC5						X	
What is the highest level of education you have completed?							

	High school or equivalent	Vocational/ technical school (2 years)	Associate' s degree	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Doctoral degree	Profession al degree
PC1				X			
PC2					X		
PC3				X			
PC4				X			
PC5				X			
<b>Do you currently pay property tax?</b>							
	Yes	No					
PC1	X						
PC2		X					
PC3	X						
PC4	X						
PC5	X						
<b>Please indicate your occupation and job title, and give a simple description of your daily job responsibilities.</b>							
	<b>Comment</b>						
PC1	Office Manager-run the office						
PC2	Associate professor and writer/editor. I teach thrice weekly for Austin CC, creative fiction and nonfiction classes. Additionally write and edit on a free-lance basis.						
PC3	retired state employee						
PC4	Electronic Publishing Specialist/Instructional Designer - create online content for high school level courses, create CBEs (credit by exams), maintain and update the learning management system we use.						
PC5	I work for the Navy. I'm a pilot at a base in California. I work normal business hours Monday through Friday.						
<b>How long have you been using the internet?</b>							
	Less than 12 months	1-3 years	4-6 years	More than 7 years			
PC1				X			
PC2				X			
PC3				X			
PC4				X			
PC5				X			
<b>How frequently have you accessed the web in the past 3 months?</b>							
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Less than once a month	Never		
PC1	X						
PC2	X						
PC3	X						



PC4	X							
PC5	X							
Have you visited the Texas Comptroller's Office website? ( <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/">http://www.window.state.tx.us/</a> )								
	Yes	No						
PC1		X						
PC2	X							
PC3		X						
PC4	X							
PC5		X						
What types of property tax-related information would be useful to you? (please rate the following 8 items)								
Information about property tax appraisals								
	Not useful	1	2	3	4	5	Very Useful	
PC1					X			
PC2				X				
PC3		X						
PC4						X		
PC5				X				
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.2</b>							
Tax education and training resources								
	Not useful	1	2	3	4	5	Very Useful	
PC1				X				
PC2				X				
PC3		X						
PC4					X			
PC5				X				
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.8</b>							
Which local office handles certain property tax transactions and questions								
	Not useful	1	2	3	4	5	Very Useful	
PC1				X				
PC2					X			
PC3		X						
PC4					X			
PC5			X					
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.8</b>							
How to pay property taxes								
	Not useful	1	2	3	4	5	Very Useful	
PC1					X			
PC2						X		

PC3			X				
PC4			X				
PC5						X	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.4</b>						
How to pay property taxes electronically							
	Not useful	1	2	3	4	5	Very Useful
PC1						X	
PC2						X	
PC3			X				
PC4			X				
PC5						X	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.6</b>						
Payment deadlines and penalties							
	Not useful	1	2	3	4	5	Very Useful
PC1						X	
PC2						X	
PC3						X	
PC4			X				
PC5						X	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.4</b>						
Current property tax rates for my county							
	Not useful	1	2	3	4	5	Very Useful
PC1						X	
PC2						X	
PC3				X			
PC4						X	
PC5						X	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.4</b>						
Downloadable tax forms							
	Not useful	1	2	3	4	5	Very Useful
PC1						X	
PC2						X	
PC3				X			
PC4					X		
PC5				X			
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4</b>						

## Redesign

### What is your age?

	18-25	26-40	41-55	56 or older
PR1			X	
PR2			X	
PR3		X		
PR4		X		
PR5		X		

### What is your gender?

PR1	female
PR2	female
PR3	Male
PR4	Female
PR5	female

### What is your native language?

	English	Another language
PR1	X	
PR2	X	
PR3	X	
PR4	X	
PR5	X	

### How would you classify yourself?

	American Indian or Alaskan Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic/Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Would rather not say
PR1						X	
PR2						X	
PR3				X			
PR4						X	
PR5						X	

### What is the highest level of education you have completed?

	High school or equivalent	Vocational/technical school (2 years)	Associate's degree	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Doctoral degree	Professional degree
PR1						X	MFA
PR2				X			
PR3				X			
PR4				X			
PR5							
Do you currently pay property tax?							
	Yes	No					
PR1.5	X						
PR1		X					
PR2	X						
PR3		X					
PR4	X						
PR5							
Please indicate your occupation and job title, and give a simple description of your daily job responsibilities.							
	Comment						
PR1	Co-Producing Artistic Director of a Theatre Company in Austin, TX and Co-Director of a theatre camp for teenaged girls.						
PR2	technology commercialization masters - consulting/contract work						
PR3	Business Analyst. I investigate and document business processes (both manual processes and IT systems) and implement IT solutions for the UT Austin International Office.						
P4	Teaching assistant at School of Information. Help students with tech issues, teach short courses, maintain lab equipment and software.						
PR5	Teaching Assistant						
How long have you been using the internet?							
	Less than 12 months	1-3 years	4-6 years	More than 7 years			
PR1						X	
PR2						X	
PR3						X	
PR4						X	

PR5										X	
How frequently have you accessed the web in the past 3 months?											
										Less than once a month	Never
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly								
PR1	X										
PR2	X										
PR3	X										
PR4	X										
PR5	X										
Have you visited the Texas Comptroller's Office website? ( <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/">http://www.window.state.tx.us/</a> )											
	Yes	No									
PR1	X										
PR2	X										
PR3	X										
PR4		X									
PR5		X									
What types of property tax-related information would be useful to you? (please rate the following 8 items)											
Information about property tax appraisals											
	Not useful	1	2	3	4	5				Very Useful	
PR1				X							
PR2										X	
PR3										X	
PR4									X		
PR5									X		
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.2</b>										
Tax education and training resources											
	Not useful	1	2	3	4	5				Very Useful	
PR1										X	
PR2										X	
PR3										X	
PR4										X	
PR5									X		
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4</b>										

Which local office handles certain property tax transactions and questions							
Not useful	1	2	3	4	5	Very Useful	
PR1						X	
PR2			X				
PR3						X	
PR4						X	
PR5			X				
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.2</b>						
How to pay property taxes							
Not useful	1	2	3	4	5	Very Useful	
PR1						X	
PR2			X				
PR3			X				
PR4						X	
PR5						X	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.2</b>						
How to pay property taxes electronically							
Not useful	1	2	3	4	5	Very Useful	
PR1						X	
PR2				X			
PR3						X	
PR4						X	
PR5						X	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.8</b>						
Payment deadlines and penalties							
Not useful	1	2	3	4	5	Very Useful	
PR1						X	
PR2			X				
PR3				X			
PR4						X	
PR5						X	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.4</b>						
Current property tax rates for my county							
Not useful	1	2	3	4	5	Very Useful	
PR1			X				
PR2						X	

PR3						X		
PR4						X		
PR5							X	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.2</b>							
Downloadable tax forms								
	Not useful	1	2	3	4	5		Very Useful
PR1							X	
PR2							X	
PR3					X			
PR4							X	
PR5					X			
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.6</b>							

## Appendix B: Post-Task Participant Ratings

Mean Post-Task Participant Ratings		
Task	Current Site	Redesign
Task 1: Homestead Exemption	2.8	3
Task 2: Tax Assessor-Collector	4	3.6
Task 3: Protest a Property Value	4	4.2
Task 4: Ft. Worth Field Office	3.6	1
Task 5: Property Tax Deadline	3.6	3
Task 6: Appraising Timberland	3.2	2
Task 7: Contact Appraisal District	4.4	4.2
Task 8: Tax Rate by County	1.6	2.6
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>2.95</b>



## Appendix C: Post-Test Survey and Results

<b>Current Site</b>		
The information was easy to find.		
	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Comments</b>
PC1	3	Again, took time but became easier.
PC2	3	My main point and the primary reason for my choices on ease of locating information is that there is simply too much information which takes the user some time to become accustomed to the site and the answer that one seeks.
PC3	4	
PC4	4	The information was easier to find that I thought it would be given the large amount of text on the page and the fact that it's government website.
PC5	3	By and large, the information was accessible. Some of the tasks required me to hunt through lots of information on the main page.
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.4</b>	
The organization of information was intuitive.		
	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Comments</b>
PC1	4	The page was organized. Just had to learn where everything was.
PC2	1	Not necessarily intuitive, and I'm not sure that intuition should be the guiding principle in this effort.
PC3	4	
PC4	3	It could be better, bu the left nav bar was very helpful for a majority of these tasks.
PC5	3	I have a bit of ADD. It probably would make more sense to someone with a better attention span.
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3</b>	
The site was easy to navigate.		
	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Comments</b>
PC1	2	Got better over time.
PC2	3	Easty to navigate it was, but to find the particular site for an answer is similar to finding one's way through a maze.
PC3	4	

PC4		For the most part everything I needed was available within a few clicks and from the left nav bar.
	4	
PC5	2	There was too much infomation on the main page.
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3</b>	
The language of the website was understandable and appropriate.		
	Rating	Comments
PC1	5	
PC2	5	Language was both understandable and appropriate. Perhaps could be made more succinct in places.
PC3	3	
PC4	3	There was a lot of text on the page, too much so on most pages. There wasn't an abundance of legalese, which was helpful. So, the language in and of itself was fine, there was just too much of it.
PC5	3	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.8</b>	
The site's graphics were pleasing.		
	Rating	Comments
PC1	5	
PC2	1	Much work can be done here.
PC3	4	
PC4	3	I didn't pay attention to the graphics at all.
PC5	3	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.2</b>	
The site had a good balance of graphics versus text.		
	Rating	Comments
PC1	1	Too much text on the Texas Tax page.
PC2	1	Nope.
PC3	4	
PC4	1	Too much text.
PC5	2	Too much text.
<b>Mean</b>	<b>1.8</b>	
The colors used throughout the site were attractive.		
	Rating	Comments
PC1	5	
PC2	1	No.
PC3	4	
PC4	4	Sure. everyone loves green.
PC5	3	

<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.4</b>	
The homepage made me want to explore the site further.		
	Rating	Comments
PC1	2	This seems to be an important source of info. So, I would try and learn it over time.
PC2	2	No. Better graphics would help.
PC3	4	
PC4	2	If I needed to use the site on a regular basis, the homepage wouldn't scare me off, but the amount of text does make the site seem intimidating.
PC5	3	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.6</b>	
Screens had the right amount of information.		
	Rating	Comments
PC1	1	
PC2	2	Same answer to the one above: graphics will help.
PC3	4	
PC4	2	There's good info, just a lot of it. Some organization and collapsable menus would be helpful.
PC5	4	Once I navigated to the page I wanted, the information was presented in a clear, concise manner.
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.6</b>	
The information was easy to read.		
	Rating	Comments
PC1	5	The language was easy to understand once you got to where you needed to be.
PC2	3	Not particularly.
PC3	4	
PC4	4	It was easy to read, when I read it. There was too much text and I just ended up scanning for key words.
PC5	4	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4</b>	
Overall, I am satisfied with this website.		
	Rating	Comments
PC1	2	
PC2	2	Needs work.
PC3	3	
PC4	4	

PC5	3	I wish there wasn't so much information on the main page. On the other hand, taxes involve a lot of information. I'm not sure how you'd reorganize it.
-----	---	--

<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.8</b>	
-------------	------------	--

The site effectively communicated the organization's image.

	Rating	Comments
--	--------	----------

PC1	1	Unless you want to convey; BIG, HUGE, hard to understand for the average joe.
-----	---	---

PC2	2	It is not easy to have both much information that is necessary and a good site, but it can be done, I'm sure.
-----	---	---

PC3	4	
-----	---	--

PC4	4	Yes, it seems more user friendly than the first time I accessed it years ago. I think they are trying to provide more information in a more user-friendly, lay-man style.
-----	---	---

PC5	3	
-----	---	--

<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.8</b>	
-------------	------------	--

I would use the website as my primary resource for property tax information.

	Rating	Comments
--	--------	----------

PC1	1	
-----	---	--

PC2	5	I have to.
-----	---	------------

PC3	5	
-----	---	--

PC4	3	I'd use it as a second source after talking to other homeowners.
-----	---	--

PC5	5	
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<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.8</b>	
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Here's what I liked most about the website. (Please list from 0-3 items.)

	Rating	Comments
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PC1		Colors. Seemed to have a lot of information if you could actually get to it. Nice idea!
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PC2		Everything that is needed to know about property taxes and other information related to the subject is there on the website.
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PC3		no jarring graphics that move a lot basically black text on white background good menus
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PC4		The FAQs and Property Tax 101 sections were very helpful. The most helpful of the site.
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PC5		-the FAQ's -Most popular items -the top-left items on the main page
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Here's what I'd like to see changed on the website. (Please list from 0-3 items.)

	Rating	Comments
--	--------	----------

PC1	Less info on first page. Easier tabs to find things.
PC2	First, change the graphics, colors. Then try to make more of a sense of hierarchy of all that is contained within.
PC3	tax rates simply found clearly use language regarding homestead exemption use rural not just agric and etc.
PC4	Again, there's too much text on each page. Categories would be helpful and/or smaller menus.
PC5	
Here's what I'd like to see added to the website. (Please list from 0-3 items.)	
PC1	Ease of use. Especially that property tax rate button. Where is it!
PC2	Same as 15. Add more bold graphics to highlight most important in terms of each subject, to lesser for less important. Decisions about portions of the entity should be segmented by some degree of organization as in chapter, etc.
PC3	good search engine
PC4	A quick and easy link to find tax rates per county.
PC5	

<b>Redesign</b>		
The information was easy to find.		
	Rating	Comments
PR1	3	Sometimes it was easy to find, other times it was not very intuitive.
PR2	2	Some information was relatively easy to find but not all! failed at least three tasks.....
PR3	4	
PR4	2	I had problems finding much of the requested information.
PR5	3	Sometimes it was very easy to find information, other times it was very difficult.
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.8</b>	
The organization of information was intuitive.		
	Rating	Comments
PR1	2	need bigger buttons, should be graphically easier to intuitive.

PR2	2	for a seasoned tax protestor, yes it's clear and top left bottom right intuitive - but for a new property owner or potential buyer, NO. Intuitives want a map visualization or better contact directory
PR3	4	
PR4	2	The site lacking explanatory text and images.
PR5	4	The structure of the site made sense, and the labels were generally helpful.
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.8</b>	
The site was easy to navigate.		
	Rating	Comments
PR1	3	I wouldn't say easy. I second guessed myself too many times, even when I had it right.
PR2	3	
PR3	4	
PR4	4	Navigation wasn't really a problem. The menus and submenus were displayed well, but I wasn't sure what kind of information was categorized under each heading.
PR5	4	It never felt like I was on a huge site that I might get stuck in following rabbit trails, so that helped me to feel confident that information was generally only one or two levels deep.
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.6</b>	
The language of the website was understandable and appropriate.		
	Rating	Comments
PR1	3	I don't think it is dummy proof, no.
PR2	2	
PR3	5	My only doubt, based on the tasks, was finding the right tax contact for Fort Worth.
PR4	2	I had difficulty understanding what certain headings referred to, and I was often surprised by the content of the page.
PR5	4	Because some governmental agencies have specific nomenclatures that they have to use it sometimes made it a little challenging, but overall, I felt the language was fairly clear.
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.2</b>	
The site's graphics were pleasing.		
	Rating	Comments
PR1	3	pleasing, sure, but not particularly helpful. I wanted some kind of official seal so I knew I wasn't on a bogus sight.

PR2	4	rolling images slickest part of site - almost too slick for dot gov
PR3	3	The design is clean and uncluttered. However, the slide show is a little bit distracting (the images transition too quickly, and each time they change it draws my eye away from other things). Also, I didn't see any graphic element that clearly identifies the homepage as an official State of Texas website. The design is generic enough that I felt a little cautious, in case it was actually put together by a non-neutral party, such as a real estate company.
PR4	3	Not really many graphics at this point. The slideshow on the home page is very large and distracting.
PR5	5	Great graphics, though the animations were a bit distracting.
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.6</b>	

The site had a good balance of graphics versus text.		
	Rating	Comments
PR1	2	
PR2	2	
PR3	5	
PR4	3	There aren't very many images, so there's not much of a balance. But I'd prefer text over unrelated, distracting images.
PR5	5	There were not so many graphics or so much text that you couldn't see one because of the other.
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.4</b>	

The colors used throughout the site were attractive.		
	Rating	Comments
PR1	4	
PR2	2	tool bar and top left grey box and central blue on white glossary all melded together - mor distinct colors, graphics per section would help
PR3	4	
PR4	4	No real opinion here...reminds me of Twitter Bootstrap. I would expect a government website to use red, white, and blue.
PR5	4	The colors were easy to read, and easy to identify links over text.
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.6</b>	

The homepage made me want to explore the site further.		
	Rating	Comments
PR1	2	seemed flat--need a color panel to the side. needs to look more 3d and invite me in.

PR2	3	maybe....if buying property or protesting taxes or shopping for better tax scenarios
PR3	4	
PR4	2	I like the 'I want to...' section, but it needs to be expanded. Users will come to the site with all sorts of needs, and addressing the needs in plain English (minimizing the tax vocab) will help serve them.
PR5	3	If I had reason to explore the site, I might, but generally once I've found my information I close a site and leave.
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.8</b>	
Screens had the right amount of information.		
	Rating	Comments
PR1	2	
PR2	2	somme too much, some too little
PR3	5	I was impressed, especially given the fact that this is a state government site, that pages were not overly content heavy (i.e. no no long passages that I had to slog through).
PR4	2	Screen after you clicked on the primary nav links were very bare and contained no contextual content.
PR5	3	Some of the FAQ pages would have benefitted from a listing of the questions on the page to the side to see the kind of information that was available on that page.
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.8</b>	
The information was easy to read.		
	Rating	Comments
PR1	3	
PR2	4	some vocabulary questionable - 'repositories, references, etc...
PR3	5	
PR4	3	Some of the FAQs pages were text-heavy. Need to break up content with heading and subheadings.
PR5	4	The information was generally structured well and easy to locate items.
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.8</b>	
Overall, I am satisfied with this website.		
	Rating	Comments
PR1	2	not particularly intuitive. I would have given up and called someone
PR2	2	
PR3	4	



PR4	2	I would be really confused if I were paying property taxes for the first time and had to use this website.
PR5	3	While some things were clear and easy to find, others were not. It's far and away better than many government pages.
2.6		
The site effectively communicated the organization's image.		
Rating		Comments
PR1	1	I didn't get a sense of image or vision for the office at all.
PR2	3	
PR3	2	I had trouble identifying this site as an official source of information from the State of Texas.
PR4	1	Needs more images: logos, images of people involved in office, maps!
PR5	3	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2</b>	
I would use the website as my primary resource for property tax information.		
Rating		Comments
PR1	1	I like my Travis County one better.
PR2	3	most likely if metatags led me here and it seemed or proved to be an official dot gov site
PR3	3	I would certainly find this website very helpful and an authoritative source of information. However, I would probably use the Travis County CAD website as my primary source for property tax information for my home in Travis County (I already go to the Travis County CAD website several times a year for specific information about my property, including appraisal value and history).
PR4	1	I would probably Google any needed information to avoid using this website.
PR5	4	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.4</b>	
Here's what I liked most about the website. (Please list from 0-3 items.)		
PR1		images tool bar top hyperlinks
PR2		I really liked the 'I want to' section on the left side of the homepage, which provided quick links to common tasks/needs. I also really liked the 'Contact' info below it (although I had some trouble because I don't completely understand the distinction between Appraisal Districts and Assessor/Collector offices).

PR3	I liked the I want to... section even though I didn't use it. I have mixed feelings on duplicating the navigation on the home page, but in the end I thought it was useful.
PR4	Clear hierarchy and repetition in the navigational items from the homepage and the menu. Not typographically dense. Navigational tool at the top left of the homepage.
PR5	
Here's what I'd like to see changed on the website. (Please list from 0-3 items.)	
PR1	more variation in colors bigger buttons contact easier to find
PR2	contacts, important info like rates forms button search function
PR3	The slide show is just distracting. I don't think you need to get rid of it completely, but slow down the time between slide transitions. Also, it takes up a lot of the screen, and the information I wanted was often below the fold (i.e. I had to scroll down). I would also like the design to clearly reflect that I'm on a state website at all times.
PR4	More text explaining vocab terms. Expand I want to... section.
PR5	List of questions on FAQ pages. Change the heading sizes to be not quite so overwhelming.
Here's what I'd like to see added to the website. (Please list from 0-3 items.)	
PR1	definition of terms used info on how to use the website
PR2	map forms big button search function
PR3	
PR4	Add a contact section. Add color to differentiate content.
PR5	Current tax information for at least 2012.

## Appendix D: Task List

Task No.	Task Description	Task Detail
1	Locate the application for Residential Homestead Exemption	<p><i>Current site</i>  <b>Destination:</b> Application for Residence Homestead Exemption  <b>Destination Url:</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/taxforms/50-114.pdf">http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/taxforms/50-114.pdf</a>  <b>Current Path:</b> Property Tax Forms &gt; Exemption Forms &gt; 50-114 Application for Residential Homestead Exemption  <b>OR</b> Property Tax Forms &gt; 50-114 Application for Residential Homestead Exemption  <b>OR</b> Property Tax Exemptions &gt; 50-114 Application for Residential Homestead Exemption  <b>OR</b> Exemptions &gt; 50-114 Application for Residential Homestead Exemption  <b>OR</b> Citizens &gt; Property Tax Forms &gt; 50-114 Application for Residential Homestead Exemption</p> <p><i>Redesign</i>  <b>Destination:</b> Application for Residence Homestead Exemption  <b>Destination Url:</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/taxforms/50-114.pdf">http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/taxforms/50-114.pdf</a>  <b>Current Path:</b> 2011 Changes to Homestead Exemption&gt; 2011 Changes to the Residence Homestead Exemption&gt; residence homestead application form  <b>OR</b> Frequently Asked Questions &gt; Application for Residential Homestead Exemption  <b>OR</b>  Resident Homesteads (dropdown) &gt; Application for Residential Homestead Exemption</p>
2	Locate the contact information for the participant's local tax collector	<p><i>Current site</i>  <b>Destination:</b> Harris Tax Assessor-Collector - 101  <b>Destination Url:</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax/references/directory/tac/101.html">http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax/references/directory/tac/101.html</a>  <b>Current Path:</b> Contact Your Tax Assessor-Collector&gt; Harris County</p> <p><i>Redesign</i>  <b>Destination:</b> Harris Tax Assessor-Collector - 101  <b>Destination Url:</b></p>

		<a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax/references/directory/tac/101.html">http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax/references/directory/tac/101.html</a> <b>Current Path:</b> Tax Assessors-Collectors Directory>Harris County
3	Protest a property value	<p><i>Current site</i>  <b>Destination:</b> How to Protest <b>OR</b> Property Taxpayer Remedies  <b>Destination Url:</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/remedy12/index.html">http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/remedy12/index.html</a>  <b>Current Path:</b> How to Protest  <b>OR</b> Property Tax Payer Remedies</p> <p><i>Redesign</i>  <b>Destination:</b> How to Protest <b>OR</b> Property Taxpayer Remedies (pdf)  <b>Destination Url:</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/remedy10/remedy10_6.html">http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/remedy10/remedy10_6.html</a>  <b>OR</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax_bootstrap/local-protest/remedies/96-295.pdf">http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax_bootstrap/local-protest/remedies/96-295.pdf</a>  <b>Current Path:</b> How to Protest  <b>OR</b> Property Tax Payer Remedies  <b>OR</b> Property Tax Payer Remedies Pamphlet (dropdown)</p>
4	Locate the phone number and physical address for the Fort Worth field office	<p><i>Current site</i>  <b>Destination:</b> Audit Field Offices  <b>Destination Url:</b> <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/fieldoff.html">http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/fieldoff.html</a>  <b>Current Path:</b> (from Texas Taxes) Field Offices  <b>OR</b> Citizens &gt; Field Offices</p> <p><i>Redesign</i>  <b>Destination:</b> Audit Field Offices  <b>Destination Url:</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/auditfieldoff.html">http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/auditfieldoff.html</a>  <b>Current Path:</b> Contact Property Tax Assistance Division (PTAD)&gt; Audit Field Offices</p>
5	Look up an important property tax deadline	<p><i>Current site</i>  <b>Destination:</b> Property Tax Calendar <b>OR</b> Tax Bills and Delinquent Taxes  <b>Destination Url:</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/taxcalendar/index.html">http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/taxcalendar/index.html</a>  <b>OR</b> <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/ptaxbill.html">http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/ptaxbill.html</a>  <b>Current Path:</b> Property Tax Calendar</p>

		<p><b>OR Tax Bills and Delinquent Taxes</b></p> <p><i>Redesign</i>  <b>Destination:</b> Property Tax Calendar <b>OR</b> Tax Bills and Delinquent Taxes  <b>Destination Url:</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/taxcalendar/index.html">http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/taxcalendar/index.html</a>  <b>OR</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax_bootstrap/assessment/tax-delinquent/penalty-interest-calendar.php">http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax_bootstrap/assessment/tax-delinquent/penalty-interest-calendar.php</a>  <b>Current Path:</b> View Property Tax Calendar  <b>OR</b> Tax Bills and Delinquent Taxes&gt;Delinquency Dates, Penalty and Interest by Type of Property Tax Bill</p>
6	Find general information about appraising timberland	<p><i>Current site</i>  <b>Destination:</b> Agricultural and Timberland Appraisal  <b>Destination Url:</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/timber04/">http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/timber04/</a>  <b>Current Path:</b> Agricultural and Timberland Appraisal (either of two links on the page)</p> <p><i>Redesign</i>  <b>Destination:</b> Agricultural Appraisal <b>OR</b> Manual for the Appraisal of Timberland  <b>Destination Url:</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax_bootstrap/appraisal/agricultural/">http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax_bootstrap/appraisal/agricultural/</a>  <b>OR</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax_bootstrap/appraisal/methods/manuals/timber/">http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax_bootstrap/appraisal/methods/manuals/timber/</a>  <b>Current Path:</b> Agricultural Appraisal  <b>OR</b> Appraisal Methods&gt;Appraisal Manuals&gt;Manual for the Appraisal of Timberland  *The redesigned pages include no single page that provides general information on both agricultural and timberland appraisal (which is technically need to complete the task.) Instead, the investigator accepted either of the URL's listed above as evidence of task completion.</p>
7	Find out one's County Appraisal District	<p><i>Current Site</i>  <b>Destination:</b> Tarrant Appraisal District - 220  <b>Destination Url:</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax/references/directory/cad/220.html">http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax/references/directory/cad/220.html</a>  <b>OR</b></p>

		<p><a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/assessdir11/246.pdf">http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/assessdir11/246.pdf</a>  <b>Current Path:</b> Contact Your Appraisal District&gt;Tarrant County  <b>OR</b> Appraisal Districts&gt; Contact Information &gt; Texas Property Tax Appraisal District Directory&gt;Tarrant County</p> <p><i>Redesign</i>  <b>Destination:</b> Tarrant Appraisal District - 220  <b>Destination Url:</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax_bootstrap/references/directory/cad/220.html">http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax_bootstrap/references/directory/cad/220.html</a>  <b>Current Path:</b> Appraisal District Directory&gt;Tarrant County  <b>OR</b>  Directory (dropdown)&gt;Appraisal District Directory&gt;Tarrant County</p>
8	Determine the property tax rate in one's county	<p><i>Current site</i>  <b>Destination:</b> Williamson Tax Assessor-Collector <b>OR</b> 246 Williamson  <b>Destination Url:</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/assessdir11/246.pdf">http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/assessdir11/246.pdf</a>  <b>OR</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax/references/directory/tac/246.html">http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax/references/directory/tac/246.html</a>  <b>Current Path:</b> Tax Rates and Levies by County&gt;2012 Tax Assessors-Collectors&gt;246 Williamson  <b>OR</b> Tax Assessors-Collectors&gt; Williamson Tax Assessor-Collector – 246</p> <p><i>Redesign</i>  <b>Destination:</b> 246 Williamson  <b>Destination Url:</b>  <a href="http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax/references/directory/tac/246.html">http://www.window.state.tx.us/propertytax/references/directory/tac/246.html</a>  <b>Current Path:</b> Tax Rates (on the page or in dropdown)&gt; tax collector assessor&gt; 246 Williamson</p>

## **Appendix E: Task Scenarios**

### **Task 1**

A local newspaper recently ran a public service announcement explaining how homeowners could lower their taxes by filing for a Homestead Exemption. Please use the website to locate the form needed to file for this exemption.

### **Task 2**

You live in Harris County. You've arranged a partial payment agreement for your property taxes, and would like to speak to your local tax assessor-collector about some of the terms. Please use the website to find the contact information for your local tax assessor-collector.

### **Task 3**

You recently read an article about some Texas homeowners who successfully protested the appraised value of their homes, adjusting the value and lowering their property taxes. You feel that your home similarly wasn't given a fair appraisal and would like to protest. Find the page that provides general information about how to protest the property value of your home.

### **Task 4**

You have recently relocated to the Fort Worth, Texas area and need to speak with someone in person regarding property taxes on your new home. Please use this website to locate the phone number and physical address for the Fort Worth field office.

### **Task 5**

It's March and you still haven't paid your property tax bill for this year. You realize you're incurring a penalty, but you're not sure when the penalty rate jumps to 12%. Please use the website to find the date on which late payments begin incurring a 12% penalty.

### **Task 6**

You just inherited some wooded rural property from a relative and you need to determine its value. Please use the website to find the page with general information about how to get it appraised.

### **Task 7**

You live in Tarrant County. Three large homes have replaced older, more modest homes on your block in the last year. You are wondering how this might affect the valuation of your home and lead to a possible hike in your property taxes. Find the phone number for your appraisal district's office so you can contact the chief appraiser.

### **Task 8**

You live in Travis County and you are thinking about moving just a few miles north into Williamson County. Before making the decision, however, you would just like to know what the property tax rate is there. Please use the website to determine where you need to look online, or who you need to contact, to find out the 2013 property tax rate for Williamson County.