

DESIGN SPECS

IMPORTANT ALERTS FEATURE

June 17, 2020

Overview

The Opportunity

The Coronavirus health emergency has revealed a need for more effective communication of important information and public alerts via Boston.gov and its associated services. Looking beyond simply adding info to the homepage, an opportunity was identified for a more comprehensive system that could show several critical pieces of information at once and make them accessible site-wide on boston.gov.

The Solution

Create a new "Important Alerts" feature that makes residents aware of critical messages about emergency events and other areas of concern. When an alert is active this feature would appear for users of boston.gov as a banner below the main navigation on every page, site-wide. Details about envisioned functionality are outlined below and highlighted next to the proposed designs.

- Each alert consists of a short title & call-to-action link for the banner, as well as a dedicated page with more info (linked from the banner CTA).
- Alerts should be active for a period of time and include a start & end date for when they will be visible via the site-wide banner. Only active alerts are shown in the banner. Once the alert reaches its end date it disappears from the banner (the info page can stay available for historical access).

- If no alerts are active, the entire bar is NOT visible
- If a single (1) alert is active, the title and call-to-action link show up directly in the bar (top desktop design)

- If multiple (2 or more) alerts are active, the bar lists the # of important alerts and a link to expand the bar to view all alert titles and call-to-action links (middle & bottom desktop designs). On mobile, this expand/collapse interaction will be used for both single and multiple alerts.
- No more than 5 alerts should ever be active at once. Listing more than this will reduce the ability of each item to communicate individually (if everything is a priority, nothing is a priority). If there is pressure to list more than 5 alerts at once it's a sign that some of the info should be grouped and summarized under 1 alert.

The new "Important Alerts" feature as envisioned will provide a flexible way for boston.gov to communicate critical info from any source in a consistent, easy digestible manner. In addition to visibility on the website, these alerts could be connected to the city's broader mobile text and Alexa alert system for reach beyond the website itself.

References

The Important Alerts feature follows a similar pattern to web alert services already in use by other states and municipalities. A few references are provided below for additional review and comparison:

Maine Citizen Alert System

www.maine.gov & <https://www.maine.gov/portal/CAS/>

The visual execution on the website is not particularly great but Maine has a strong sense of active/inactive and offers multiple ways to for residents to receive the alerts (on the web, email/SMS, RSS, Twitter, etc.).

Mass.gov Emergency Alerts

www.mass.gov & <https://www.mass.gov/alerts>

The state's website alert system is well executed and a good reference. The alerts information page itself highlights the types of scenarios in which alerts are used (weather warnings, power outages, traffic, emergency events etc.).

City of New Orleans - NOLA Ready

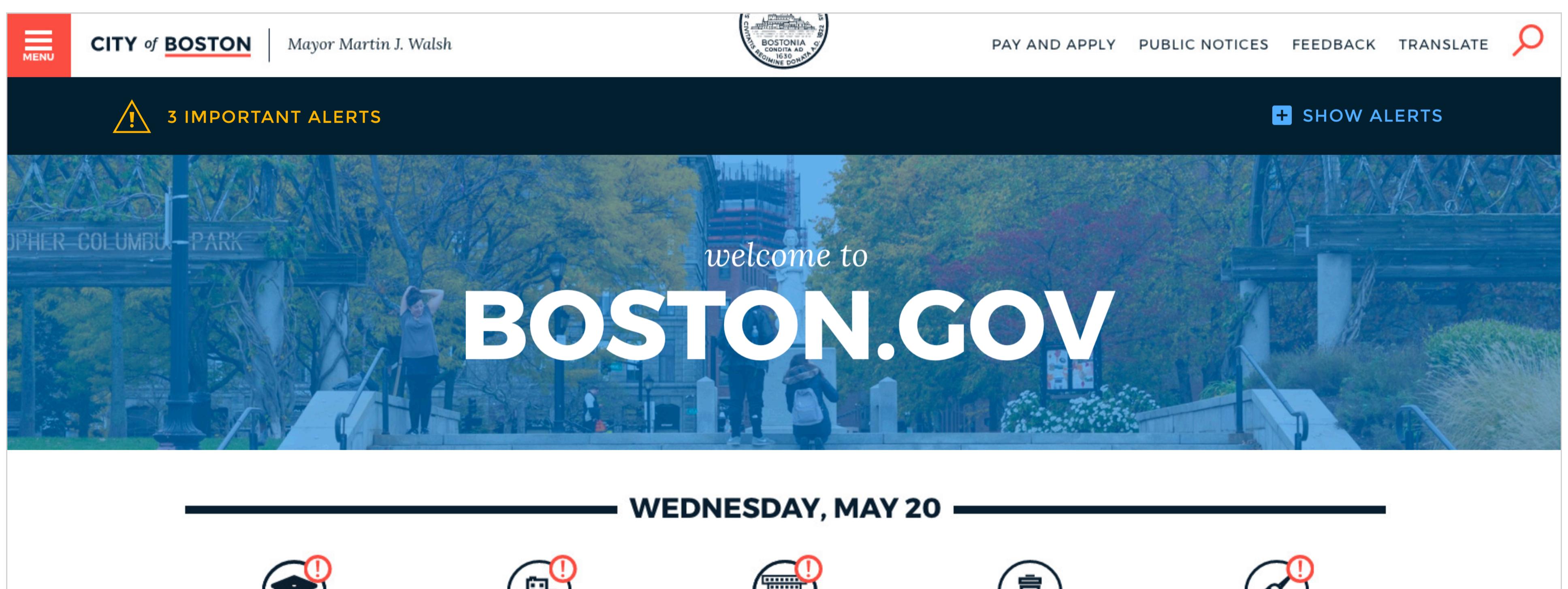
www.nola.gov & <https://ready.nola.gov/incident/>

The city of New Orleans is highlighted here as an example of what NOT to do. The banner fills almost a third of the vertical screen space and contains 10 calls-to-action. For residents looking for Covid information everything seems equally important. For residents looking for general city info they repeatedly have to scroll past a bright yellow bar screaming for their attention.

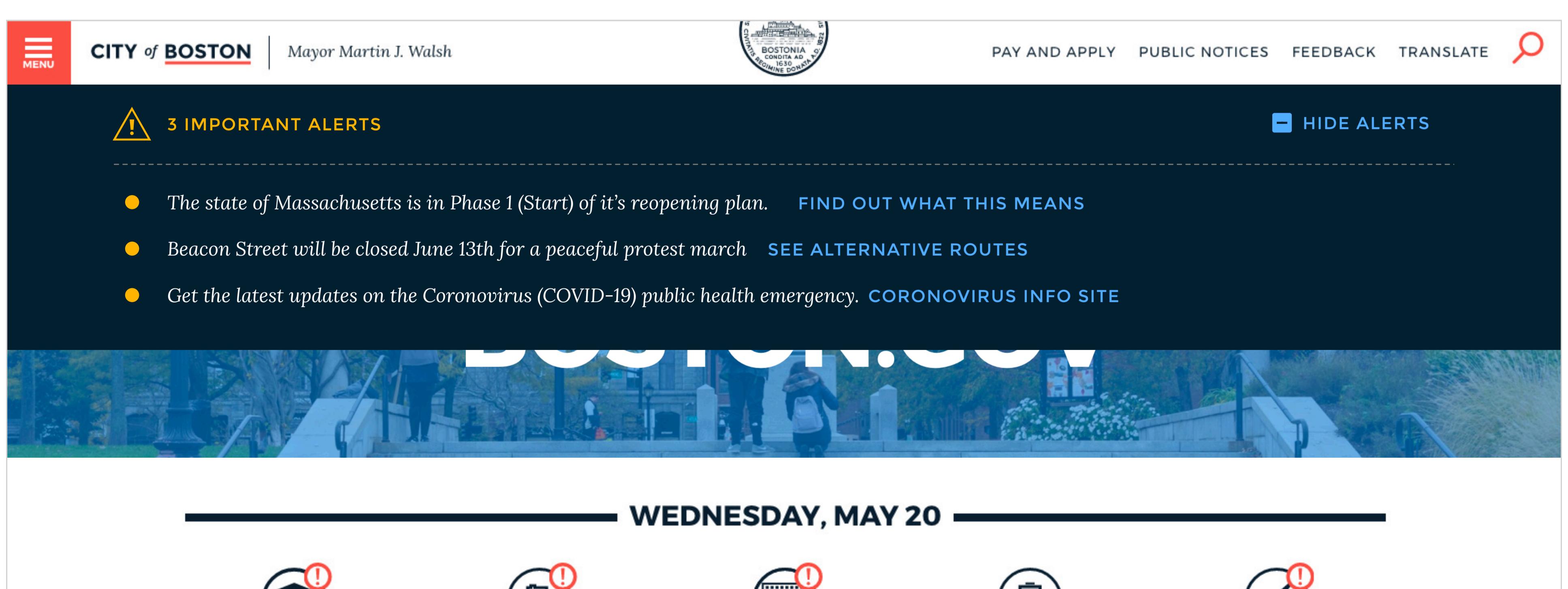
Desktop Single Alert View



Desktop Multiple Alert, Collapsed View



Desktop Multiple Alert, Expanded View



Mobile, Collapsed View



Mobile, Expanded View

