



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

Newark Advocate
By Chad Klimack
December 9, 2015

PATASKALA - Residents interested in following the city's spending habits no longer need to make a public records request.

In fact, they do not need to leave their homes, much less flip through an enormous pile of receipts.

That is because the city on Nov. 30 officially joined the state's new open checkbook program, known as OhioCheckbook.com.

The program, launched last year by Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel, allows residents to monitor their community's spending from the comfort of their own homes. All they need to do is jump onto the internet.

"They can pretty much look at any (city) expenditure," Pataskala Finance Director Jamie Nicholson said. "They can go in and look at vendors, who we've written the payments to. They can look at (spending) on different objects, like road maintenance materials or office supplies. They can drill into our checkbook and see everything."

Nicholson announced plans earlier this year to participate in OhioCheckbook.com.

Pataskala is the first city in Licking County to post its spending on the website, Mandel's office said in a press release.

The move will allow residents to view a whopping 10,000 financial transactions accounting for more than \$32 million in spending over a two-year period.

Nicholson said the city eventually plans on updating its information on a monthly basis.

"We are extremely pleased to be partnering with the treasurer of state to provide our residents with online access to the city's ledger," Nicholson said in a press release announcing the partnership. "To be able to provide our residents with the ability to search the database in order to see exactly where and how their tax dollars are being spent, is extremely powerful financial transparency has always been a priority of mine, and this is a wonderful tool in support of that goal."

Mandel launched the program late last year, placing all the state's spending information on the internet for everyone to see — with the simple push of a few keystrokes.

The treasurer in April sent a letter to nearly 4,000 local government entities, including Pataskala, inviting them to place their spending data on the same website.

Nicholson quickly decided his office should participate.

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The website lets visitors search records by keyword, category, department or vendor.

Visitors can search participating entities' financial records or state records.

Locally, Nicholson cautioned there is one catch.

"It's just the spending side, not the revenue side," he said.

Mandel, for his part, applauded Nicholson and the city for joining OhioCheckbook.com

"I believe the people of Pataskala have a right to know how their tax money is being spent and I applaud local leaders here for partnering with the Treasurer's Office to post their finances on OhioCheckbook.com," Mandel said in a press release. "By partnering and posting local government checkbooks, taxpayers across Ohio are empowered with a powerful tool to hold public officials accountable within their communities."

Want to monitor Pataskala's spending?

Go online to www.ohiocheckbook.com and type Pataskala in the search field.

You can search transactions by fiscal year and by month and even break out individual checks.

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