



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

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Editorial

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The list of Lake County-based local government entities signing up for the Ohio Treasurer's online, publicly accessible checkbook continues to grow.

On Aug. 11, it was announced that the city of Eastlake will be the first municipality in Lake County to post its finances on the OhioCheckbook.com website, allowing citizens to keep an eye on city spending.

Eastlake is only the ninth city in Ohio to agree to post its finances online through the program. Perry Township also will be on OhioCheckbook.com, coming in as the 11th municipality to take advantage of the new transparency system. Perry Public Library adds to the list as the first local library system in Ohio to join.

In June, the Mentor School District became the first Northeast Ohio school district to join the OhioCheckbook.com program, which was launched by Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel last December to make the state of Ohio's spending more transparent. Mandel then extended the option, at no cost, to local governments, as well as school districts and library systems.

We're encouraged to see that Lake County government entities are among the first in the region and state to secure places on OhioCheckbook.com. It's especially impressive to see Eastlake emerge as the first Lake County municipality to sign up for the program.

After an income tax increase levy failed on the November 2014 ballot, Eastlake cut \$900,000 in operating costs and laid off 15 city employees. Although the city recently received a federal grant to rehire two firefighters, Eastlake has dealt with other financial setbacks in 2015, including seeing its bond credit rating reduced by Moody's Investors Service. The lower rating means it could cost the city more money to borrow money.

Despite its financial struggles, Eastlake's decision to become part of OhioCheckbook.com reflects a desire to be honest and forthright with city taxpayers.

"We may be one of the poorest cities in Lake County, but we're going to be the most transparent," Eastlake Finance Director Michael Slocum said.

Eastlake, along with 18,062 other local governments in Ohio, were contacted by Mandel about participating in OhioCheckbook.com.

Mandel said the website will help fulfill his vision "to create an army of citizen watchdogs who are empowered to hold public officials accountable."

OhioCheckBook.com will make it less complicated for citizens to research and monitor local government financial records. That's because citizens can review government finances on their own computers when it's convenient for them, rather than making public records requests at government offices or attending government meetings to ask questions.

The site also gives visitors options on how they can view and use financial data. OhioCheckbook.com displays spending in multiple formats, including charts and graphs, that can either be printed, saved onto a computer or directly shared online through social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and LinkedIn.

Since the website launched, there have been 286,000 searches into the state of Ohio's finances, displaying more than \$473 billion in spending over eight years.

The website has not yet launched its local government section, but Chris Berry, communications director for the Ohio Treasurer's Office, said they expect the first cities to be posted "in a month or so." He added that every local government entity is on its own



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timeline.

We applaud all four Lake County government entities for their eagerness to become part of a new and innovative way of allowing citizens to see how their tax dollars are being spent. Here's hoping that other area municipalities, library systems and school districts decide to follow the quartet's lead.

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