



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

Portsmouth Daily Times
By Wayne Allen
February 18, 2016

Officials with Treasurer Josh Mandel's Office were in Portsmouth this week to launch the Southern Ohio Port Authority's (SOPA) online checkbook. During the event, it was also announced the village of New Boston and the city of Portsmouth have decided to participate.

The office of Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel has an ongoing initiative aimed at getting local governments and associated agencies to place their checkbook online.

Mandel and his team put Ohio's checkbook online first as an example of the system's capabilities.

OhioCheckbook.com was launched on Dec. 2, 2014, marking the first time in Ohio history when citizens could actually see every expenditure in state government.

As of Feb. 16, 2016 there have been more than 464,000 total searches on the site. OhioCheckbook.com displays more than \$506 billion in spending over the past eight years, including more than 137 million transactions.

Seth Unger, senior policy advisor for public affairs in the treasurer of state office, said the data for SOPA online checkbook details \$413,000 worth of spending over three fiscal years, which does not include spending for the last three months of 2015.

The data can be broken down in a number of ways including how each penny was spent and who it was paid too.

"SOPA is essentially an open book now," Unger said.

SOPA Executive Director Jason Kester said the organization has moved to Quick Books accounting software, which will make it simple to upload data to the website. Kester said it's his intent to update the site once a month and add information from the last three months of 2015.

Kester complimented the work of the treasurer's office, for working with SOPA to meet their needs.

"I think it's a good thing we did this. The port authority decided to do this because one of the issues that happened in the past with economic develop revolving loan funds. I thought it was really important for the work we do," Kester said. "Anything we can do to make ourselves look like other parts of the state and be more competitive is a good thing."

Unger said SOPA is also first in this region of the state to go live on OhioCheckbook.com.



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"We wanted to recognize SOPA today because you are the first port authority in the entire state to go on OhioCheckbook.com. You're the first entity in Scioto County to go live on OhioCheckbook.com," Unger said.

Also in attendance at the event was local business owner Jeff Albrecht who said OhioCheckbook.com is offered free to local governments and government agencies.

"It's our money, it's so nice if we have a question or want to look at the data. This is a good way to find out what's happening with our money. I think it's great for governments too, look at other cities their size and how they send their money," Albrecht said.

Unger said they've noticed a corresponding increase in public trust, which comes along with participating in OhioCheckbook.com.

Trent Williams, Portsmouth city auditor/treasurer said they are elated to have the opportunity to be transparent with the city's information.

"We've been talking with the treasurer of state's office over the past year about this program and I am happy to have the opportunity to partner with treasurer Mandel to make the city's information easily accessible and transparent to the public," Williams said. "With the technology that is available now, this just seems like a valuable tool to allow our taxpayers to easily see for themselves how and where their tax dollars are being spent. I look forward to moving the city forward with this initiative in the near future."

Mike Payton, president of New Boston village council, said it was an easy decision for the village to get on board with this project.

"Taxpayers have the right to know where their money is going. Being in the political realm, one of the questions we get asked on a daily basis is, are you taking care of our money," Payton said. "If they choose to see it, all of the information will be there and will be updated regularly. I think it's a great thing and New Boston is proud to be a part of it."

To view SOPA's checkbook, visit www.ohiocheckbook.com.

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