



# JOSH MANDEL

## STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

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By Jeremy Erskine  
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CAMDEN &mdash; The Village of Camden has become the first government entity in Preble County to adopt the OhioCheckbook.com platform. The website, which officially launched during a presentation at the village office on Tuesday, March 8, will allow the public to easily access and see how the local government is spending their tax dollars.

"I believe the people of Preble County have a right to know how their tax money is being spent, and I applaud local leaders (in Camden) for partnering with my office to post the finances on OhioCheckbook.com," said Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel. "By posting local government spending online, we are empowering taxpayers across Ohio to hold public officials accountable."

The service is free to local governments, with the cost coming out of the state treasurer's budget, and Camden's online account holds over 6,600 individual transactions, totaling \$4.6 million in spending, since 2013. The site also shows spending at the state level, dating back through 2008 and includes more than \$512 billion in expenditures.

Mandel's office created the website after Ohio ranked number 46th in transparency by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group. After its inception, the state jumped to number one in the survey and have stayed there since 2015.

"It's not transparency for transparency sake, but it's also increasing efficiency at the local government level as well as becoming a deterrent for somebody that might be misusing tax dollars or defrauding the citizens," said Seth Unger, the senior policy advisor for public affairs for Mandel.

The site creates more accountability for government officials, who now will, for example, stay at a Holiday Inn instead of the Ritz-Carlton on a business trip, said Unger.

Using features such as a "Google-style" contextual search &mdash; sorting by keyword, department, category, or vendor &mdash; and fully dynamic interactive charts creates a familiar look and feel to the site and opens it up to become very user-friendly.

"It helps relieve me of public records requests. I can tell them that if they want more detail, go online to the checkbook and they can see everything that is written out, everything the village has spent on a certain item, streets, water debt, whatever," said Rebecca Wilson, the Camden fiscal officer. "It is on there. It is accessible."

There is currently no plan to make the use of the site mandated by the state, but currently over 500 local government bodies &mdash; out of 3,962 in Ohio &mdash; voluntarily use OhioCheckbook.

In Preble County, representatives from the Treasurer's office said Gratis is also "close" in transitioning to the site while they are still discussing the possibility with the City of Eaton.



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According to Unger, the website will also increase trust between people and government.

"There's also a corresponding increase in public trust because a lot of people, once they pay their taxes, they lose track of where the money goes," he said. "This gives them the ability to really see (where their money goes)."

Users can access the entire site directly at [OhioCheckbook.com](http://OhioCheckbook.com) or link straight to Camden's page by visiting [Camden.OhioCheckbook.com](http://Camden.OhioCheckbook.com).

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