



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

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By Beth Lanning
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ROCKBRIDGE — Good Hope Township and Marion Township are the first two entities in Hocking County to launch online checkbooks on OhioCheckbook.com.

"I believe the people of Hocking County have the right to know how their tax money is being spent," stated State Treasurer of Ohio Josh Mandel. "I applaud the local leaders here for partnering with my office to post the finances on OhioCheckbook.com."

The two townships in Hocking County join close to 900 local governments and school districts that share their state spending information on the internet.

"We launched it to empower citizens to see how their tax dollars are being spent and to provide public officials with a tool to improve efficiency," added Mandel.

Public Affairs Liaison Jamie Barker, from Treasurer Josh Mandel's office, visited Good Hope Township Volunteer Fire Department in Rockbridge to present the latest news on the checkbook launch to Good Hope Township Fiscal Officer Jack McGrady.

"It would be really easy to say nobody else in the county is doing it, why should we? We have some real leaders in Hocking County and we appreciate them," stated Barker.

Barker said in April, Mandel sent a letter to all elected officials in Ohio, totaling more than 18,000 local government and school officials, inviting them to join the effort. It stated in part:

"My goal is to encourage and facilitate even more government transparency by displaying data from counties, cities, townships, villages, school districts, libraries and other local entities across Ohio," stated Mandel. "I am writing to ask you if you would be willing to partner with us to put your local government's spending on OhioCheckbook.com?"

"Good Hope Township is proud to partner with the treasurer's office on this cutting edge transparency tool," said Fiscal Officer Jack McGrady. "The service is provided at no cost to the township and will allow residents to see how their hard earned tax dollars are being spent."

"As your independently elected fiscal officer, I believe transparency is key to ensuring public funds are spent wisely and efficiently. I also believe it is important to leverage modern technology to share information with our taxpayers," said Marion Township Fiscal Officer Holly Sheets. "This website will provide a more visual and accessible format than a standard public records request would, as our accounting software is a bit limited in the reports that can be generated."

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Barker said about three years ago, the U.S. Public Interest Research Group, which releases yearly transparency report cards for all 50 states, ranked Ohio 46 in transparency.

"Treasurer Mandel was not happy about that," explained Barker. "He asked his staff, who is responsible for transparency in the state of Ohio? Which agency? Elected officials? Whose job is this? There was no clear answer. Mandel's answer was let's do it! That's where the idea of OhioCheckbook.com came from."

OhioCheckbook.com launched in December of 2014; the first time in Ohio history where people could see every single expenditure made in state government. Since September of this year, there have been more than 633,000 searches on the site.

Now Mandel's office reports it's up to number one in the nation. Mandel said it's the highest mark in history of these rankings.

Barker said the website started out at the state level and spending information goes back to 2008. The State of Ohio is capable of going back so far because most state agencies use the same accounting network

"You can view any penny that the state of Ohio has spent on this website. Anything from \$2 for a pack of pencils to millions of dollars in road construction projects," he said excitedly.

When it comes to the local level, it gets a little tricky. Barker said since most entities use different accounting networks, there is usually only three years worth of data.

On Good Hope Township's online checkbook, you can find more than 2,100 individual transactions that represent more than a million dollars worth of total spending in the past three years.

On Marion Township's online checkbook, it includes more than 2,600 individual transactions that represent over \$1.5 million of spending in the past three years.

Barker said there has been some other interest in Hocking County, but as of now there are only two townships active on the website.

When looking through the information, you can see specific transactions and which fund it's coming out of. For example, Barker clicked on one charge that happened to be from Saving Hardware in Logan.

"You can view the check details. It brings up the check image. It's the part people tend to like. It looks like your personal check," he shared. "There are no account numbers, no routing numbers, there is no information that can compromise your security. There is a lot of care with confidential and person information. Every bit of information on this is website is something someone could get through a public record request."

Time also seems to be an issue for those on the fence about joining the effort. McGrady said it was an easy process and he



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basically just agreed to do it.

"It made sense to me. They did all the work and I didn't have to do anything. It didn't add any burden to me," McGrady added.

Having the one stop shop of government spending information is beneficial in many different ways.

"It's decreased public record requests, across the state," Barker said. "The people can look it up themselves. It makes your public record request more specific instead of a vague public records request."

Barker also said people who look at the spending habit may be moved to become more involved and come to meetings if they like or dislike how their taxpayer dollars are being spent.

"It's the taxpayer's money. There is no entity too big or too small. As elected officials we are spending public money," Barker remarked.

Many people are pleased to have this information readily available and hope more local entities join.

"It's a good thing; as long as we know what they're spending and not spending it something they're not suppose to," said Meagan Schoenlaub of Logan.

"Why would somebody be against it? It's kind of a no brainer. Everyone wants to see where their money is going," mentioned Bill Saving, owner of Saving Hardware in Logan.

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