



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

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By Josh Sweigart

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Montgomery County on Tuesday became the latest and largest area government to commit to putting its expenditures on the internet for the public to nitpick and peruse.

Montgomery County auditor Karl Keith was joined for the announcement by Ohio treasurer Josh Mandel, whose office will create a searchable website for the county at no cost, and several state lawmakers who heralded the effort.

"We've empowered taxpayers to follow the money and hold government accountable across the Miami Valley and across Ohio," Mandel said.

The goal is to have the county's entire \$800 million budget online by Labor Day — a total of 80,000 transactions a year including those from the county water department, sheriff's office, court system, MetroParks, developmental disabilities and other county offices.

The layout will replicate Mandel's OhioCheckbook.com, which allows users to search for specific vendors or departments. It will also allow users to compare how counties spend money with each other.

"Making what we do open and accountable has always been a top priority for the auditor's office," Keith said.

Mandel has made this effort a signature issue, urging every local government in Ohio to follow his lead after he put the state's checkbook online. The website received bipartisan accolades and improved Ohio's reputation for transparency.

But while Mandel is offering the service at no charge to local governments, it's unclear how much the transparency effort will cost state taxpayers. Mandel said his office is in negotiations with the vendor, California-based OpenGov, and will have a sense of the per-government cost once he knows how many governments sign on.

His office has said they expect it to be "a fraction" of the \$6 million Mandel has cut from his office's budget in recent years.

Other area governments that have taken Mandel up on his offer include Dayton Public Schools, Liberty Twp., Hamilton County and Sugarcreek Twp. Statewide, 185 have signed on and 358 are in discussions to do so out of the nearly 4,000 governments Mandel sent offer letters.

So far, none of them are up and running. Mandel said he hopes to have all of them up by Labor Day, though that's a goal not a promise.

Other local governments have contracted directly with OpenGov. Dayton in May signed a \$29,500 contract to put its \$560 million in expenditures online by the end of this year. Others include Riverside, Huber Heights, Hamilton and Middletown. Costs for them have ranged from \$6,000 to \$18,000 per year.

State lawmakers in attendance Tuesday who lauded the initiative were state Sen. Bill Beagle, R-Tipp City; Rep. Niraj Antani, R-Miami Twp.; and Rep. Jim Butler, R-Oakwood.

"(This effort) really goes to the core of what we believe, and that's political power is in the hands of the people," Butler said.

A growing movement

Area governments that have pledged to put their finances online include:

Sugarcreek Township (Greene County)

Harlan Township (Warren County)

Montgomery County

Dayton



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Hamilton County
Dayton Public Schools
Northwestern Local Schools (Clark County)
Liberty Township (Butler County)
Clinton County
Huber Heights
Riverside
Hamilton
Middletown
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