



# JOSH MANDEL

## STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

Salem News

By Mary Ann Greier

August 13, 2015

SALEM - City residents wanting a peek at the city's checkbook from their computer, tablet or mobile phone may get the chance to pore over the numbers beginning next month.

That's when the city of Salem's information is expected to go live on OhioCheckbook.com, the online program launched last year by Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel to bring transparency to government spending.

City Auditor Betty Brothers attended an event Tuesday in Cleveland where Mandel talked about the importance of transparency when it comes to how the government spends taxpayer dollars. He talked about partnerships formed with governmental entities in the state wanting to become part of the online checkbook, including the city of Salem, the village of Salineville and Mahoning County.

According to a press release issued by Mandel's office, Salem and Salineville are the first two entities in Columbiana County to step forward and partner with OhioCheckbook.com through the Ohio Treasurer's office. Salem is the eighth city in the state to join and Salineville is the third village to join statewide.

Brothers had announced her intention to put the city's spending on the website this spring. She said the state has all the information now and she was told the city's checkbook will go live in the next three to five weeks. Once she knows the date, she'll announce it.

"I think it's great," she said. "I think it's extremely important. There's transparency in everything we do."

"Cool" was another word she used to describe OhioCheckbook.com, which can be used now to view the state's checkbook.

"You name it. There's nothing you can't see," she said.

People wanting more information about the city's spending habits have always had the opportunity to request information from the city auditor's office, but now they'll be able to look on their own at any time. They'll be able to look up a specific department, a specific vendor, or any expense they want and know where the money is going. She encouraged residents to visit the site now and try it out for state spending. Not only will people be able to look, she'll be able to see if anyone's looking or showing an interest in city spending.

Brothers said the information will be updated. The information she provided so far goes back five years and goes through June. According to the press release, Mandel's checkbook program "sets a new national standard for government transparency and for the first time in Ohio history puts all state spending information on the Internet. OhioCheckbook.com recently earned Ohio the number one ranking in the country for government transparency."

The state's previous rank was 46th in the country. Mandel sent letters to 18,062 local government and school officials representing 3,962 local governments throughout the state in April asking them to partner with his office at no cost to place their checkbook data on OhioCheckbook.com. The local governments include cities, counties, townships, schools, library districts and other special districts.

"I believe the people of Columbiana County have a right to know how their tax money is being spent and I applaud local leaders here for partnering with the treasurer's office to post their finances on OhioCheckbook.com," Mandel said. "My vision is to create an army of citizen watchdogs who are empowered to hold public officials accountable."

Since launching, OhioCheckbook.com has received support from newspapers and groups across the state, with 286,000 searches on the site as of Monday.



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